CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS’ WRITING

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty of The University of Akron

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Vladislava Sidorova

December, 2016
ABSTRACT

This research examined the role of corrective feedback (CF) in an adult English as a Second Language (ESL) writing class via a longitudinal, embedded single-case study design. It explored how four high intermediate English language learners (ELLs) responded to their instructor’s error feedback, in terms of their perceptions and writing. The purpose of this investigation was to gain a deeper understanding of written CF techniques and their influence on adult ELLs’ views and written accuracy over time.

This fifteen-week study took place during the winter semester of 2016 at an English language learning center for adult ELLs in Greater Boston, MA. Three research questions guided the study:

1. How does the teacher in an adult ESL writing class provide CF on morphological, lexical and syntactic errors in student writing?
2. How do adult ELLs perceive the CF they receive?
3. How does CF on morphological, lexical and syntactic errors influence adult ELLs’ written accuracy?

Data were collected from multiple sources: classroom observations, interviews with the ELLs and the teacher, and a review of student texts. The study relied on the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) of qualitative analysis supported by elements of quantitative analysis of student errors (error frequency counts and ratios).
Findings suggested that the focused, indirect written CF the ELLs received over the course of the study had a positive effect on their views and written accuracy. Although individual variations were observed, generally, the ELLs appreciated a greater awareness of their frequent error patterns, deeper engagement in the editing process, and increased self-reliance as writers, which they developed in response to the teacher’s CF practice. Furthermore, all four ELLs showed writing progress by the end of the study. Their final texts exhibited a reduction in the frequency of persistent error patterns and error frequency ratios.

The results seemed to constitute strong evidence in favor of providing written CF. Contrary to Truscott’s (1996) assertion of CF’s harmful effects on writing development, this study suggested that focused, indirect feedback was a successful means of facilitating ELLs’ written accuracy improvement over time and positively influencing students’ self-images as writers.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .............................................................................................................. viii

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................................... 1

   Statement of the Problem ......................................................................................... 2
   Purpose of the Study ................................................................................................. 5
   Significance of the Study ......................................................................................... 5
   Research Questions ................................................................................................. 6
   Background of the Study ......................................................................................... 6
   Assumptions ............................................................................................................... 8
   Definition of Terms ................................................................................................. 9
   Summary of Chapter I ............................................................................................. 11

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .......................................................................... 12

   Introduction ............................................................................................................. 12
   L1 Writing and Response Theories and Their Impact on L2 Writing Pedagogy .......... 12
   Academic Discourse and ELLs’ Experiences with Academic Writing ................. 24
   Adult ELLs ................................................................................................................ 29
   Second Language Acquisition and Its Impact on ELLs’ Errors ......................... 33
   Role of CF in L2 Writing: Empirical Investigations ........................................... 44
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Best Practices in Written CF.</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Chapter II</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. METHODS</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design of the Study</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Sources</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness and Credibility</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Chapter III</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. FINDINGS: GENERAL TRENDS AND FOUR CASE STUDY NARRATIVES</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Trends in Participant Data</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study Narrative 1: Liling</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study Narrative 2: Bilge</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study Narrative 3: Saida</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study Narrative 4: Maya</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Chapter IV</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions................................................................................................................. 144
Practical Implications................................................................................................. 152
Recommendations for Further Research................................................................. 156
Summary of Chapter V .............................................................................................. 161
REFERENCES ............................................................................................................. 162
APPENDICES ............................................................................................................ 179
APPENDIX A. HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL LETTER................................. 180
APPENDIX B. TEACHER CONSENT FORM ................................................. 181
APPENDIX C. STUDENT CONSENT FORM ...................................................... 182
APPENDIX D. TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .................................... 183
APPENDIX E. FOLLOW-UP TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ............ 185
APPENDIX F. STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ........................................ 187
APPENDIX G. FOLLOW-UP STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .......... 189
APPENDIX H. PROMPTS FOR PARTICIPANTS’ WRITING ASSIGNMENTS .................................................................................. 191
APPENDIX I. SAMPLES OF STUDENT TEXTS MARKED WITH ERROR CODES .................................................................................. 193
APPENDIX J. SAMPLES OF STUDENT TEXTS MARKED WITH UNDERLINING ................................................................. 194
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Student Interview Data on Self-Identified Weaknesses and Difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Research Questions and Corresponding Data Collection Sources and Data Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>List of Error Codes Used to Mark and Analyze Student Texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Summary of Frequent Error Types</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Total Error Frequency Ratios in Diagnostic and Final Texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Liling’s Error Chart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Bilge’s Error Chart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Saida’s Error Chart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Maya’s Error Chart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Summary of Major Findings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

“Somewhere between the folly of pretending that errors don't matter and the rigidity of insisting that they matter more than anything, the teacher must find his answer” (Shaughnessy, 2000, p. 97).

Regardless of how central a role grammar instruction plays in a second language (L2) writing classroom, error correction is one of the fundamental issues faced by English language instructors and learners. The ultimate goal of English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms is to help English language learners (ELLs) communicate effectively in the new language and function in real-world settings, which makes corrective feedback (CF) a subject difficult to ignore. However, over the last three decades, the attention to error correction (i.e., focus on accuracy) has become a topic of great controversy. The late 1970s saw a major paradigm shift in English composition as researchers and practitioners started to call for a process-oriented approach to writing that emphasized “discovering ideas, drafting, revising, working collaboratively, and sharing successes” (Ferris, 2011, p. 8), instead of stressing grammar and editing concerns. This stance translated into a practice of either postponing grammar instruction and error correction to the end of the writing process or entirely ignoring them. Ferris (2011) described this period of composition instruction as “benign neglect” of linguistic accuracy (p. 8). As
Hinkel (2002) observed, addressing issues related to language development “became associated with reactionary ultraconservatism” (p. 56).

At the time, L2 composition research and pedagogy had not matured into an independent field of inquiry. Being in its developing stages, the discipline of L2 writing “looked to and borrowed theories from its L1 counterpart” (Santos, 2001, p. 159). As a result, similarly to their first language (L1) composition colleagues, some ESL instructors made a decision to avoid error feedback altogether, while others struggled to find a balance between focus on the development of ideas and attention to accuracy. Many of these L2 teachers found that “the students’ language problems were not magically disappearing as the sure result of a more enlightened process and view of writing” (Ferris, 2011, p. ix). Yet to them, “error correction, grammar instruction, and editing-strategy training felt like the ‘dirty little secret’ of … [their] writing classes” (Ferris, 2011, pp. ix-x).

Statement of the Problem

The dilemma of how to incorporate error correction into a process-approach writing classroom led scholars to conduct research in various academic settings in order to better understand the effect of CF on student improvement in accuracy. However, due to the brief history of L2 writing research as compared to L1 composition theories and pedagogy coupled with the historical trend in L2 research of drawing strongly upon L1 writing scholarship, fewer studies (particularly, before the 1990s) examined the impact of teacher feedback on L2 writers’ work than on L1 students (Ferris, 2003; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005; Johns, 1990; Zamel, 2001). Although recent decades have seen a surge of L2 writing research activity, many current studies on CF in ESL writing are still based
on L1 sources, some of which “have serious methodological flaws and are not directly applicable to L2 writing instruction” (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p. 186). At the same time, as the L2 composition research base began to evolve, some L2 writing theorists started to challenge the widely accepted process-centered pedagogy by pointing to a number of key differences in L1 and L2 students’ needs and the distinct nature of errors in their writing (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Ferris, 1994, 2011; Hinkel, 2002; K. Hyland, 2002; Leki, 1990; Nelson & Carson, 1998; Silva, 1997, 2001; Zhang, 1995). According to Silva’s (2001) meta-analysis of a large body of L2 writing research, “in general terms, adult L2 writing is distinct from and simpler and less effective (in the eyes of L1 readers) than L1 writing” (p. 200). Silva (2001) found that “L2 writers’ texts were less fluent (fewer words) [and] less accurate (more errors)” (p. 200). Specifically, compared to their L1 counterparts, L2 writers made more errors with verbs, prepositions, articles, and nouns and errors of morphosyntactic and lexicosemantic nature (Silva, 2001, p. 196).

Ferris (2011) echoed Silva’s argument by stating the following:

While L2 writers may also have trouble with commas, apostrophes, semi-colons, pronouns, and lexical choice, their more serious and frequent issues are related to language structures that are almost never problematic for monolingual English native speakers. These include verb tense and aspect issues, the use of articles and other determiners, noun endings …, errors in word form …, and word order. To be able to recognize such errors in written discourse and to address them in talking to students, prospective teachers of L2 writers need to acquire substantial knowledge of these issues. (p. 62)

These insights suggest that the “dialogue around the issue of error is thus quite different in L2 writing than it is in L1 composition” (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012, p. 43). Figuratively speaking, these recent arguments point to the fact that, perhaps, what is good for the goose (i.e., L1 writers) is not necessarily good for the gander (i.e., L2 students).
What is also problematic with current research in L2 writing is that while many studies have reported benefits of error correction (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010a, 2010b; Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Chandler, 2003; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008; Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Ferris, 1995, 1997, 2006; Ferris, Liu, Senna, & Sinha, 2010; Ferris, Liu, Sinha, & Senna, 2013; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Foin & Lange, 2007; Sheen, 2007; Sheen, Wright, & Moldawa, 2009; Van Beuningen, de Jong, & Kuiken, 2012), others have asserted that grammar correction does not have any positive effect on student writing (Polio, Fleck, & Leder, 1998; Truscott, 1996, 1999, 2004, 2007, 2009; Truscott & Hsu, 2008). Thus, there is no consensus on what constitutes an effective pedagogical approach to providing CF in ESL writing classes.

Another issue that creates an arguably important problem in the body of the L2 writing research is that the studies have differed “from one another on just about every research parameter imaginable—subject characteristic, duration of treatment, types of student texts and teacher feedback being considered, and analysis methods” (Ferris, 2011, p. 29). Such inconsistency in research methodology undermines the arguments of both proponents and critics of CF.

Most crucially, “a compelling case for or against error correction in L2 writing classes cannot possibly be made without a substantial body” of longitudinal, contextualized research (Ferris, 2011, p. 49). Even though the number of such studies has grown in the last decade, the research on the effects of CF on L2 students’ written accuracy over time remains fairly limited (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010a, 2010b; Ellis et al., 2008, Ferris, 1995, 2006; Ferris et al.,
Purpose of the Study

This research examined the role of CF in an adult ESL writing class through a longitudinal (fifteen-week) embedded single-case study approach. Driven by the researcher’s personal interest based on her past experiences, initially, as an adult ELL at a Midwestern university and later, as a composition instructor at the same institution, the study was designed to investigate this topic in an adult ESL classroom setting. Specifically, the study explored how adult ELLs in a high intermediate writing section at an English language learning center in Greater Boston, Massachusetts (USA) responded to CF, in terms of their perspectives and writing. The purpose of this investigation was to gain a deeper understanding of CF techniques and their influence on adult ELLs’ perceptions and written accuracy over time.

Significance of the Study

Given the reported differences in the nature of L1 and L2 writing (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Ferris, 1994, 2011; Hinkel, 2002; K. Hyland, 2002; Leki, 1990; Nelson & Carson, 1998; Silva, 1997, 2001; Zamel, 1982; Zhang, 1995), the inconsistencies in research findings on the topic of CF in L2 settings and the insufficient amount of longitudinal CF research, there is a need to conduct more studies examining both short- and long-term effects of error correction and student responses to CF in L2 writing classrooms. The present study was designed to shed more light on the role of error correction in helping L2 writers improve their written accuracy (i.e., use of appropriate morphological, syntactic and lexical forms) over time and to contribute to the empirical
knowledge base on written CF. I hoped that the insights from this study would help L2 specialists and teachers to refine their pedagogical approaches and make them more responsive to learners’ needs, which in turn would enhance the quality of current ESL programs and academic experiences of ELLs.

Research Questions

The present study addressed the following research questions:

1. How does the teacher in an adult ESL writing class provide CF on morphological, lexical and syntactic errors in student writing?
2. How do adult ELLs perceive the CF they receive?
3. How does CF on morphological, lexical and syntactic errors influence adult ELLs’ written accuracy?

Background of the Study

To explain my research interest in CF in L2 writing, first I need to look back on my school years in Russia in the 1980s. This was when I became conscious of the fact that errors, especially errors in grammar, equaled red-pen marks and low grades. As an elementary-school student, I quickly realized that grammatical errors were something to be avoided at all costs, even if this often resulted in simplistic and somewhat formulaic essays. I knew that as long as my writing was error-free my teachers would be pleased. So I learned the rules of the game and tried to concentrate my attention on grammar. This was particularly true of my English papers because unlike regular writing classes, where we were graded both on accuracy of our work and content, the focus of my high-school English classes was predominantly on grammatical issues. Thus, I grew up believing that
errors were an impediment to learning and expected my teachers to point out every single mistake they could find in my writing.

When I came to the United States in the mid 1990s to pursue my undergraduate studies, I was amazed to see how different English composition courses were from my previous writing classes. It seemed that what mattered the most now was the organization of my ideas, not their grammatical accuracy. Still, being a non-native speaker of English, I often felt disappointed by not getting the feedback I had come to expect from my language teachers. One of my primary goals was to improve my English skills so that I could write effectively for academic purposes. Yet how was I supposed to do that if my teachers seemed to completely ignore the grammatical aspects of my writing? Frustrated, I would turn to my American roommates for correction of my writing. Slowly, however, I started to see more value in this new writing approach because of the freedom it granted the writer to experience the composition process as a cyclical, not linear, activity. I eventually majored in English and went on to get a Master’s degree in the field.

As part of my graduate coursework, I became familiar with the process-centered theory and was trained to practice it myself as a teaching assistant in freshman composition courses. I turned into an advocate of the idea that composition instructors must “teach unfinished writing and glory in its unfinishedness" (Murray, 1997, p. 4). Yet in the back of my mind, there was a picture of me feeling confused and frustrated with my English instructors who focused predominantly on content and overlooked grammar in their instruction. Sometimes I would hear a voice in my head asking, “Are you really helping your students improve as writers?” This voice would become particularly persistent whenever I had ELLs in my classroom. Being reminded of my own
experiences with writing in English, I kept asking myself whether the way our composition program was structured, with its emphasis on expressing ideas, actually met those students’ needs. Their written products often pointed to the unsettling reality that our courses were not helping them in the development of their accuracy. It seemed obvious to me that those students could benefit from grammar instruction and error correction. Yet, this realization made me feel uneasy: wouldn’t I be an ineffective process-approach instructor if I started addressing my students’ grammatical errors?

This internal conflict led me to seek a middle ground. I began to wonder how I could bring the notions of teaching writing as a process and as a finished product together and let these two competing philosophies co-exist and complement each other in my classroom. It was my need, fueled by my experiences as an ELL and a writing instructor, to better understand what can help ESL writers improve the clarity and accuracy of their work and, consequently, be successful in their academic careers, that led me to pursue this study.

Assumptions

The following assumptions guided this investigation:

1. Second language acquisition (SLA) is a complex developmental process that occurs in multiple stages. The nature and number of errors English language learners make are reflective of the SLA process.

2. Most L2 practitioners and learners value CF and believe that errors should be addressed in student writing.
Definition of Terms

1. *Adult English language learner (ELL)*—International (visa) students pursuing post-secondary education, immigrants who came to an English speaking country later in their lives, and grown children of immigrants who either came to the new country at a young age or were born there

2. *Corrective feedback (CF)/Error correction/Error feedback*—Teacher feedback (including focused, unfocused, direct, indirect, explicit and unlabeled approaches) on ELLs’ written errors

3. *Corrective feedback effects*—The influence of error correction on student perceptions and written accuracy

4. *Direct corrective feedback*—CF on a linguistic error that provides the correct form or structure

5. *English as a Second Language (ESL)/English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)*—Programs that offer non-English speakers an opportunity to learn or improve their English language speaking, reading, and writing skills in an English speaking country

6. *English language learner (ELL)*—A person who is learning English as a second language in an educational setting where English is the language of instruction

7. *Errors*—Morphological, syntactic and lexical forms that deviate from accepted norms of the target language

8. *Explicit/Labeled corrective feedback*—CF that may be accompanied by an error code/symbol/label, a rule reminder or an explanation
9. *Focus on form (Accuracy)*—Focus on formal linguistic features such as grammatical structures and lexical terms

10. *Focus on meaning (Fluency)*—Focus on content and organization

11. *Focused/Selective corrective feedback*—CF that targets specific error types

12. *Implicit/Unlabeled corrective feedback*—Minimally explicit CF that may be presented in the form of underlining or checkmarks/numbers in the margins next to errors

13. *Indirect corrective feedback*—CF that indicates a linguistic error has been made without providing the correct form (e.g., marking an error location in a text through underlining or circling, providing a code for a specific error category, or recording the number of errors in the margins)

14. *Lexical errors*—Form or meaning deviations of target-language lexical items (e.g., misspellings and wrong word choices)

15. *Morphological errors*—Word structures that deviate from rules of the target language (e.g., failure to use the plural marker -s/es in English nouns)

16. *Progress in written accuracy*—A reduction in the number of frequent or problematic types of morphological, syntactic or lexical errors as well as in the total error ratio (the total number of errors divided by the total number of words in a text) in student writing

17. *Revision strategies*—Editing techniques (e.g., reading a draft aloud or backward to focus on linguistic details, marking individual error patterns, consulting the dictionary and textbooks, and tracking progress through error logs, asking questions, soliciting peer feedback) used by ELLs to revise their texts
18. *Syntactic errors*— Violations of the rules that govern the arrangement of words in phrases, clauses and sentences (e.g., wrong word order).

19. *Unfocused/Comprehensive corrective feedback*— CF on all error types found in student writing

20. *Written work*— Student texts written in response to teacher-assigned topics as a form of accuracy and fluency assessment.

**Summary of Chapter I**

CF is one of the principal issues in L2 writing. However, due to a paradigm shift in the English composition pedagogy, the attention to error correction has recently become a controversial subject. The dilemma of how to incorporate it into process-approach writing classrooms has led scholars to examine the impact of error correction on L1 writing; yet the research base on CF in ESL writing remains relatively small. The L2 studies that have been conducted are mainly based on L1 writing theories and research, which are not always applicable to L2 situations. Furthermore, L2 research has been plagued by several crucial issues such as the lack of consensus among researchers on what constitutes an effective approach to error feedback in ESL writing classrooms, methodological inconsistencies and a fairly small number of longitudinal studies. The purpose of the present study was to examine the role of error correction for ELLs in a high intermediate adult ESL writing class and student responses to CF over the course of one semester (fifteen weeks). Thus, the goal of this longitudinal investigation was to gain a deeper understanding of CF techniques and their short- and long-term impact on ELLs’ perceptions and writing.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This study examined CF in ESL writing and adult ELL responses to this type of feedback, both in terms of their perceptions and written accuracy. The inquiry focused exclusively on ESL writing as part of L2 writing research. The goal of this study was to investigate error correction strategies that can aid ELLs in developing the accuracy of their writing, which can help us improve the quality of adult ESL programs in this country. The following sections offer a research overview in the areas central to this investigation: L1 writing and response theories and their impact on L2 writing pedagogy, academic discourse and ELLs’ experiences with academic writing, adult ELLs, second language acquisition and its impact on ELLs’ errors, the role of error correction in ESL writing, and best practices in written CF.

L1 Writing and Response Theories and Their Impact on L2 Writing Pedagogy

As a relatively young discipline lacking its own comprehensive theories (Johns, 1990; Leki, 1991; Raimes, 1991; Silva, 2001), L2 writing instruction has traditionally relied on advances in L1 writing theory and pedagogy. According to Ferris and Hedgcock (2005), “Substantive L2 composition research did not appear until the 1980s” (p. 3). Bitchener and Ferris (2012) also noted that until the publication of the first collections on L2 writing (Johnson & Roen, 1989; B. Kroll, 1990) and the arrival of the Journal of
Second Language Writing in 1992, most of the references in articles on L2 writing came from L1 research. As a result, L1 composition approaches “have played influential roles in shaping theory development and praxis in L2 writing” (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p. 3). The following sections examine shifts in pedagogical focus in L1 writing paradigms and how these shifts have influenced L2 instructional practices over time. They discuss the “current-traditional rhetoric” model with its focus on form, the process-oriented approach (i.e., the writer-centered pedagogy), and the post-process models, including social constructionism and critical pedagogy.

**Current-Traditional Rhetoric: Product-Oriented Writing**

A quick look at the L1 composition textbooks and classrooms before the 1960s would be enough to understand the main focus of the writing pedagogy in the early and mid-twentieth century. The predominant concern of composition instruction was students’ ability to understand and interpret canonical literary texts and produce written work that “adhered to the traditional modes of classical writing” (Hinkel, 2002, p. 47). This traditional paradigm (Berlin, 1987; Bloom, Daiker, & White, 1997; Clark, 2003), also known as the product approach (B. Kroll, 2001), focused exclusively on the finished product of writing. Emphasizing rigidly established formulas, writing instructors explicitly taught rhetorical patterns, or modes, such as classification, comparison and contrast. In constructing their essays based on a literary text, students were often expected to follow prescribed templates. As Hinkel (2002) explained, “The quality of student assignments was evaluated according to the analysis of literature and writing style, which included such considerations as the presence of thesis and rhetorical support, coherence, cohesion, and use of vocabulary and syntax” (p. 47).
As for teacher response, the issue did not present interest to writing theorists and practitioners prior to the 1970s. Research on teacher feedback was virtually nonexistent. Within the product-oriented paradigm, teachers’ written commentary served mainly one purpose. According to Ferris (2003), “Teachers responded to a finished piece of writing primarily to justify a final grade” (p. 1). Thus, teacher response was equivalent to evaluation and came as part of the final phase of the instructional sequence.

The principles driving L1 writing instruction in the mid-twentieth century quickly found their way into L2 writing classrooms. The prominent tradition in the L2 pedagogy of the 1950s and 1960s was the Audiolingual method (Fries, 1945), which focused on reinforcement of various language patterns through drills and repetition and “learners’ accurate application of grammatical rules” (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p. 11). Great emphasis was placed on teaching students how to produce well-formed sentences. As Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) pointed out, “A writing task that typifies this paradigm is the controlled composition, a narrowly focused paragraph- or essay-length assignment designed principally to give students practice with specific syntactic patterns … as well as lexical forms” (p. 11). Similarly to the current-traditional rhetoric prevalent in the L1 instruction, L2 classrooms adopted a writing approach in which students were expected to combine sentences into short paragraphs following a prescribed formula. Just like L1 students, L2 writers practiced specific rhetorical patterns by modeling their compositions after authentic samples. Thus, the focus of both L1 and L2 pedagogies was predominantly on the product of writing. Little, if any, effort was devoted to understanding the strategies and cognitive processes involved in the writing task (Babin & Harrison, 1999; Graves, 1999; B. Kroll, 2001, Matsuda, 2003).
The Process Movement

It was in reaction to the prescriptive nature of L1 composition instruction with its restrictive focus on the fixed written product that a revolutionary approach to teaching of writing was born, which took L1 (and, subsequently, L2) writing classrooms by storm. The radically new instructional methodology, known as the process-centered paradigm (Flower & Hayes, 1981), “emphasized the individual writer as a creator of original ideas” (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p. 5). Thus, the 1970s and 1980s witnessed an important pedagogical shift in L1 composition from the product-oriented methodology to the writer-centered instruction. As Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) observed, the new movement “focused particular attention on procedures for solving problems, discovering ideas, expressing them in writing, and revising emergent texts” (p. 5). Finding one’s individual voice, exploring and expressing personal thoughts and using the multi-stage, recursive writing process of prewriting, drafting and revising for personal development now came at the center of L1 composition pedagogy. Attention to such rhetorical concepts as audience and purpose was also greatly emphasized.

Process writing proponents can be divided into two camps: expressivists and cognitivists. Expressivists (Elbow, 1973, 1981a, 1981b; Murray, 1982, 1985; Zamel, 1982, 1983) believed that composing was “a creative act in which the process—the discovery of the true self—is as important as the product” (Berlin, 1988, p. 484). Self-discovery, personal voice, and fluency were at the heart of expressivist writing (Elbow, 1981b). Cognitivists (Flower, 1985, 1989; Flower & Hayes, 1981; B. M. Kroll, 1978), on the other hand, viewed writing as problem solving. Thus, they placed more emphasis on higher-order thinking and such skills as planning, identifying rhetorical problems,
operationalizing definitions and generating solutions (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). This camp of process-writing theorists focused almost exclusively on the development of writers’ cognitive processes. It was thanks to cognitivists that such well-known stages of the process-based instruction came to life: prewriting tasks, writing and revising multiple drafts, peer reviews, feedback conferences and editing sessions, which were reserved to the very end of the writing cycle (Murray, 1992).

As for the state of teacher feedback in the process era, it underwent a noticeable transformation compared to the product-orientated decades. Now the teacher’s role was viewed as that of a nondirective facilitator, whose goal was to create a learning environment “with minimal interference” (K. Hyland, 2002, p. 18). Therefore, teachers were instructed to comment for the following purposes: “(a) to let student writers know whether or not their texts have conveyed their intended meanings; (b) to help students become aware of the questions and concerns of an audience . . . ; and (c) to give students a motive for revision” (Ferris, 2003, pp. 3-4). In line with these principles, Sommers (1982) advocated providing students with content-only feedback at intermediate stages of the composing process and reserving comments on form for the very end. Based on these recommendations, it is evident that the process movement downplayed the role of grammar, lexis and error correction as it saw the emphasis on these issues as inhibitory to writing (Ferris, 2003; Hinkel, 2002; Casanave, 2012). Casanave (2012) explained this point as follows:

Pedagogical principles and strategies … asked novice writers not to worry about what the final product would look like, and in particular to disregard grammar errors during drafting stages. Students were asked instead to brainstorm before writing, write freely as a way to discover what they had to say, review what they had written, and write multiple drafts. The underlying assumptions were that expert writers write in similar ways, that novice writers should or could be taught
to write like experts, and that the final product had for too many decades received way too much attention. (p. 287)

In the L2 composition arena, Zamel (1982, 1983) became a prominent advocate for “looking at L2 writing through the writing process lens” (Casanave, 2012, p. 286). In her two influential papers, Zamel argued that the theory behind L1 composition was applicable to L2 writing instruction by equating L1 and L2 writing processes. For example, in her 1982 article, Zamel concluded the following:

It is quite clear that ESL writers who are ready to compose and express their ideas use strategies similar to those used by native speakers of English. Their writing behaviors suggest approaches to the teaching of composition that ESL teachers may have felt were only appropriate for native speakers but, which in fact, may be effective for teaching all levels of writing, including ESL composition. (p. 203)

Following Zamel’s lead, L2 researchers and teachers began to focus on what ELLs “actually do as they write” (Raimes, 1991, p. 409). Investigations were directed at understanding L2 learners’ cognitive and metacognitive processes involved in planning, drafting and revising written texts (Cumming, 2001; Manchón, 2001; Ransdell & Barbier, 2002). L2 classroom procedures reflected this shift in pedagogical interest and, therefore, now included such tasks as prewriting strategies (freewriting, brainstorming and listing), creating multiple drafts, peer revisions and editing. L2 theorists and practitioners wholeheartedly embraced these hallmarks of the process writing movement (Ferris, & Hedgcock, 2005; Hinkel, 2002). Process-oriented textbooks for teaching L2 writing (e.g., Leki, 1999; Raimes, 1992; Scarcella, 1994) became the gold standard in ESL instruction (Hinkel, 2002).

However, as Casanave (2012) observed, “by the mid-1980s, some voices of protest began to appear that challenged some of … [the process-centered] assumptions”
(p. 287). With its primary emphasis on developing personal voice and generating ideas, the process-oriented pedagogy sent a strong message to L1 and L2 writers that the final product did not matter (Bowden, 1999; Delpit, 1988; Stapleton, 2002). Horowitz (1986) questioned this undivided attention to process, saying that the approach would not help students succeed in their academic careers or in the professional world, where writing was mainly produced under strict time constraints. In addition, both Reid (1984) and Dillard (1989) argued that not all writers progressed through the same stages of the process model at the same speed or in the same fashion. Yet many writing instructors adopted a somewhat rigid, stage-oriented approach, in which students went through the steps of prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing together, as a class (Casanave, 2012). Thus, the way the model manifested itself in many writing classrooms was very different from the nonlinear approach proposed by Flower and Hayes (1981). The above arguments ultimately led L1 and, subsequently, L2 writing theory and research in the new direction.

**Writing and Response in the Post-Process Era**

Rejecting the process-oriented view of writing as “the act of an individual mind attempting to express itself and communicate its message to a perceived audience” (Santos, 2001, p. 161), a group of L1 writing theorists of the mid-1980s known as social constructionists (Bizzell, 1987; Bruffee, 1986; Faigley, 1986; Trimbur, 1985, 1989) focused instead on the social nature of writing. In Trimbur’s (1989) words, “consciousness is the extension of social experience inward” (p. 604). Thus, the social constructionist position redefined writing as a social construct, or artifact, created by members of a community (Bruffee, 1986). Social constructionists challenged process
proponents’ “almost total obsession” (Horowitz, 1986, p. 788) with the relationship between the writer and the writer’s text (Raimes, 1991), arguing that writing did not exist in a “socio-cultural vacuum” (Silva, 1990, p. 17). To social constructionists, writing was not an asocial, decontextualized process, but rather a transactional activity between writers and their readers (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). Social constructionism shifted the emphasis from the writer to the audience. Writing was no longer viewed as a solitary process. According to Johns (1990), “the language, focus, and form of a text stem from the community for which it is written” (p. 27). The central idea was that any text was always written in a specific context for a specific audience and that it was the expectations of the audience that needed to be met for the writer’s text to be effective (K. Hyland, 2002; Johns, 1990, 1997, 2003). The writer, then, must be familiar with his or her readers’ interests, needs, culture and social norms. To summarize, according to the social constructionist position, “knowledge, language, and the nature of discourse are determined for the writer by the discourse community for whom the writer is producing text” (Johns, 1990, p. 28).

By the late 1980s, the social constructionist idea of learning participatory mechanisms to become accepted as a member of a discourse community was embraced by L1 composition instruction. The new content- and discourse-based pedagogical models focused on the mastery of various skills that were required to gain access to different academic discourse communities, while keeping some of the process-centered techniques, such as prewriting, drafting and revision tasks (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). The goal was to give novice writers opportunities to practice writing for different academic disciplines in order for them to learn the language and gain the content and
rhetorical expertise required in their chosen fields (K. Hyland, 2002; Johns, 1997; Reid, 1989). For example, writing empirical research reports and preparing technical documents could now be found among typical assignments in a post-process writing course. The goal of writing instruction was to broaden learners’ discourse repertoire in order for them to pass the academic discourse community’s threshold and become part of that community (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005; Johns, 1990).

To reach the goal of socializing students into a discourse community, teachers could no longer play “the role of well-meaning bystanders” (K. Hyland, 2003, p. 19), as they often did in the process era, and argue that teacher feedback should only minimally pay attention to correctness (Ferris, 2003). The new focus on explicitly teaching the standards and language of academia had an impact on teacher response. To help students learn acceptable writing behaviors, writing instructors could no longer rely on one of the tenets of the process-centered pedagogy—“good writing is involved writing” (Silva, 1990, p. 16). Students had to pay attention not only to the content of their texts but also to the form if they were to develop what Bizzell (1987) called “academic literacy” (p. 131). Therefore, as Ferris (2003) pointed out, writing specialists of the post-process era began to ask themselves if neglecting linguistic accuracy was the right path to follow.

After gaining recognition among L1 writing experts, the social constructionist ideas were incorporated into L2 writing instruction in the form of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). The goal of these programs was to find a way to introduce academic discourse to ELLs, which, in turn, would allow them to shed their “outsider” (Bizzell, 1987, p.131) status in their academic areas of study (Johns, 1990; K. Hyland, 2002). One of the major
arguments against the process approach was that the model did not adequately address the needs of ELLs and failed to prepare them for academic tasks (Johns, 1997; Hinkel, 2002; Horowitz, 1986; K. Hyland, 2002). According to these opinions, L2 learners typically needed more assistance with language development (i.e., grammar and lexicon) and building schemata for academic literacy than native speakers of English (Hinkel, 2002; Silva, 1990). Therefore, proponents of EAP and ESP courses maintained that it was particularly important for L2 reading and writing instruction to focus on the specific content that ELLs were expected to master in their major fields and build assignments around that discipline-specific content (Crandall & Kaufman, 2002; Jordan, 1997; Kasper, 2000; Pally, 2000; Raimes, 1991; Snow, 2001). To socialize ELLs into the academic community, L2 writing instruction involved the issues of language development and sentence construction, the identification of sources on a specific topic, the analysis of relevant information from these sources, and the presentation of this information in an appropriate academic discourse format (Silva, 1990). Thus, mimicking the social constructionist model of L1 writing instruction, L2 pedagogy “center[ed] on identifying, practicing, and reproducing the implicit and explicit features of written texts aimed at particular audiences” (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p. 13).

As it often happens in many disciplines, voices of discontent with the social constructionist model of writing began appearing shortly after its introduction to L1 and L2 instruction. By the 1990s, a new theoretical orientation known as critical pedagogy was already gaining prominence in response to the criticism of social constructionism (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). While supporters of the new theory agreed with the social constructionist view of writing as a social act, they emphasized its political implications
in and outside of academia (Silva, 2001) and argued that the audience-centered, socioliterate model overlooked their importance (Benesch, 2001; Freire, 1970, 1985, 1994). In addition, some argued that the social constructionist idea of an “all-powerful” (Johns, 1990, p. 31) academic community of experts into which novice writers must gain access was covertly advocating a return to a prescriptive, form-centered writing model (Raimes, 1991). Critics of the social constructionist model warned practitioners that its sociopolitical purposes were not beneficial to learners (in particular, to novice and L2 writers) (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). As Belcher and Braine (1995) claimed, teaching of academic discourse was not “neutral, value-free, and nonexclusionary” (p. xiii). Therefore, critical pedagogy proposed that instead of forcing students to master academic literacy, the academy itself needed to change and adapt its standards and requirements to the cultures and social norms that ELLs brought with them (Johns, 1990).

Following Freirean concepts of liberatory education (Freire, 1970), critical pedagogy advocates argued that learners should be encouraged to examine power relations within the academic community and challenge the demands of the academy (i.e., authority) (Zamel, 1993). According to Santos (1991), writing instruction must be viewed as “inherently political and ideological” (p. 162). Consequently, since the introduction of critical pedagogy to literacy instruction, L1 and L2 writing research has begun to investigate social and political issues related to critical pedagogy, including critical needs analysis (Benesch, 1996), race, class and gender equality (Belcher, 1997; Kirsch & Ritchie, 1995; Vandrick, 1994, 1995), and identity (Ivanic, 1998; Norton, 1997). According to this still somewhat small research database, the aforementioned sociopolitical issues have a profound impact on the lives of L1 and L2 students by
denying them power over their learning. Hence, this body of research calls for a reform of the hierarchical nature of academic institutions.

The models of writing presented here are “by no means discrete and sequential” (Raimes, 1991, p. 412). Therefore, L1 and L2 writing specialists of the 21st century must carefully examine the existing theoretical approaches, the ideologies that underlie them, and the classroom practices these paradigms advocate. Although the discussion about L2 writing theories as similar to, or different from, L1 theories is ongoing (e.g., B. Kroll, 2003; Silva & Matsuda, 2010), L2 practitioners can greatly benefit from being conscious of the theoretical assumptions upon which they base their instruction. As Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) explained,

An operational understanding of theoretical and pedagogical paradigms can … equip us to implement a balanced, informed, and effective pedagogy that takes into account the multiple dimensions of L2 writers’ developing skills in composing. (p. 15)

As an L2 writing researcher and practitioner, I see the social constructionist emphasis on providing L2 learners with the necessary tools to be accepted as members of an academic discourse community as the sound middle ground between the product and the process. I agree with the tenets of critical pedagogy that instruction is never apolitical and that it is important for educators to ask themselves whose interests their instructional practices serve and what purposes they serve (Raimes, 1991). I also support the idea that teachers should educate their students about the issues underlying these questions for the latter to be able to negotiate the expectations of the academy. However, I think it is important to keep in mind that critical pedagogy has been around for several decades. Yet the academic community has been slow in meeting the demands of this educational philosophy. Considering that any social change and acceptance is a gradual process, it is
seemingly more practical and realistic at the present time to empower L2 writers by educating them about the language and conventions of the academic community and equipping them with participatory skills than by challenging the standards and demands of academic disciplines and expecting them to drastically change soon. Thus, it was the social constructionist thought that established theoretical parameters for the present research.

Academic Discourse and ELLs’ Experiences with Academic Writing

The previous section examined the notion of academic discourse communities and one’s ability to participate in them. But what is academic discourse? Before defining this concept, it is helpful to look at what is meant by discourse. According to Gee (1998), it is “a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’” (p. 51). Discourse employed by various social communities allows them to “develop and advance their agendas of action, build solidarity, patrol and extend their boundaries, and perpetuate themselves in the life of a general culture” (Killingsworth & Gilbertson, as cited in McKenna, 1997, p. 191). Armed with the definition of discourse, we can now turn our attention to the meaning of academic discourse. Bizzell (1992) operationalized the term simply as “the ways of thinking and using language that prevail in the academy” (p. 3). Similarly, Bartholomae (1986) referred to the concept as the “peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding and arguing that define the discourse of our [academic] community” (p. 4). White and Lowenthal (2011) defined the term as “the specific yet tacit discursive style expected of participants in the academy” (p. 284). According to Ray (1990), academic discourse refers to the following
uses of language: “to examine and identify; to question and clarify; to make comparisons; to see relationships between concrete and abstract, specific and general; to define, classify, and differentiate” (pp. 321-322). Bartolomé (1998) offered readers a more nuanced definition:

The concept of “academic discourses” refers to more than just the student’s ability to produce standard English by using the correct phonology (sound system), lexicon (vocabulary), and syntax (sentence structure). In addition to these three language dimensions, less easily measured language components such as cultural knowledge about rhetorical structures (the ability to create texts whose logic and structure reflect academic and mainstream ways of organizing texts) are equally important. (p. 2)

The significance of the ability to learn and employ these tacit features of academic discourse lies in that it largely determines whether or not an individual will be successful in his or her academic career (Spack, 1998; White & Lowenthal, 2011). Those who cannot meet the expectations of the academic community, comprised of instructors, students, academic administrators and staff, and learn its culture by mastering the academic discourse norms and conventions are denied full participation in the academy and access to social power (Delpit, 1995; Gee, 1998; Ogbu, 1995; Simon, 2005; White & Lowenthal, 2011). Simon (2005) argued that academic discourse identified a person “as a member of the club of scholars,” and could be used, either intentionally or unintentionally, to keep individuals out of that club (p. 6). Gee (1998) noted an intimate link between discourse and social hierarchy. As he indicated, knowledge of certain discourses (including academic discourse) could “lead to the acquisition of social goods (money, power, status) in a society” (1998, p. 53). Similarly, White and Lowenthal (2011) stated that without certain linguistic “codes of power . . . [students could not] achieve success in existing educational, economic, and political systems” (p. 285).
The two student populations whose experiences are often highlighted and compared in the discussions revolving around academic discourse and social power are native English-speaking basic writers (i.e., students who are perceived to be academically unprepared for conventional college writing classes) and ELLs (Spack, 1998). Both groups often report experiencing alienation and marginalization and see themselves as outsiders in the academy (Shaughnessy, 1977; Zamel, 1998). Although there is a tendency to equate the academic struggles that these students face, caution should be exercised when drawing parallels between these two groups of learners, in particular when discussing their ability to acquire and use academic discourse. “Research indicates significant differences between their composing processes, language use, cultural perspectives, and motivation,” argued Brammer (2002, p. 22). Similar arguments have been echoed by several other L2 writing specialists, including Atkinson and Ramanathan (1995), Leki (1990), Nero (1997) and Silva (2001). For instance, both Leki (1990) and Silva (2001) maintained that the linguistic features that many ELLs struggle with do not typically present problems for L1 students, even for those who are considered novice writers. While Chapter I briefly introduced the differences in lexicogrammatical structures employed by L1 and L2 writers, this point will be examined in greater detail later in Chapter II.

In addition to lexicogrammatical features, another significant factor that distinguishes native English-speaking students’ experiences with academic discourse from that of ELLs is the knowledge, or lack thereof, of the cultural norms and values of the American society. Several authors have explored what binds American society members into a unified whole. Bizzell (1992) argued that instead of such commonalities
as ethnicity, religion, and language, “Americans are united as a national community… by a common experiment in negotiating difference” (p. 293). “Different groups in America have seldom had the 'comfort' of cultural isolation,” wrote Bizzell (1992, p. 293). King’s (2000) argument extended Bizzell’s notion of American unity even further:

In spite of all our racial divisions and economic unfairness, we have the frontier tradition, respect for the individual, and opportunity; we have our love affair with the automobile; we have in our history a civil war that freed the slaves and was fought with valor; and we have sports, hot dogs, hamburgers, and milk shakes—things big and small, noble and petty, important and trifling. (p. 419)

This “unique otherness” (King, 2000, p. 418) of the American society has been shaped and continues to be shaped by a variety of material and symbolic goods, including specific ways of thinking about the world and expressing ideas. To use Bourdieu’s (1996) terminology, these physical objects and social practices valued by Americans constitute what is known as cultural capital. If we accept the vision of the United States as a unified society, then newcomers can be seen as outsiders since they do not readily possess the appropriate cultural capital valued in this country.

To offer a quick example, we can consider the difference between writing a job application in the United States and South Korea. As Evans (2015) reported, while American job applicants are expected to emphasize their skills and education, in South Korea, a potential candidate would instead discuss his or her family because that is what is valued in the Korean society and one’s character is judged based on the person’s lineage. Thus, without an appropriate cultural capital, a person from South Korea may find him or herself at a disadvantage when writing a cover letter for a prospective U.S. employer.
Shen (1998) presented a similar argument writing about the clash of his Chinese identity with the expectations of his English composition instructors:

The rules of English composition encapsulate values that are absent in, or sometimes contradictory to, the values of other societies (in my case, China). Therefore, learning the rules of English composition is, to a certain extent, learning the values of Anglo-American society. In writing classes in the United States I found that I had to reprogram my mind, to redefine some of the basic concepts and values that I had about myself, about society, and about the universe, values that had been imprinted and reinforced in my mind by my cultural background, and that had been part of me all my life. (p. 124)

Perhaps it is non-native speakers’ deficit in cultural capital that can partly account for the University of Massachusetts’ finding that the school’s “ESL students were failing the [writing proficiency] exam at higher rates than native speakers of English” (Zamel, 1998, p. 261). Ray (1990) observed a similar phenomenon in her study conducted at Wayne State University: Three times as many nonnative speakers as native speakers failed the university’s English Proficiency Exam, which was a graduation requirement. “The word around campus was that if English wasn’t your native language, you were going to fail the exam,” noted Ray (1990, p. 322).

The alarming findings of the two studies above are not isolated occurrences that can be easily ignored. The number of adult ELLs entering U.S. postsecondary educational institutions has surged in recent decades reflecting a rapid growth in foreign-born, non-native English speaking population in this country as well as the dominance of the United States and the English language on the global arena (Orem, 2005, pp. 4-5). This trend has prompted researchers, practitioners and institutional administrators to examine and seek to improve academic experiences of this fast-growing student population.
ELLs’ struggles with academic writing have been reported by a number of studies (Ferris, 2011; Ferris et al., 2013; Johns, 1995; Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999; Hinkel, 2002; Hinkel, 2005; Scarcella, 1996, 2003; Zamel, 1998). According to these reports, when adult ELLs enroll in writing courses, they often find their experiences with academic writing disappointing and frustrating. Typically, while ELLs’ writing courses emphasize writing as a process, in their subsequent mainstream studies, they are assessed primarily on the quality of their written products. As Hinkel (2002) argued, this “disparity between the teaching methods and evaluation criteria of L2 writing has produced outcomes that are damaging and costly to most ESL students enrolled in academic and language-training programs” (p. 46). Johns (1995) took an even stronger stance by calling L2 instructional methods “cruelly unfair to diverse students” (p. 182). It is not surprising that in many cases ELLs do not advance their education beyond ESL courses (Prince & Jenkins, 2005), and those who do often fail to succeed in college or workplace settings (Scarcella, 1996, 2003). The demands and expectations placed on these students are simply too overwhelming for them, which leads to discouraging results.

Adult ELLs

With the focus of the present study on adult ELLs, it is important to point out that these students possess a number of attributes that are markedly different from those of primary and secondary school leaners (Smith & Strong, 2009). So who are adult ELLs and what sets them apart from younger students?

When examining adult ELL population, L2 researchers (Ferris, 2009, 2011; Roberge, Siegal, & Harklau, 2009) have identified three subgroups: international (visa)
students pursuing post-secondary education, immigrants who came to the United States later in their lives, and the so-called “Generation 1.5” (Ferris, 2009)—children of first-generation immigrants, who either came to the new country at a young age or were born there. According to Ferris (2011), within and across these three groups of adult ELLs, “there is substantial diversity and complexity as to L1s and cultures represented, educational pathways (including especially how L2 literacy was acquired), legal and socioeconomic factors, and so forth” (p. 4).

Academically-bound international students tend to be well-educated and literate in their native language. Many of them come from economically secure backgrounds and have had formal English education in their home countries. Reid (1998) referred to this group as “eye learners” because of their exposure to formal language instruction and familiarity with grammatical rules and terms gained through what they have seen in their textbooks. According to Ferris (2011), international students are used to “a structured approach to language instruction … and want and expect their teachers to provide direct correction of all of their writing errors” (p. 5).

In contrast to the above ELL population, late-arriving immigrants and refugees, who often come to the new country to better their economic future or escape a political conflict, “may have had interrupted L1 schooling and haphazard or even nonexistent L2 instruction” (Ferris, 2011, p. 5). Therefore, they may not have a strong literacy foundation in their L1 or L2. Lacking formal language instruction, resident immigrants tend to be “ear learners” (Reid, 1998), who primarily rely on what they have heard from native speakers of L2 rather than on what they have studied in a formal setting. They may not be familiar with grammar terminology; however, due to their daily exposure to L2 in
the new country, they may have “acquired intuitions about what ‘sounds right’ in the L2” (Ferris, 2011, p. 5).

The children of late-arriving immigrants make up the third group of adult ELLs. These students come to the new country at a very young age, with many not receiving any formal education in their L1. Ferris (2011) pointed out that “nonetheless, depending on where they went to school and what their surrounding community was like, some Generation 1.5 students may still exhibit non-native characteristics in their writing even when they reach high school or college” (p. 6). Most of these early arrivals went through a transitional ESL program in their elementary school years and were placed in mainstream classes in middle school or high school. Due to their complex education path, these students’ academic literacy skills tend to be less advanced than those of their native English-speaking peers (Ferris, 2011). Like their immigrant parents, they are ear learners, “but their ears may be better attuned to the L2 than those of the late-arriving group” (Ferris, 2011, p. 7).

Thus, adult ELLs constitute a diverse student population, whose goals and needs may vary from earning a college degree in order to have a successful professional career to helping their children with school assignments or learning to communicate with others in their daily lives and in the workplace (Orem, 2005; Smith & Strong, 2009). At the same time, as Bitchener and Knoch’s (2008) study comparing adult international and immigrant ELLs’ response to written CF suggested, sometimes there may be an overlap in these subgroups’ L2 learning backgrounds and, hence, learning needs. For instance, immigrant students may or may not come into an ESL classroom with a prior “formal instruction in the target language,” while international students “may or may not have had
opportunities to study the target language in an English-speaking environment” (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008, p. 427). Speaking more broadly, what all of these ELLs have in common is that these are “mature, competent, experienced, multitalented individuals who live complex lives and fulfill a variety of different life roles” (Smith & Strong, 2009, p. 1). In other words, it is the unique characteristics of these second language learners as adults that unite them and distinguish them from younger learners.

Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2012) offered four definitions of the term adult: biological, legal, social, and psychological. The biological aspect of being an adult involves one’s ability to reproduce. The legal definition is based on the one’s age at which the person is granted certain legal rights and responsibilities. Socially, individuals are viewed as adults when they assume such social roles as voters, parents, and spouses, among many others. Finally, psychologically, individuals reach adulthood when they gain a self-concept and become self-directing.

A number of characteristics set adult learners apart from children, which have been the subject of andragogy, a prominent theory of adult learning introduced by Malcom Knowles in 1980. Over the years, the andragogical model has been expanded from its original four assumptions to include two additional principles that distinguish adult learning from preadult schooling. Knowles’s (1980, 1984, 1989) theory proposes the following assumptions:

1. As a person matures, his or her self-concept moves from that of a dependent personality toward one of a self-directing human being.
2. An adult accumulates a growing reservoir of experience, which is a rich resource for learning.
3. The readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental tasks of his or her social role [i.e., it is influenced by the learner’s need to effectively perform certain social roles such as that of a parent, worker, or member of an organization].
4. There is a change in time perspective as people mature-- from future application of knowledge to immediacy of application. Thus an adult is more problem centered than subject centered in learning.
5. The most potent motivations are internal rather than external.
6. Adults need to know why they need to learn something. (as cited in Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 84)

Together, these six assumptions of the andragogical model are frequently used as the foundation for the design and implementation of adult learner programs, including adult L2 education.

When it comes to developing effective programs for adult ELLs, we can rely on the past forty years of research. Still, as Orem (2005) pointed out, there is much left to be understood about L2 learning in adulthood. Today, what we know about how adults learn another language can be summarized in the following principles put forth by Orem (2005):

1. Language must be meaningful.…
2. Adults learn language that is comprehensible…. Lack of comprehension will quickly discourage the adult learner from learning English.
3. Adults learn best when they feel safe to make mistakes.
4. Adults often experience a silent period early in the language learning process. Effective language instruction recognizes that some learners are not going to want to say anything for a while.…
5. Adults learn at widely varying rates and through different modalities. (pp. 12-13)

Knowledge of these principles of L2 learning in adulthood as well as a general understanding of L2 acquisition processes can help educators in the development of effective adult ESL programs.

Second Language Acquisition and Its Impact on ELLs’ Errors

*Theoretical Perspectives on Error and Error Correction in SLA*

For several decades, L2 acquisition theorists have described the unique needs of L2 learners. Summarizing these arguments, Bitchener and Ferris (2012) stated the
following: “L2 writers, being still in the process of second language acquisition, need more attention to their errors than do L1 writers producing texts in their native languages” (p. 43). Unfortunately, many academic programs have been slow in responding to these concerns (Hinkel, 2002). Researchers maintain that language acquisition involves complex developmental sequences (Krashen, 1987) and takes a considerable amount of time, particularly when the learner tries to attain what Cummins (1984) calls Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)—the language necessary for academic success. As Hinkel (2002) wrote,

The process-centered approach to teaching writing … seems to overlook the fundamental fact that NSs [native speakers] already have highly developed (native) language proficiency in English, whereas most NNSs [non-native speakers] dedicate years to learning it as a second language, in most cases as adults. (p. 53)

Many students never achieve a near-native proficiency in the second language because of such factors as their age, literacy and cognitive development, cultural background and the rhetorical patterns of their native language (Ferris, 2011; Hinkel, 2002).

Chapter I offered an introductory overview of the key differences in L1 and L2 writing. Before returning to the discussion of the unique features of ESL writing, including errors, it is important to consider the history of error in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), since there is a strong indication that the SLA processes have a direct impact on the errors L2 writers produce (Ferris, 2011).

Behaviorist perspectives

“Error, like sin, is to be avoided and its influence overcome” (Brooks, 1960, p. 58). This statement is a reflection of the sentiments toward errors among L2 theorists in the 1950s and 1960s. According to the behaviorist perspectives, which were largely
influenced by Skinner (1957), allowing L2 errors to exist was a dangerous practice because it led to the formation of bad habits, which “interfere[ed] with the learning of new target-like habits” (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012, p. 4). The overwhelming belief was that language learning, just like any other behavior, only took place through positive or negative reinforcement and repetition. Therefore, to learn a second language, students had to have opportunities to practice the correct language forms in response to a stimulus. These ideas translated into the Audiolingual approach, introduced by Fries in 1945 and quickly adopted by the majority of L2 teachers. L2 learners were supposed “to observe and practice the right model a sufficient number of times” and “to shorten the time lapse between the incorrect response and the presentation once more of the correct model” (Brooks, 1960, p. 58). In order to prevent errors, time in the classroom was focused on repetition, pattern drills, and memorization of dialogues.

Another instructional approach that gained popularity during those decades was Contrastive Analysis (CA). The idea was that the primary source of errors in L2 lay in the incorrect transfer from L1. Therefore, theorists called for a need to identify common features as well as differences in the learner’s L1 and L2 in order to predict the learner’s errors and explain why these errors would be likely to be made. However, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, as Bitchener and Ferris (2012) pointed out, “the value of CA as the diagnostician and panacea of all ills was … [starting to be] questioned” (p. 5). A number of empirical studies (e.g., Hendrickson, 1977; Richards, 1970; Selinker, 1969; Wilkins, 1968) indicated that L1 interference was only one of the sources of L2 errors, especially in writing, and could not account for all types of errors being made by L2 learners. For instance, Richards (1970) argued that some of the prominent sources of L2
errors were: “1. Over-generalization; 2. Ignorance of rule restrictions; 3. Incomplete application of rules; [and] 4. False concepts hypothesized” (p. 6). Furthermore, these research investigations also indicated that it was often difficult to isolate the exact source of many L2 errors.

Developmentalist Perspectives

Unsatisfied with CA’s ability to reliably predict L2 learners’ errors, theorists were looking for alternative explanations about L2 errors’ sources and their role in SLA. Influenced by the L1 acquisition research conducted by Piaget (1970) and Chomsky (1959), a more developmentalist view of language learning began to emerge. L1 studies of the 1970s suggested:

(1) that children go through stages; (2) that these stages are similar across children for a given language and across languages; (3) that child language is rule-governed and systematic; (4) that children are resistant to error correction; (5) that their processing capacity limits the number of rules they can apply at any one time; and (6) that they will revert to earlier hypotheses when two or more rules compete. (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012, p. 5)

These L1 research discoveries influenced a resurgence of interest in SLA and the role of errors in the process, which culminated in an approach known as Error Analysis (EA).

The goal of EA was to classify learners’ errors. Parallels were being drawn between children’s developmental errors made while acquiring their L1 and those made by L2 learners. Refuting the belief that L1 is the main source of L2 errors, EA proposed a novel idea that errors were learner-internal. However, despite its contributions to the field of SLA, EA soon came under attack due to its limited scope of focus and methodological problems related to the reliability of error typologies.

By the mid 1970s, theorists moved to a more comprehensive SLA approach known as interlanguage, a term coined by Selinker (1972). Supporters of this stance
argued that the language produced by learners was a dynamic system with its own set of rules that evolved over time. At the same time, interlanguage fossilization, or cessation of progress toward the target language, could occur at any stage of language acquisition. Investigations into the nature of interlanguage found that L2 learners of different linguistic backgrounds acquired English grammatical morphemes in a set order. “The existence of such an order indicated an operation of internal principles” (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012, p. 6). Influenced by these findings, the views on the role of error in the SLA process were quickly changing. No longer was error viewed as a “sinful act,” but rather it was considered in a more positive light as an “indicator of mental processes” as learners acquired the L2 (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012, p. 6). Thus, the pedagogical focus was shifting from error prevention to error correction, with the teacher’s goal now being not to eradicate all errors, but to determine which errors to correct and when to correct them (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012).

Krashen’s Monitor Model

Early 1980s witnessed yet another pendulum swing when Krashen (1981, 1982, 1984, 1985) proposed what has come to be known as the first general theory of SLA—the Monitor Model. The model consisted of five components: the acquisition-learning hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, the input hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis. Although highly influential in the SLA arena, all of Krashen’s hypotheses have attracted criticism over the years (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012).

The acquisition-learning hypothesis differentiated between the processes of acquisition and learning a language. According to Krashen (1985), acquisition is a “subconscious process identical in all important ways to the process children utilize in
acquiring their first language,” while learning is seen as a “conscious process that results in ‘knowing about’ language” (p. 1). Thus, acquisition took place while learners engaged in a natural communication, and learning was a product of classroom instruction. Krashen (1985) maintained the two processes could not be integrated. This view of acquisition and learning as two separate processes that could not be unified into a whole meant that pedagogical techniques including CF had little impact on helping learners in their acquisition of the target language. To Krashen (1985), learned knowledge could not be converted into acquired knowledge. Although this argument came under attack in later years, the distinction between learned and acquired knowledge has had a profound influence on SLA theoretical perspectives over the last thirty years.

Krashen’s monitor hypothesis (1985) further clarified the nature of the relationship between learned and acquired knowledge. The hypothesis stated that learning’s sole function was to allow a learner to monitor or edit his or her output, which is initiated by the acquired system. However, for the monitor to operate successfully, the learner should have the linguistic knowledge already acquired (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). The claim has been criticized because empirically it is “impossible to tell when a learner is consciously applying a rule from the learned system and when the learner is applying, subconsciously, a rule from the acquired system” (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012, p. 10).

The natural order hypothesis claims that there is a predictable order in which learners acquire a second language. Some rules are acquired earlier than others and do not necessarily correlate with the rules that are taught in language classes. For instance, while the progressive marker —*ing and the plural marker —*s are typically among the first morphemes acquired in English, the third person singular —*s and the possessive —*s
are acquired relatively later (Krashen, 1977). Thus, according to Krashen’s point of view, classroom instruction including error correction played no role in the subconscious process of language acquisition (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012).

The central component of Krashen’s model (1985), the input hypothesis, was directly influenced by the natural order hypothesis. In Krashen’s view, “L2 learners move along the developmental continuum by receiving comprehensible input” (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012, p. 10) about the target language that is just slightly above the learner’s current linguistic knowledge. He referred to the learner’s current linguistic level as \( i \) and to the next stage on the developmental continuum as \( i + 1 \). According to one of his principal arguments, “if input is understood, and there is enough of it, the necessary grammar is automatically provided” (Krashen, 1985, p. 10). Here Krashen once again played down the role of formal grammar instruction and error correction and maintained that given sufficient comprehensible input, acquisition would take place as a natural, subconscious occurrence. Critics have questioned Krashen’s input hypothesis due to the vagueness of what constitutes comprehensible input and the impossibility to precisely determine level \( i \) and level \( i + 1 \) (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). The mechanism highlighted by the input hypothesis was not clearly explained.

As an extension of the input hypothesis, Krashen’s (1985) final theory component, the affective filter hypothesis, stated that for a learner to be able to process comprehensible input, his or her affective filter must be relatively low. In Krashen’s view, a high affective filter is not optimal for L2 acquisition because it can lead to anxiety and low self-esteem. Krashen proposed that learners with a high affective filter would not be receptive to the comprehensible input provided to them. Again, there has
been a significant degree of criticism leveled against Krashen’s argument primarily because there is little empirical evidence that self-conscious people make bad L2 learners, whereas confident individuals are more successful at learning a second language (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Nevertheless, despite the criticism directed at all five components of the Monitor Model, Krashen’s ideas have had a substantial impact on L2 pedagogy and on the subsequent theoretical stances in SLA (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012).

**Cognitivists: Information Processing Perspectives**

In the years following the widespread belief that Krashen’s (1985) hypotheses were the prominent paradigm in SLA, theorists began to focus more on cognitive processes that take place as part of language learning/acquisition. Cognitivists such as McLaughlin (1987, 1990), Anderson (1993), and Pienemann (1981, 1987, 1989, 1998) believed that SLA stemmed from inner processes instead of external stimuli; therefore, their primary interest was the human brain activity as L2 learners process new information. Like Krashen, these scholars tried to understand the connection between acquisition and learning. However, their conclusions differed from those presented in the Monitor Model. While Krashen (1985) maintained that explicit learning could not be converted into language acquisition, cognitivists (McLaughlin, 1987, 1990; Anderson, 1993) argued that declarative knowledge (i.e., knowledge *that*) developed via controlled instruction could transform into automatized procedural knowledge (i.e., knowledge *how*) as a result of practice. Thus, these theorists viewed the role of instructional practices, including CF, in a much more positive light than Krashen. Pienemann (1981, 1987, 1989, 1998) added a caveat to this stance: for conversion to be successful, the learner’s interlanguage must be at the stage of readiness where linguistic knowledge could be
acquired naturally. Otherwise, the input learners received during the controlled processing stage could not be converted into automatized linguistic knowledge. Echoes of this argument (Lantolf & Appel, 1994; Lantolf & Thorne, 2007; Swain, Brooks, & Tocalli-Beller, 2002) were later found in the socio-cultural perspective based on Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of the *zone of proximal development (ZPD)*.

**Cognitivists: Interactionist Perspectives**

Another group of cognitive theorists in the 1990s focused primarily on the role of interaction between L2 learners and their interlocutors. Interactionists such as Long (1996), Sharwood Smith (1993) and Schmidt (1994) argued that interaction itself, including negotiation of meaning, facilitated language development. Similarly to Krashen (1985), interactionists saw comprehensible input as an important component of language acquisition. However, they also made a case for the significance of negative evidence (Long, 1996), or CF, which L2 learners receive from their interlocutors. As Bitchener and Ferris (2012) explained, “Whereas Krashen stated that it was sufficient for a learner to pay attention to the meaning embedded in comprehensible input for acquisition to occur, interactionists . . . explained that learners need to pay some attention to language form and structure if acquisition is to occur” (p. 17). According to the interactionists’ theoretical perspective, giving L2 learners “a constant diet of well-formed utterances” (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012, p. 17) in the target language (i.e., positive evidence) is not enough because this type of “input does not provide specific enough information on the limits to the system” (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012, p. 17). To summarize, interactionists’ arguments built upon Krashen’s Input Hypothesis (1985), but unlike his model, their
perspectives included an added emphasis on the value of CF in second language acquisition.

Socio-cultural perspective

Interaction was also found at the center of another SLA perspective introduced in the 1990s, the socio-cultural theory of human mental processing (Lantolf & Appel, 1994), which was based on Vygotsky’s work (1978). The theory proposes that language development, similar to other cognitive processes, is a product of interaction between L2 learners and more advanced speakers of the target language, who provide learners with appropriate scaffolding. With the assistance of more proficient speakers, L2 learners can achieve a level of performance that is higher than what they would have achieved autonomously (Lantolf & Appel, 1994; Lantolf & Thorne, 2007; Swain, Brooks, & Tocalli-Beller, 2002). According to the socio-cultural perspective, L2 development is the most effective when it takes place in the learner’s zone of proximal development, i.e., the language domain that the learner can master only with scaffolded assistance, such as repetition, modeling and CF (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). Therefore, socio-cultural theorists assign a positive role both to error and error correction in SLA.

Nature of L2 Errors

The previous section presented an overview of how different SLA theoretical perspectives have treated L2 error and CF over time. However, a discussion about the role of error and error correction in SLA would not be complete without looking at the nature of L2 errors. Drawing on the multitude of SLA theories of the recent decades, current L2 writing research indicates that the SLA process, which takes considerable time and occurs in stages (Collier, 1989; Krashen, 1982; Truscott, 1996; Valdés, 1992), has a
direct impact on the type and quantity of errors English language learners make. Ferris (2011) wrote the following:

As learners go through various stages of acquisition of different elements of the L2, they will make errors reflective of their SLA processes. These errors may be caused by inappropriate transference of L1 patterns and/or by incomplete knowledge of the L2. Written errors made by adult L2 acquirers are therefore often quite different from those made by native speakers. (p. 10)

As mentioned in Chapter I, Silva’s (2001) meta-analysis of studies on L2 accuracy noted that L2 writers not only made more written errors overall compared to L1 writers, but they also frequently struggled with verbs, prepositions, articles and nouns, areas that were not typically problematic for L1 writers. Ferris (2011) supported these findings by saying that “while monolingual English speakers may struggle with issues such as punctuation rules, pronoun reference, and informal usage in their academic writing . . . , L2 writers make a wider variety of errors” (p. 82). Among the most common types of L2 errors, Ferris (2011) listed the following issues (in the order of frequency): sentence structure, word choice, verb tense, noun endings (singular/plural), verb form, punctuation, articles, word form, spelling, run-ons, pronouns, subject-verb agreement, fragments, idioms, and informal language.

Because of the insights on the SLA processes and their impact on the nature of error patterns of L2 students, many researchers agree that the instructional methods used to address these learners’ linguistic needs should not be blindly borrowed from L1 settings (Ferris, 2011; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005; Leki, 1990, 1996; Nelson & Carson, 1998; Silva, 2001; Yates & Kenkel, 2002; Zhang, 1995). As Silva (2001) noted:

L2 writing is strategically, rhetorically, and linguistically different in important ways from L1 writing. Therefore, L2 writing specialists need to look beyond L1 writing theories, to better describe the unique nature of L2 writing, to look into
the potential sources … of this uniqueness, to develop theories that adequately explain the phenomenon of L2 writing. (p. 201)

Ferris (2011) presented a similar argument in her overview of the differences in L1 and L2 writing:

L2 student writers need (a) a focus on different linguistic issues or error patterns than native speakers do; (b) feedback or error correction that is tailored to their linguistic knowledge and experience; and (c) instruction that is sensitive to their unique linguistic gaps and needs for strategy training, including not only strategies for findings, fixing, and avoiding errors but also for continued developments of language structures that will strengthen their writing across a variety of tasks and genres. (p. 10)

While sounding certainly convincing, these theoretical suggestions, however, rarely provide L2 writing practitioners with specific guidelines on what the focus of their instruction should be.

Role of CF in L2 Writing: Empirical Investigations

As previously noted, many writing instructors find working with ELLs to be a daunting task. Their frustration is often rooted in the fact that there is no agreement among scholars on how teachers should respond to L2 writing. The majority of empirical studies have indicated that teacher feedback, including written CF, must have a prominent presence in the ESL writing classroom (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008, 2010a, 2010b; Chandler, 2003; Ellis et al., 2008; Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Ferris, 1995, 1997, 2006; Ferris et al., 2010, 2013; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Sheen, 2007; Sheen et al., 2009; Van Beuningen et al., 2012). At the same time, other scholars have questioned the validity of error correction (Polio, Fleck, & Leder, 1998; Truscott, 1996, 1999, 2004, 2007, 2009; Truscott & Hsu, 2008).

Truscott (1996, 1999, 2004, 2007, 2009) has taken a strong stance against grammar feedback, saying that it should have no place in ESL writing classes. Truscott’s
argument is based on his review of a number of studies that indicated that teacher feedback on ESL writers’ grammar was often futile and counterproductive. The author has presented both theoretical and practical reasons for why “grammar correction … should be abandoned” (Truscott, 1996, p. 328). He has asserted that grammar instruction tends to ignore developmental sequences that are part of SLA. This often results in knowledge that has no practical value, which Truscott (1996) has called “pseudolearning” (p. 345). In addition, he has stated that grammar correction has a harmful impact on ELLs' motivation.

Another problem, according to Truscott (1996), is that both students and teachers lose valuable instructional time on error correction, time that could be better spent on more productive learning tasks such as “organization and logical development of arguments” (p. 356). Throughout his research, Truscott has maintained that error correction has absolutely no benefits and, therefore, is an unnecessary component of ESL writing courses:

It can be concluded that one should not expect learners to benefit from grammar correction. Even if it could work in principle (which is doubtful), it is too inefficient to be of much use. So in at least the overwhelming majority of cases correction amounts to an unpleasant waste of time. (Truscott, 1996, pp. 353-354)

On the other hand, the majority of SLA researchers’ perceptions of corrective response can be summarized by Yates and Kenkel’s (2002) statement:

L2 writing instruction cannot be divorced from L2 language instruction because it is the L2 students’ lack of knowledge about the language to achieve their writing purposes which makes responding to actual L2 writing so difficult, yet so important. (p. 46)
The findings of a number of studies have suggested that there are at least two reasons why CF should be kept as an essential part of ESL writing classrooms. These reasons are described below.

One argument for CF is that research (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010a, 2010b; Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Chandler, 2003; Ellis et. al., 2008; Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Ferris, 1995, 1997; 2006; Ferris et al., 2010, 2013; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Foin & Lange, 2007; Sheen, 2007; Sheen et al., 2009; Van Beuningen, de Jong, & Kuiken, 2008, 2012) has suggested a positive impact of error correction on accuracy improvement in ESL student writing. Although these investigations have differed from one another in terms of the types of errors and error feedback analyzed, these studies have indicated that CF can improve L2 writers’ accuracy over time. For instance, Fathman and Whalley (1990) examined essays and rewrites of 72 English language learners in college composition classes. The findings of their study indicated that both grammar and content feedback helped ELLs significantly improve their written work. Withholding teacher feedback, on the other hand, resulted in poorer quality of the students’ rewrites. The results of the study also suggested that giving content and form feedback simultaneously did not overburden ESL writers. According to the authors, “Focus on grammar does not negatively affect the content of writing” (Fathman & Whalley, 1990, p. 186).

Similarly to Fathman & Whalley’s results, the findings of Chandler’s (2003) study demonstrated that the practice of giving error feedback and having students revise their writing based on that feedback could have a positive effect on the accuracy of students’ subsequent work. Chandler worked with two ESL writing classrooms. While
the experimental group was expected to do revisions immediately after receiving CF, the control group was not asked to revise previous writing assignments until the end of the term. The results indicated that giving feedback on accuracy did not hinder students’ fluency, a finding that supported Fathman and Whalley’s (1990) conclusions. In addition, the experimental group’s accuracy increased significantly during the course of the semester; while the control group did not show such improvement. Thus, the crucial point, according to Chandler, is that teachers should ask learners to incorporate CF in their revised drafts for it to have any influence on their writing.

The second argument for error feedback is that a few researchers have observed that ELLs themselves value and expect CF because they believe that it helps them produce more effective writing (Chandler, 2003; Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Ferris, 1995; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Leki, 1991; Williams, 2005). Ferris (1995) reported that the majority of ELLs in her study perceived teacher feedback as useful, especially when it was provided on early drafts, rather than on the final draft of a paper. Moreover, grammar feedback was perceived as more important than teacher input on the content and organization of their papers—an issue also noted by Leki (1991). Ferris (1995) stated that ESL writers in the study took the teacher feedback seriously and responded to it by employing a variety of revision strategies. Therefore, according to Ferris (1995), “Students do attend to, grapple with, and appreciate the efforts their teachers make in responding to their writing” (p. 50). Chandler (2003) expressed the same sentiment when she stated, “One topic that is not controversial is L2 students’ views toward teacher feedback on their written errors. Studies … consistently reported that student writers want such error feedback” (p. 270). Although more studies are needed to substantiate the
research database on student reactions to teacher response, current investigations have suggested that ELLs appreciate CF and find it to be an important component of their writing courses (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005).

Best Practices in Written CF

According to Ferris et al. (2013), “for most writing instructors the questions around written CF are not if, but how best to provide it” (p. 308). Unfortunately, even though there is a strong indication that a significant number of L2 researchers and practitioners believe in the benefits of error correction, there is no unanimous agreement on what the most effective written CF techniques are. For instance, Chandler (2003) and Ferris and Roberts (2001) examined the impact of direct and indirect error correction approaches on L2 student writing, but came to somewhat conflicting conclusions. The results of Chandler’s (2003) research suggested that direct teacher feedback (e.g., providing the correct form) was superior to indirect forms of correction (e.g., describing an error type in the margin or underlining errors) and was preferred by ELLs because it was an easier and faster method to revise their texts. Compared to other methods used in the study, direct correction resulted in the biggest improvement of accuracy.

Contrary to Chandler’s (2003) findings, Ferris and Roberts (2001) found that students benefited greatly from teacher feedback even when the teacher used an indirect approach. Three feedback strategies were used in this study to examine self-correction abilities of 72 ESL participants: (a) errors marked with codes, (b) underlining of errors, (c) no teacher feedback. The results suggested that the two groups that received error feedback in the form of error codes and underlining performed significantly better than the no-feedback group on the self-correction task. However, no major differences were
found between the “codes” and “no-codes” groups. Based on these findings, the authors concluded that unlabeled feedback seemed to work just as effectively as the more explicit form. The study’s results regarding the benefits of indirect CF were similar to the ones presented by Ferris (2006), Ferris and Helt (2000), Ferris et al. (2010, 2013), Hendrickson (1980) and Lalande (1982).

An important factor needs to be considered when interpreting the findings of written CF studies. One aspect of the CF research in L2 writing that poses a major limitation is that it has rarely looked at the transfer of learning from error feedback. The majority of the error correction studies have been short-termed. To date, longitudinal error feedback research conducted over a period of an academic semester or a year has been relatively scant (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010a, 2010b; Ellis et al., 2008, Ferris, 1995, 2006; Ferris et al., 2010, 2013; F. Hyland, 2003; Sheen, 2007; Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986; Van Beuningen et al., 2012). The weakness of conducting a one-shot instructional treatment that does not investigate the longitudinal effects of teacher feedback is that “demonstrating students’ ability to reduce errors on a rewriting task does not prove that their accuracy will improve over time” (Ferris, 2003, p. 60). This was also one of Truscott’s (2006) main criticisms of existing L2 error correction studies. It is in response to these arguments that the body of work that has looked at the influence of error feedback longitudinally has been slowly expanding. Although current longitudinal studies have shown significant methodological differences, most have demonstrated a positive impact of written CF on L2 accuracy over time.

In one such study, Bitchener and Knoch (2010a) investigated the effectiveness of four error feedback approaches (direct error correction with written and oral
metalinguistic explanation, direct error correction with written metalinguistic explanation, direct error correction, and no error correction) over a 10-month period. The researchers found that the three groups who received one of the treatments outperformed the one that did not receive error correction (i.e., the control group). Moreover, no differences were detected in the effectiveness between the three written CF options. Thus, these findings suggested a positive influence of error correction on accuracy retention over time.

Using a longitudinal, multiple-case study approach spanning fifteen weeks, Ferris et al. (2010, 2013) worked with ten college-level ELLs in a developmental writing course. Participants wrote four in-class assignments, received indirect written CF on their errors, revised their texts, and were interviewed three times about their self-editing strategies and understanding of the received CF. All participating students showed at least some improvement in their written accuracy over the course of the investigation and felt that the written CF techniques used in the study were helpful to them as developing writers.

In another study, Ferris (2006) worked with ESL students in six sections of a university writing course over a period of one semester. Participants received systematic written CF (including direct and indirect corrective input) throughout the course of the study. A comparison between the errors on the first paper and the last paper written that semester revealed that the total error ratios (total errors divided by total number of words) and verb errors were significantly reduced. However, changes in other measured categories were not statistically significant.
F. Hyland’s (2003) case study explored the relationship between the CF provided by teachers in two ESL writing classes at a university in New Zealand and six ELLs’ revisions. Teacher think aloud protocols, teacher and student interviews and student texts were analyzed to examine the extent to which teacher feedback focused on form in student writing and the use that learners made of this CF in their revisions. Findings suggested that contrary to the teachers’ perceptions of their methods, written accuracy was a major focus of their CF, which included a mix of direct and indirect corrective strategies. While most of the students engaged with the form-focused feedback provided on their writing and successfully revised their texts, the extent to which they relied on CF varied among the participants.

Overall, there seems to be at least some indication of CF’s positive longitudinal effects on written accuracy. As previously mentioned, further longitudinal research efforts need to be made in order to fully examine the value of providing error correction to L2 writers. With this purpose in mind, I conducted the present study over the course of one semester (fifteen weeks), which put the investigation in the longitudinal research camp, thus, adding to the empirical body of knowledge on the topic of written CF.

Another problematic issue in the existing research on error correction techniques is that there has been very little methodological consistency in these studies. There are no strict parameters when it comes to what researchers examine when they study error feedback strategies and how they define the terms under investigation. Many studies have not clearly operationalized such concepts as “error,” “direct feedback,” and “indirect feedback,” or they have offered conflicting definitions. For example, while Frantzen (1995) treated underlined corrections as no-feedback, Hendrickson (1980) and Lalande
(1982) referred to this type of feedback as indirect. Such inconsistencies present difficulties when comparing and synthesizing different studies, as well as interpreting their findings.

The absence of no-feedback or control groups is yet another plaguing issue in error feedback research (e.g., Haswell, 1983; Chandler, 2003, Ferris, 1995, 2006; Foin & Lange, 2007). The inability to compare an experimental group of subjects to students who receive no treatment complicates the analysis of the effectiveness of different instructional treatments. As Truscott (2007) pointed out, without a control group, it is difficult for researchers to claim that CF alone is responsible for any improvements in accuracy. At the same time, the lack of control groups in the existing L2 error correction research is not an easily fixable methodological issue; rather, it is often seen as a question of ethics. Ferris (2004) referred to this issue as a “methodological Catch-22” (p. 56). On the one hand, researchers are criticized if they do not include a control group, which can jeopardize the study’s empirical robustness. On the other hand, many feel that withholding error correction from a “no-feedback” group of students for an extensive period of time would be unfair to these L2 writers. In fact, certain research review boards may not even approve such study designs and many teachers and researchers choose to steer away from them. Haswell (1983) wrote the following regarding this ethical dilemma: “I have not had the heart to set up a control group to isolate this marking technique” (p. 603). Chandler (2003) noted “that the vast majority of students wanted the teacher to mark every error. Since the students felt so strongly about this, the teacher could only justify the treatment of the control group by offering them the same treatment as the experimental group later in the semester” (p. 273). Thus, there are practical and
ethical concerns when designing studies that include groups of students who do not receive CF.

In assessing the usefulness of error correction, it is also important to consider whether teachers should provide selective or comprehensive feedback. Researchers have disagreed on this topic as well. Selective, or focused, error correction seems to have a number of advocates (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Ellis et al., 2008; Ferris, 1995, 2010; Ferris et al., 2010, 2013; Hendrickson, 1980; Krashen, 1984; Sheen, 2007; Sheen et al., 2009; Van Beuningen, de Jong, & Kuiken, 2008, 2012). The findings of these studies have suggested that “this more limited approach allows students to focus on their more serious writing problems without overwhelming them and their teachers” (Ferris, 2003, p. 51). On the other hand, researchers such as Evans, Hartshorn, McCollum, and Wolfersberger (2010), Hartshorn et al. (2010), and Lalande (1982) have pointed out that in order to progress, English language learners need to receive as much feedback as possible on their writing since accuracy matters in the real world. Their arguments have suggested that comprehensive, or unfocused, error correction may be of greater benefit to L2 students in achieving their long-term objectives than selective feedback. This disagreement highlights yet again the complexity of written CF research, the difficulty of drawing conclusions from existing studies, and a great need to address the multiple gaps in the current research base.

Summary of Chapter II

L1 writing instruction has witnessed several shifts in pedagogical focus since the mid 20th century. These paradigm shifts have had a profound influence on L2 instructional practices. By the 1970s, in response to the rigid focus of the current-
traditional rhetoric on the finished written product, L1 and L2 pedagogies adopted a revolutionary, writer-centered approach, focused on the cognitive processes involved in the act of writing. While still a favorite among many writing specialists, this approach attracted a great degree of criticism, which in the 1980s led to the introduction of a new theoretical stance with a fundamentally different focus—the audience, or discourse community. The 1990s marked the arrival of critical pedagogy, which has questioned the sociopolitical purposes of L1 and L2 instruction. The shifts in L1 and L2 writing pedagogy can be viewed in terms of different reactions to the demands of the academic discourse community. The process-centered methodology downplays the importance of academic discourse conventions and expectations of L2 learners’ writing proficiency.

Social constructionism, the chosen theoretical framework for this study, advocates teaching academic literacy to help L2 writers successfully navigate the demands of the academy. Finally, critical pedagogy proposes to change the conventions of the academy. “In the end, however, it is … [L2] students who bear the brunt of the political trends in L2 and teacher training” (Hinkel, 2002). Therefore, L2 specialists need to be conscious of the theories that guide their praxis in order to develop instruction that is responsive to ELLs’ needs.

When it comes to adult ELLs’ experiences with using the discourse accepted in the academy, many struggle and report feeling alienated from their academic discourse communities (Shaughnessy, 1977; Zamel, 1998). Research has suggested that many educational programs in the United States fail to address the needs of adult ELLs (Ferris et al., 2013; Hinkel, 2002). ESL writing instructors predominantly rely on L1 teaching approaches and do not take into account the effects of second language acquisition when
working with adult ESL writers. According to Hinkel (2002), “L2 students are not well prepared for their studies in the academy in the English medium of instruction, and most produce written discourse not too distant from that found in the texts of elementary school students” (p. 257). Because the lexicogrammatical fundamentals are not given enough attention in many L2 writing courses, adult ELLs experience difficulties in writing. As a result, many “will be hindered in their future academic or professional progress, regardless of how much fun they have in the ESL classroom” (Hinkel, 2002, p. 265).

Adult ELLs constitute a diverse population with varying backgrounds and reasons for studying English. However, their learning is rooted in several shared principles of “how adults learn and how they learn a second language” (Orem, 2005, p. 13). Developing adult English language programs that encompass these principles of learning is of increasing importance for the American society of the 21st century, where foreign-born, non-native English speakers continue to be a major source of population growth.

In general, learning a second language is a complex process that cannot be devoid of error. An overview of the history of error and error correction in SLA indicates that both play a role in language development. Furthermore, current SLA research findings suggest that the nature of L2 errors is different from that of L1 errors and is reflective of learners’ L2 development processes. Therefore, writing theorists and practitioners should be cautious not to equate L1 and L2 learners’ linguistic needs.

Although many researchers have supported the idea that L2 writing instruction cannot be solely rooted in L1 writing theories, there has been little agreement among them regarding the role of error feedback in ESL writing classrooms. Given the fact that
there seems to be some compelling evidence that error correction can help ESL writers improve their accuracy (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010a, 2010b; Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Chandler, 2003; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008; Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Ferris, 1995, 1997; 2006; Ferris et al., 2010, 2013; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Foin & Lange, 2007; Sheen, 2007; Van Beuningen, de Jong, & Kuiken, 2012) and that ELLs themselves believe in its positive impact on their language development (Chandler, 2003; Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Ferris, 1995; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Leki, 1991; Williams, 2005), we can assume that CF is not going to disappear from ESL writing classrooms in the foreseeable future. At the same time, considering the objections to error feedback coming from scholars like Truscott (1996, 1999, 2004, 2007, 2009), the inconclusiveness of research findings regarding what constitutes effective error feedback strategies, and methodological issues that have undermined the robustness of some existing L2 studies, it is clear that “the research database on error correction and grammar instruction is incomplete” (Ferris, 2011, p. 15). Thus, there is a need to further investigate the role of written CF in L2 settings and examine its short- and long-term effects, which was the purpose of the present study.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

Introduction

This study focused on the controversial issue of CF in ESL writing classrooms and examined its influence on ELLs’ perceptions and written accuracy through a longitudinal (fifteen-week), embedded single-case study approach. Because of the researcher’s background, first as an adult ELL and later as a writing instructor at a college in the Midwest, the study was designed to investigate the phenomenon specifically in an adult ESL writing classroom setting. The researcher explored how adult ELLs in a high intermediate level writing class at an English language learning center in Greater Boston responded to the teacher’s CF practice. Insights from SLA research indicate that many U.S. educational institutions are not successful at meeting the needs of adult ELLs (Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999; Hinkel, 2002; Hinkel, 2005). This situation calls for a further examination of the effectiveness of pedagogical approaches used with this growing student population.

As Ferris (2010, 2011) has argued, there is a particular need for longitudinal, contextualized research efforts to comprehensively assess the value of providing various types of instructional interventions, including CF, to ESL writers. With this purpose in mind, the present case study was conducted in an intact adult ESL writing class over the course of one semester to address the existing gap in the CF research database. The
limited number of current longitudinal CF investigations discussed in Chapter II (e.g., Ferris, 2006; Ferris et al., 2010, 2013; F. Hyland, 2003) served as helpful exemplars for conceptualizing the design of this case study. The data collection and analysis methods employed in this investigation were to a certain extent modeled after these studies to examine the effects of CF on student views and writing. The remainder of this chapter discusses the research design selected for this investigation, its site and participants, and data collection and analysis methods that were used in this study.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How does the teacher in an adult ESL writing class provide CF on morphological, lexical and syntactic errors in student writing?

2. How do adult ELLs perceive the CF they receive?

3. How does CF on morphological, lexical and syntactic errors influence adult ELLs’ written accuracy?

Design of the Study

This investigation was a case study that utilized qualitative research methods supported by elements of quantitative techniques (descriptive statistics) to explore the role of CF in a high intermediate adult ESL writing classroom over the course of one academic term (fifteen weeks). By choosing to work with one class conducted by one instructor, I hoped to minimize the effects of certain confounding factors (e.g., different teachers following different instructional approaches) and to ensure consistency in the CF students received.
Before discussing the rationale for choosing a case study design for this investigation, I would like to consider a number of general features that distinguish qualitative inquiries (nonexperimental designs under which case studies typically fall) from quantitative research (experimental designs) and the philosophical assumptions that underlie them. While the overarching goal of educational research is “to generate knowledge that describes, predicts, improves, and explains the processes and practices related to education” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 10), scholars can follow different research design paths in order to reach these objectives. A research investigation can be conceptualized as a quantitative or a qualitative study (or in some cases, as a pragmatically driven combination of the two approaches, resulting in a mixed-method study), with each type guided by a distinct set of epistemological beliefs (Creswell, 2009).

Quantitative research relies on deductive reasoning to test theories and hypotheses by studying relationships among different variables. The key objective of quantitative studies is to establish the cause of certain outcomes and to predict similar outcomes in the future (Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam (2009), “The focus is on how much and how many” (p. 5). This type of research employs pre-determined instruments that measure variables, involves large random samples, and generates numerical data with the help of statistical procedures. Quantitative researchers can manipulate variables under study and generally have a significant amount of control over their experiments. The goal of those who engage in this form of inquiry is to stay detached from the phenomenon under investigation, control for bias, generalize their findings and try to replicate them in other situations or contexts (Creswell, 2009).
Quantitative research is rooted in the positivist/postpositivist philosophical worldview, which is also known as the scientific method (Creswell, 2009). Positivists and postpositivists believe that our reality is objective and measureable. It exists somewhere out there, independent of our perspectives (Creswell, 2009). By conducting empirical research, we can test the laws that govern the world and determine the causes that affect outcomes (Creswell, 2009). According to this worldview, through objective, bias-free experiments, researchers can verify and refine theories about the world so that humans develop a better sense of reality. Thus, the scientific method advocates the following deductive approach to research: A researcher starts out with a theory, gathers data that either support or reject that theory, and then reflects on the results and makes any necessary adjustments before conducting further testing (Creswell, 2009).

Unlike experimental research with its focus on prediction built on cause and effect, qualitative research strives to understand and unveil the meaning members of a particular group assign to a social phenomenon (Creswell, 2009; Gall et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009). The design of qualitative research is emergent and inductive (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). Qualitative researchers typically follow a less prescribed investigation plan than quantitative researchers (Creswell, 2009). As Merriam (2009) pointed out, the design of a qualitative inquiry can change in response to changing circumstances of the research in progress. The primary goal is to get as much information about an issue from the participants’ perspective. Therefore, the research process may go through modifications to better address the researcher’s objectives as he or she begins the actual data collection in the field (Creswell, 2009). Following inductive reasoning, the researcher starts out with questions that are explored in the participants’ setting. Then,
from the data collected in the field, the researcher identifies patterns and larger themes, and eventually builds more abstract concepts and theories (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). This bottom-up process is quite different from the top-down approach used in quantitative designs, where researchers start out with theories and hypotheses that are tested and verified via experiments.

An additional defining characteristic of qualitative research is its interpretive nature, which is yet another feature that sets qualitative inquiries apart from quantitative designs (Creswell, 2009; Gall et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009). As stated above, the primary goal of qualitative research is to understand a social event or phenomenon from the participants’ point of view, or the emic perspective (Gall et al., 2010). While observing how the participants in a study (typically, a small purposefully selected sample) construct meaning, the researcher must make an interpretation of what he or she sees. Therefore, the researcher is the key instrument in qualitative research. Participants’ perceptions are filtered through the researcher’s own perceptions and interpretations, known as the etic view, in order to make conceptual sense of the findings (Gall et al., 2010). These interpretations are influenced by the researcher’s own background, prior understandings, and experiences (Creswell, 2009). Because an investigator’s interpretations of data cannot be separated from his or her subjectivity, it is important for an individual conducting a study to engage in a process of self-reflection, or reflexivity, and to monitor the etic views and how they can shape the research (Merriam, 2009).

The key characteristics of qualitative research have their roots in an epistemological tradition known as social constructivism. Social constructivists believe that our reality is ever changing, multidimensional, and dependent on people’s subjective
perspectives. As individuals seek to understand the world around them, they develop meanings of what they see and experience. According to Creswell (2009), “these meanings are varied and multiple” (p. 8). The social constructivist position states that this complexity of viewpoints and interpretations of experiences and reality must be explored (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). “There is no ‘objective’ experience that stands outside its interpretation” (Merriam, 2009, p. 9). In other words, reality is never independent of the mind (Creswell, 2009). These ideas are espoused by qualitative researchers. Through prolonged observations of interactions, open-ended questioning, and a careful examination of social artifacts, they try to understand the meanings of the phenomenon being studied that are constructed by the participants. Constructivist researchers recognize that these perceptions are shaped by historical and cultural norms of the individuals in a study. Likewise, researchers need to acknowledge that their own cultural and social backgrounds impact their interpretations of the observed interactions. Therefore, it is important for qualitative researchers to position themselves in their investigations and to explain how their interpretations are shaped by their own experiences (Creswell, 2009). Instead of starting out with a hypothesis (as quantitative researchers do), qualitative researchers inductively generate theories by observing social interactions and interpreting the meanings individuals have about the world (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009).

Why did I choose the case study design, based on the social constructivist framework, as the most suitable approach for addressing my research agenda? According to Schram (2006), “case study involves the exploration of a ‘bounded system,’ something identifiably set within time and circumstance” (p. 107). Similarly, Yin (2003) defined
case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within
its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are
not clearly evident” (p. 13). By drawing on qualitative and often quantitative evidence
(Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2003) collected over a period of time, case studies offer a rich,
“thick description” (terminology borrowed from anthropology) of a situation or an event
(Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 451). Although case study experts (Merriam, 2009; Yin,
2003) have pointed out that this type of inquiry can rely on a variety of methods for data
collection and analysis, including quantitative techniques, the approach is rooted in the
social constructivist ideas such as the search for meaning, inductive reasoning, the
researcher as the key instrument, and an in-depth description of a phenomenon (Merriam,
2009).

Guided by Ferris’s (2011) call for more L2 writing research designs that are
longitudinal and contextualized, I chose to focus my inquiry on a phenomenon closely
tied to its real-life context, CF in an L2 writing class, and spend prolonged time in the
field investigating the emic perspectives. Case study was, thus, identified as the most
fitting research strategy for my inquiry. Merriam (1998) described the strength of a case
study design:

Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic
account of a phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand
its readers’ experiences. These insights can be construed as tentative hypotheses
that help structure future research; hence, case study plays an important role in
advancing a field’s knowledge base. (p. 41)

The goal of my study was to examine the phenomenon of CF in a typical adult ESL
writing course and investigate how error feedback was provided to students, how students
perceived the feedback they received, and how it affected their writing. According to
Creswell (2009), open-ended research questions that begin with the words what or how are indicative of an emerging, qualitative design. Therefore, in order to address my research questions, I needed to conduct a case study.

The value of case study “lies in its ability to draw attention to what can be learned from the single case” (Schram, 2006, p. 107). According to Merriam (1998), the design is used “to understand the particular in depth, not because one wants to know what is generally true of the many” (p. 208). Similarly to the views expressed by Merriam (2009), Schram (2006) and Yin (2003), Gall et al. (2007) discussed the following general characteristics of case studies: (a) case studies investigate a particular phenomenon or occurrence; (b) case studies provide researchers with an extensive amount of data; (c) research is conducted in real-life contexts; (d) research involves substantial fieldwork with the goal of gaining an in-depth understanding of the participants’ perspective (the emic view) of the phenomenon under investigation, while being aware of how the researcher’s own perspective (the etic view) and background affect his or her interpretations of the collected data. The particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic features of case study research (Merriam, 2009), with its focus on understanding how participants in a specific context ascribe meaning to a specific issue, made this approach advantageous for achieving my research goal. As previously stated, through my investigation, I wanted to explore, holistically describe and explain how CF manifested itself in a particular yet typical setting (an adult ESL program) and how the participants in that setting (high intermediate level adult ELLs) respond to this practice. The interpretive, particularistic, and descriptive nature of my study, with its objective to
illuminate and advance ESL specialists’ understanding of error correction in L2 writing, is what made my inquiry a case study.

The characteristics described above are applicable to all case studies; however, researchers can choose from several existing types of case study designs. When it comes to the case study typology, various writers have conceptualized it in different ways. For example, Merriam (2009) and Gall et al. (2010) pointed out that case studies could be differentiated according to their functions, or purposes (e.g., description, explanation, or evaluation). Yin (2003) offered a different classification by saying that the key distinction in case studies is between single- and multiple-case designs. It was this differentiation (which Yin further broke down into holistic and embedded case designs) that I found particularly useful for the conceptualization of my study.

According to Yin (2003), a study can focus on one case (e.g., one organization or one classroom) from which all of the data will be collected and analyzed, or it may involve several entities, or units of analysis, that could be studied (e.g., several schools). Furthermore, both single cases and multiple cases can be studied holistically or by looking at sub-units of analysis that could be embedded within an individual case (Yin, 2003). The type of case study design that was best suited for addressing my research questions was an embedded single-case study. Yin (2003) argued that a single-case study is highly justifiable under certain circumstances, one of which being the representativeness or typicality of a case (p. 45). According to Yin, the goal here is to describe everyday situations and commonplace conditions. Therefore, representative cases can provide rich information about the average individual or organization (Yin, 2003). The objective of my research investigation was to study a phenomenon that is
found in one form or another in the majority of ESL writing classes. By exploring how error correction was used in a setting representative of a typical adult ESL classroom, I hoped to contribute to the knowledge base on effective L2 pedagogy. The next section will offer a further discussion of the typicality of the selected case.

Investigating a single case does not imply that the researcher has to disregard multiple subunits of analysis that may be embedded in the study. According to Yin (2003), “The subunits can often add significant opportunities for extensive analysis, enhancing the insights into the single case” (p. 46). Working with several ELLs in one writing class, or the subunits of analysis, allowed me to obtain concrete measures before taking the inquiry to a higher, more abstract level dealing with CF in an adult L2 writing course, the main focus of analysis. By exploring how error correction manifested itself in a particular yet typical L2 classroom and how the participants in that setting responded to written CF, I hoped to offer ESL specialists a better understanding of the effectiveness of this instructional practice.

Site

English Language Program is one of several programs for adult ELLs offered free of charge by a not-for-profit English language learning center in Greater Boston, Massachusetts. Since opening in the early 1990s, the center has served more than 8,700 immigrant adults (18 years or older) from 118 countries. According to the center’s data from previous fiscal years, the organization annually serves over 900 students and maintains a waiting list of more than 500 applicants. The top countries of student origin are Haiti, China, Morocco, El Salvador, Brazil and Vietnam. Student population is 70%
female and 30% male. Approximately 60% of students hold a high school diploma, with 27% having a post-secondary degree.

Based on its key components, the center’s English Language Program is representative of a typical adult ESL curriculum. Aligned with the federal and state standards for adult English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) education, the program curriculum is focused on helping adult ELLs develop their English language skills necessary for further academic study in institutions of higher education or professional careers. The center offers English language courses at five proficiency levels, which correspond to the following student performance levels (SPLs) for adult non-native speakers of English outlined in the National Reporting System for Adult Education (NRS) Implementation Guidelines (Division of Adult Education and Literacy, 2015) and Massachusetts Adult Basic Education Curriculum Framework for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) (Adult and Community Learning Services, 2005): Beginning Literacy, Low Beginning, High Beginning, Low Intermediate, and High Intermediate. ELLs are placed in levels that best reflect their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Classes are intensive, with ten to fifteen hours of instruction per week given entirely in English for a total immersion experience. The program curriculum is student-centered and designed to support adult ELLs’ efforts to improve their language proficiency so that they can achieve their personal, academic and professional goals.

The classes offered at each of the five levels target the following language areas: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, Grammar and Vocabulary. At the end of each level, students take the REEP Writing Assessment (RWA), a performance-based writing test developed by the Arlington Education and Employment Program (1997). In
conjunction with instructors’ evaluations and recommendations, the test determines whether students can move to the next level or exit the English Language Program and pursue further language or mainstream education at a different institution.

The purpose of the ESL writing sections offered by the center is to help ELLs develop skills necessary for effective written expression in English. The skills learned in lower levels are reinforced at each succeeding level. The writing curriculum culminates in Level 5 with its focus on the introduction of academic writing conventions and the steps and content requirements of a multiple-draft college-style essay (a troublesome issue for many ELLs, as discussed in Chapter II). The objective of Level 5 Writing is to help ELLs develop composing strategies and write for different purposes. These classes prepare learners for writing in academic and professional settings. To achieve this goal, Level 5 curriculum emphasizes the following skills:

- write paragraphs with a topic sentence and supporting sentences
- develop essays with an introduction, body and conclusion
- summarize a text
- use different sentence types (simple, compound, complex)
- recognize and develop different types of writings (descriptive, expository, persuasive, creative)
- improve editing skills (i.e., edit with few errors)

This description of Level 5 Writing curriculum (obtained from the director of the English Language Program) matches the descriptors for the high intermediate writing level outlined in the NRS guidelines (Division of Adult Education and Literacy, 2015).
The above features of the English Language Program and its Level 5 writing curriculum made the program a suitable fit for my case study setting. The overview of the program design suggested that it was a typical adult English language program whose curriculum was aligned with the federal and state standards for adult ESOL education. As Patton (1990) explained, “When the typical site sampling strategy is used, the site is specifically selected because it is not in any major way atypical, extreme, deviant or intensely unusual” (p. 173). Because my goal was to examine CF in ESL writing, a hotly debated issue that is present in many L2 writing classrooms and is closely linked to the topic of adult ELLs’ experiences with academic writing, I determined that the English Language Program and its’ Level 5 Writing class would serve as an appropriate setting for my inquiry.

Even though generalizability is a debatable concept in qualitative research (Creswell, 2009; Gall et al., 2007; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2003), the typicality of the site chosen for the present study had the potential to make the findings applicable to other settings. The philosophical underpinnings of qualitative inquiries make it impossible to think about a case study’s generalizability in its traditional, statistical sense. However, some qualitative experts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009) have pointed out that researchers can strengthen the applicability, or transferability, of their studies by offering readers a detailed account of their research contexts, which can allow the latter to see if the findings can be applied to their own situations. By choosing a program that was developed in alignment with federal and state initiatives for adult ESOL education and, therefore, had similarities to other adult ESOL programs and providing an in-depth description of my investigation, my goal was to enhance the transferability of my
findings. “The general lies in the particular,” argued Merriam (1998, p. 210). In other words, what individuals learn in a particular setting they can apply to similar settings in the future (Merriam, 1998). By creating a rich, descriptive account of a particular yet typical situation, my hope was for my case study to be perceived as pertinent to other locations and times.

Participants

As stated earlier, one of the qualitative researcher’s primary tasks is to understand how to view a phenomenon from the participants’ point of view (Gall et al., 2007). To offer a portrayal of the emic perspective held by the participants in my case study, a purposeful sample of key informants was selected from adult students enrolled in a high intermediate level ESL writing course. This investigation followed an embedded single-case design (Yin, 2003), with one writing class being the main unit of analysis and the learners in that class serving as subunits of analysis. According to Merriam (1998), the researcher must first identify the main unit of analysis to be investigated. Within that main case, there may be a number of entities that could be observed or individuals that could be interviewed. Typical case sampling was used to identify the classroom. According to Patton (1990), this sampling strategy highlights what is typical, normal or average. My goal to identify and gain access to a high intermediate level writing classroom was accomplished through discussions with site administrators, reviews of course information and informal interviews with several teachers prior to the beginning of the academic term. The high intermediate writing section selected for the study was taught during the winter semester of 2016 by an experienced ESL teacher with a PhD in English.
An overview of several adult ESL programs offered across the nation demonstrated that at the high intermediate level, learners typically have a foundation of the language and are ready to gain confidence in academic writing. Students are able to understand most questions, statements, and conversations about social issues. They have a grasp of such grammar structures as conditionals, the past perfect tense, passive voice, relative clauses, and reported speech. Students’ writing proficiency includes an ability to compose short essays on somewhat familiar topics. Given these characteristics, this level of written language proficiency represents an approximate point in a learner’s course of language training when the individual begins to demonstrate the language competency necessary for academic course work. It was concluded that this level matched the description of the high intermediate course selected for this case study, making it a typical ESL writing classroom.

Once the classroom was identified, maximum variation sampling, a purposeful sampling technique introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967), was employed to create a wide range of diversity and heterogeneity in the subunits. Findings from “a small sample of great diversity … derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity” (Patton, 1990, p. 172). To this end, four ELLs in the class with diverse cultural backgrounds and varying language proficiency levels were identified through classroom observations and conversations with the teacher and invited to participate in this investigation. Creswell (2013) recommended including no more than four or five participants in a single case study, which, according to him, “should provide ample opportunity to identify themes of the cases as well as conduct cross-case theme analysis” (p. 157).
During Week 1 of the term, I asked the teacher to introduce me to the class of eighteen students and briefly describe the purpose of my research. Once I identified the sample of student participants with varying English proficiency based on classroom observations and the teacher’s evaluations of initial student work and participation, I approached each potential participant individually after class during Week 2, invited them to join the study, described their role in the investigation and answered their questions. Initially, three female ELLs agreed to participate: a student from Nepal named Maya, whose English proficiency was evaluated as lower than the class average, a student from Morocco named Saida, whose proficiency was representative of an average high intermediate level, and a student from mainland China named Liling with an English proficiency level above the class average (all participants were assigned pseudonyms).

The majority of the students enrolled in the class were female, which was reflective of the overall student population at the center, and all three students initially selected for this case study were women.

Unfortunately, Liling had to withdraw from the class four weeks before the end of the semester due to a family issue. As a result, she was unable to participate in several writing tasks toward the end of the term. However, because of Liling’s enthusiasm to participate in the study and the value and the amount of the data collected from her as a key informant over the course of the term, I decided to keep her as a subject in this investigation. About one-third into the semester, three new students joined the class. One of these individuals, a woman from Turkey named Bilge (pseudonym), quickly demonstrated one of the highest oral and written English proficiencies in the class.
Therefore, she was added as the fourth participant in the case study to have an accurate representation of the range of language proficiencies in the classroom.

Maximum variation sampling strategy was used to see if there were common patterns or themes that cut across the data collected from a diverse sample (Gall et al., 2007) and “to fully describe multiple perspectives” (Creswell, 2013, p. 156) held by the ELLs in the study about CF. Data obtained from ELLs with varying language proficiency within the same high intermediate level classroom provided me with insights into the relationship between these students’ language development and error correction effects.

According to Ferris (2011), learners’ L1 backgrounds may also play a role in their written production and errors. For instance, she pointed out “that native speakers of Japanese may struggle with using English articles correctly, that Chinese speakers may have trouble with the English verb tense system, [and] that Russian speakers may have difficulty with word order” (Ferris, 2011, p. 85). Therefore, I strived to have a culturally and linguistically diverse participant sample to see if there was any indication of an interaction between the students’ L1s and their written accuracy progress. Working with an information-rich sample allowed me to make cross-case comparisons, thus, strengthening my findings and conclusions (Yin, 2003). Study participants were asked to review and sign an informed consent form (Appendix C) approved by the University of Akron Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB). In addition, the teacher was also asked to review and sign an informed consent (Appendix B) since I interviewed him twice over the course of the semester, once at the beginning and one more time at the end.
Data Sources

As a researcher, one of my main objectives was to enhance the validity and reliability of my findings, a task that may be achieved through a strategy of using multiple methods of data collection (Gall et al., 2007). The sections below outline the data collection sources that were used in this investigation, including observations, student and teacher interviews and an analysis of student texts. Using a combination of data collection procedures, my goal was to gather information from multiple sources of evidence and triangulate the data by verifying my findings via several methods (Merriam, 1998, 2009; Yin, 2003). According to Merriam (2009), a case study can rely on a wide range of data gathering methods, from tests to interviews, with some procedures being more common than others. Employing several data collection methods in the present study, I tried to ensure that the findings were “based on the convergence of information from different sources, not quantitative or qualitative data alone” (Yin, 2003, p. 93).

All information collected was kept in a secure location: paper records were kept in a locked cabinet, while digital data were stored on a password-protected computer. To preserve participant confidentiality, pseudonyms were used when individual participant responses were given as illustrative examples. A match list of participant names and pseudonyms was kept separate from participant data. All written and audio data collected, including writing samples and digital recordings and transcriptions of participant interviews, were stripped of identifying information and assigned codes.

Observations

I conducted observations of participants in a high intermediate ESL writing class over the course of the winter semester of 2016. The class had two hours of writing
instruction per week, and I observed it every week for the duration of the academic term (i.e., fifteen weeks). Collecting data through observations is an integral case-study procedure (Merriam, 2009) and can be a valuable research tool if it serves an explicitly stated purpose, is carefully planned and recorded, and is controlled for validity and reliability (Kidder, 1981). The researcher’s goal in a case study is to understand how the participants make sense of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2009). One of the best ways to gain an understanding of the emic perspective is by spending an extensive period of time in the field and observing participant interactions (Creswell, 2009; Gall et al., 2007; Merriam, 2009).

Most of my observations were conducted during class periods, but I also observed what happened before and after classes and also during breaks to document less structured interactions. My goal was to use initial observations to understand the class dynamic. I then focused on classroom instruction to understand the teacher’s theoretical orientation and look out for instances of CF during mini-lessons or individual teacher-student interactions, which served as an auxiliary tool for my understanding of the teacher’s approach to error correction.

In order to “form the database for analysis” (Merriam, 1998, p. 111), I kept field notes as an essential element of my observations. According to Merriam (1998), the format for taking field notes can vary, but the researcher’s notes should contain detailed descriptions, quotations and observer notes (p. 111). Following this advice, I took jotted notes during my observations. Then I expanded them into descriptive, analytic and personal notes, all of which served as an outlet for my etic perspective. Descriptive notes reconstructed various observed occurrences, events and conversations. Analytic notes
were a space for a continuous examination and interpretation of the meaning of what I
saw and heard. Personal notes gave me an opportunity to reflect on my impressions of
what I observed and acknowledge any reactions or biases I experienced.

*Interviews*

After establishing an initial contact with the study participants through
observations, I conducted two rounds of semi-structured interviews with each student
participant and the teacher to address the issues raised in my research questions.
Interviewing has been identified as the cornerstone of case-study research in education
(Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Yin (2003) has stated that interviews serve as an important
source of evidence about human affairs. Well-informed respondents can offer researchers
valuable interpretations of the world around them and the social interactions they
participate in.

The three student participants (Maya, Saida, Liling) initially selected for the study
were interviewed during Weeks 6 and 7 to give them time to familiarize themselves with
the teacher’s CF approach and then again toward the end of the term (Liling was
interviewed during Week 11, while Maya and Saida were interviewed at the end of Week
15). The fourth student participant (Bilge), who joined the class late, was first
interviewed during Week 10 and again at the end of Week 15 (see Appendices F and G
for the initial and follow-up student interview questions). By interviewing the four ELLs,
I was able to obtain an in-depth insight about the emic views of different corrective
strategies in ESL writing and to understand how the participants perceived the
development of their written accuracy. Interviewing study participants on two occasions
over the course of the study allowed me to note changes in the emic perspectives. The
interviews followed a semi-structured, open-ended question format and were approximately thirty minutes long. Each session was digitally recorded and later transcribed. To maintain confidentiality, no identifying information was included in the interview transcriptions.

In addition to interviewing students, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the course instructor to better understand the teacher’s theoretical stance on CF and the manner in which these beliefs translated into an actual written CF practice. The teacher was initially interviewed during Week 2 and asked to sit down for a follow-up interview the last day of the semester (see Appendices D and E for the initial and follow-up teacher interview questions). The teacher was asked to review and sign an informed consent prior to having the interviews.

Documents

A continuous examination of student writing and the instructor’s written CF served as another primary source of data in this study. To be able to fully address my research questions, I analyzed samples of student work and teacher corrections, with the goal to note any effects of CF on written accuracy or a lack thereof. Document analysis allowed me to better understand the ways error correction presented itself in L2 writing in the setting under study.

I collected multiple samples of student written work over the course of the term, including first drafts, revisions (when available) and new pieces of writing, all of which were de-identified to ensure participant anonymity and confidentiality. My focus in document analysis was on the influence of CF on student written errors across multiple drafts within the same assignment as well as across different assignments over time. In
order to capture the long-term effects of CF on student writing and document transfer of learning, it was essential to look at the new cycle of student writing, particularly at the end of the term. Photocopies of corrected written work were obtained from the instructor before it was returned to the study participants, stripped of identifying information and assigned codes.

Over the fifteen-week term, I collected five different texts from each participant: a diagnostic writing assignment, three additional essays and their revisions (when available), and a final essay. The texts analyzed in this study represented different types of writing (descriptive, narrative, persuasive) required in a high intermediate ESL writing course. All of the collected essays were composed either in class or at home as part of the course curriculum. Both in-class and out-of-class assignments were analyzed in the study to have a balanced representation of the types of writing tasks performed in the course.

Although I strived to have consistency in the prompts selected for the analysis, in practice this proved to be hard to achieve. For many assignments in the class, students had the freedom to select a prompt from several options. Therefore, although the type of writing expected of students was the same (e.g., descriptive), the exact topics they chose often varied greatly. Another issue was that as a general school policy, students were not penalized for not completing an assignment. In addition, although the teacher encouraged and expected students to submit revisions of their essays after receiving CF (this was not expected for the initial or final essays), many learners in the class, including some of the study participants, did not consistently rewrite their original texts. Furthermore, due to the fact that one of the participants (Liling) had to withdraw from the program before the end of the semester and another one (Bilge) joined the class late in the term, it proved to
be difficult for me to collect student texts written to the same prompts and under the same conditions. Nevertheless, for each participating student, I was able to collect five writing assignments that represented a beginning point, three intermediate points and a final point in that particular ELL’s course of study that semester. The prompts selected for each of the four participants are shown in Appendix H.

Additionally, other documents were collected and analyzed, including the program and course curriculum and class handouts and instructional materials. According to Yin (2003), the main use of documents in case studies is to substantiate evidence from other sources. While the corroborative value of studying documents should not be underrated, in this inquiry focused on CF in ESL writing, documents played a more prominent role. Hence, the documents from which the evidence was drawn in the present study did not merely support findings from other data sources. Instead, they served as a key source for addressing the research agenda.

Data Analysis

In accordance with Merriam’s (1998) discussion of case-study analysis methods, two stages of analysis were conducted, within-subcase and cross-subcase, in this embedded single-case study, where four ELLs served as the subunits of investigation. During the first phase, each of the four embedded subcases was analyzed comprehensively for recurring patterns. Following the initial stage of analysis, an examination of emerging themes across the subcases was conducted to achieve a higher level of abstractions and make interpretations about the main unit of analysis, the L2 writing class under study (Merriam, 1998).
This investigation relied on interpretational analysis of qualitative data, which was used to examine and group various elements of the phenomenon of interest in order to identify important themes and generate a holistic picture of the case (Gall et al., 2010). Data analysis was an iterative process that followed the constant comparative method developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), which involved comparing different segments of data for similarities and differences. To identify emerging themes in the data, I constructed a set of categories, or a code list. The observation, interview and document analysis data were then color-coded into segments and grouped under the established categories. Following Creswell’s (2013) advice to start out with a short list of five or six codes, which can then be expanded into additional categories as researchers review their data, I began by conducting “lean coding” (Creswell, 2013, p. 184) and developing a tentative list of codes. As I continued to scan my database, I refined the initial code list and grouped various data segments from the observation field notes, student and teacher interview transcripts and document analysis under the following fifteen labels: student background, CF in student writing, supplements to written CF, focus on content, focus on form, revision strategies, insights about editing processes, student strengths, student weaknesses/difficulties, student error patterns, student progress, prior grammar instruction, prior error correction, student perceptions of CF, and teacher perceptions of CF. As an example, see Table 3.1 for selected comments from the student interview transcripts that demonstrated some of the student weaknesses and difficulties.

A continuous data comparison within and across categories was conducted to discover underlying relationships between different data elements until theoretical saturation was attained. According to Gall et al. (2007), the point of theoretical saturation
Table 3.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Student Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Weaknesses/</td>
<td>I don’t have very good ideas for my paragraphs. If the teacher could give me more suggestions, my writing would be better” (Liling, Interview 1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties</td>
<td>“I have a part-time job. I have to buy food and cook, and sometimes I have appointments. I also have my own way to learn English. For example, today, I have to memorize new vocabulary. Sometimes, I watch [ESL] videos on YouTube. But there is not enough time to do everything” (Liling, Interview 1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Sometimes I am confused with grammar. I am always confused with grammar rules. That’s very difficult” (Saida, Interview 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Finding time [to revise papers] is an issue” (Saida, Interview 1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I don’t have lots of time, but if I have time, I correct a paper and give it to the teacher” (Maya, Interview 1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I look at [the class handouts] at home, but not too much because now I am so busy. Because of family issues and work, it is difficult for me to find the balance” (Maya, Interview 2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I don’t know what run-on sentences are. If you don’t understand what it means, what it symbolizes, you will not know what you did wrong. But sometimes, the grammar rule behind it is not clear” (Bilge, Interview 1).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
is reached when no new data emerge that need to be categorized under the available codes, no additional coding categories are needed to cover the phenomenon of interest, and the relationships among categories are clear. As the next step of the analysis, I identified broad themes by aggregating different segments of coded data “to form a common idea” (Creswell, 2013, p. 186). Creswell (2013) recommended reducing coding categories into a manageable set of five to seven themes. Following this suggestion, I developed six general themes (see Chapter IV). Finally, conclusions both at the subunit level and the level of the main phenomenon of interest were drawn based on these broad patterns found in the data.

As discussed by Merriam (2009) and Yin (2003), a case study can employ multiple research procedures and draw on a mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence. Case study researchers can include quantitative data to supplement their findings derived from qualitative data to show whether a particular finding is typical or extreme. In this study, qualitative methods were supported by a couple of quantitative analysis strategies. In order to understand how CF influences ELLs’ written accuracy and analyze student progress, it was essential to enumerate some of the obtained data.

I calculated error frequencies in the participating ELLs’ writing and compared the most prominent (i.e., most frequent or problematic) error types in the student participants’ initial and subsequent texts. The goal was to investigate longitudinally whether the participants’ frequent errors exhibited at the beginning of the term became less frequent or disappeared in later texts as a result of CF, which would be an indication of progress in written accuracy. In addition, when available, I compared original and revised drafts to see how successful students were at self-correcting their errors marked
by the teacher as a reflection of a short-term CF effect. I decided to record error patterns based on a list of common errors made by ESL writers, which has been discussed in previous research (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Ferris, 2006; Ferris, 2011; Ferris et al., 2013) and was presented in Chapter II. Shortly after the start of the study, I noted that the teacher in the class used a similar list of error codes to mark student papers. Thus, I made a decision to rely on this latter list of error types and their descriptions in the data analysis to ensure consistency in the way the teacher and I, the researcher, interpreted student errors (see Chapter IV, Table 4.1).

To further analyze the long-term effect of CF on student progress in written accuracy, total error frequency ratios were calculated for the participants’ diagnostic and final texts by dividing the total number of errors by the total number of words in a text. Previous research (Ferris, 2011; Ferris et al., 2013; Lunsford & Lunsford, 2008) has suggested that longer, more complex student texts may exhibit a greater number of sentence-level errors. According to Ferris (2011), “as students improve in fluency and their texts become longer, they may make more total errors. Thus, students need to think in terms of error frequency ratios (total errors divided by total numbers of words) rather than simple error counts” (p. 136). Following this advice, I compared error frequency ratios in the students’ initial and final texts instead of examining the total numbers of errors made to account for the varying length and complexity of student writing. Table 3.2 shows the three research questions guiding the study and the data collection sources and analysis techniques used to address them.
Table 3.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions and Corresponding Data Collection Sources and Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. How does the teacher in an adult ESL writing class provide CF on morphological, lexical and syntactic errors in student writing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do adult ELLs perceive the CF they receive?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How does CF on morphological, lexical and syntactic errors influence adult ELLs’ written accuracy?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Trustworthiness and Credibility

As a researcher, I strived to produce a sound and reputable study that offered plausible and consistent findings. To strengthen the trustworthiness and credibility of my research, I tried to account for a number of issues related to the validity and reliability of my study’s design. Research experts (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2005, Merriam, 2009) have emphasized that when it comes to qualitative research, the concepts
of validity and reliability cannot be used in their traditional sense (i.e., the way they are understood in quantitative research) due to the multifaceted, highly contextual and emergent nature of this type of research. However, these arguments do not imply that qualitative research should be conducted without rigor. According to Merriam (2009), the issues of validity and reliability in both qualitative and quantitative studies can be addressed via a careful conceptualization of an investigation and attention to decisions regarding data collection, analysis and presentation. There are several strategies available to qualitative researchers for ensuring credibility and dependability of their inquiries.

The first strategy that I integrated into the present study to enhance its validity and reliability was triangulation of data, or collecting evidence from multiple sources and analyzing it using multiple methods (Creswell, 2009; Gall et al., 2007; Merriam, 1998, 2009; Yin, 2003). I used observations, interviews, and documents and analyzed the collected data from these sources using a combination of qualitative and quantitative procedures. By triangulating my data sources and analysis methods, I hoped to conduct a study that was trustworthy and credible.

Another strategy commonly used in qualitative research to add to the trustworthiness of one’s findings is member-checking (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998, 2009). This is a practice for validating the researcher’s interpretations by soliciting feedback from the individuals participating in the study. “The process involved in member checks is to take your preliminary analysis back to some of the participants and ask whether your interpretation ‘rings true’” (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). I used member checks on several occasions to verify the data obtained from participant interviews. Given that my student participants were ELLs, I strived to confirm the accuracy of their
statements and my interpretations of what I heard from them by orally summarizing some of their responses during the interviews and in some cases sharing initial interview transcripts and/or preliminary notes with these students in the time following their interviews (typically after class). The idea behind asking for the participants’ feedback was to clarify some of their statements and to ensure that my understanding of their perspectives was accurate.

As Merriam (1998, 2009) and Creswell (2009, 2013) have pointed out, time spent in the field is a significant factor that affects the credibility of a qualitative study. Long-term observations of a phenomenon can strengthen the validity of research conclusions (Merriam, 1998). I conducted the present investigation over an academic semester, which gave me enough time to gain a solid understanding of the various characteristics that comprised the phenomenon of CF in the chosen L2 writing classroom setting.

Addressing the researcher’s position, or subjectivity, is an important practice that identifies the researcher’s views and epistemological orientation at the outset of the investigation (Merriam, 1998). I strived to enhance the trustworthiness of my research by grounding my work in the epistemological framework of social constructivism and documenting and reflecting on my reactions to the observations in the field. These procedures helped me monitor my etic perspective. As an additional method to offset my biases, I relied on asking a colleague to review my findings. This practice of peer examination discussed by Gall et al. (2007) and Creswell (2009) helped me enhance the soundness of my conclusions.

Lastly, the reliability of an investigation can be strengthened if the researcher maintains a comprehensive trail of evidence, or an audit trail (Merriam, 1998, 2009). In
order to generate an audit trail, the researcher must include detailed explanations of how data were obtained, how data analysis categories were constructed, and how methodological decisions were made throughout the study (Merriam, 1998, 2009). I followed these guidelines by providing readers with an in-depth description of every phase of my investigation and by establishing a clear system for gathering and analyzing data.

Limitations

This section examines several limitations of the present study design and discusses a number of solutions employed to circumvent these challenges.

Considering that the participants in my study were ELLs, I faced certain data collection challenges. On several occasions, some of the study participants expressed frustration with their inability to clearly express themselves in English. As a result, the accuracy of my data may have been compromised. I tried to control for this issue by carefully wording interview questions, repeating questions, probing the interviewees and asking them for clarifications. In addition, I relied on member checks to verify some of the obtained data. As mentioned in the previous section, this qualitative strategy has been advocated by research experts (e.g., Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998, 2009) as a way of ensuring the credibility of the collected participant data. Thus, the practice of data verification via member checks was used to enhance the validity of the present study.

As the participants in this investigation progressed in terms of their English language development, their views on error correction may have changed over time. This could have been a potential source of inconsistency in the data. Although these maturation processes are quite common in research, my objective was to control for them.
by conducting two rounds of participant interviews. This approach helped me to stay conscious of any changes in the participants’ perceptions. The first set of interviews was conducted to capture the subjects’ initial views on CF. The second round took place toward the end of the study to see if the new data could extend the original findings.

Also, as an ongoing process, I reflected on how my subjectivity affected my perceptions and interpretations of data. I tried to stay aware of the fact that my background as an ELL and writing instructor could influence how I presented the phenomenon under investigation. While a strong qualitative researcher has to be invested in the issue he or she is studying, sometimes the deep involvement can potentially compromise an investigation. Peshkin (1988) has urged researchers to “systematically seek out their subjectivity” (p. 17) while their investigations are still ongoing. Doing so allows investigators to be aware of how their personal values and backgrounds may be influencing the outcomes of their inquiry (Peshkin, 1988). Therefore, I tried to monitor any strong reactions I may have had toward anything I observed, heard or discovered over the course of the study. To strengthen the trustworthiness of my interpretations, a continuous reflection on how my etic views and biases shaped my methodological decisions, known as a subjectivity audit (Peshkin, 1988), became an integral component of this study.

Summary of Chapter III

This chapter presented an overview of methodological decisions regarding the design and procedures used in this investigation. Evidence was provided for using an embedded single-case study as the preferred design for this research. This chapter described the site being studied, the participants, the data collection sources, as well as
the methods of data analysis. Strategies for enhancing the study’s trustworthiness and credibility, as well as circumventing several limitations, were also addressed. Findings presented in the following chapter were based upon the data collected and analyzed in accordance with the methods outlined in this chapter.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS: GENERAL TRENDS AND FOUR CASE STUDY NARRATIVES

Introduction

This chapter presents results of an analysis of the data collected in this study, which sought to investigate the role of CF in a high intermediate adult ESL writing course. Specifically, this research explored how adult ELLs in that course responded to the written CF they received on their texts, in terms of their perceptions and writing, over the course of one academic semester (fifteen weeks).

Three research questions guided this study:

1. How does the teacher in an adult ESL writing class provide CF on morphological, lexical and syntactic errors in student writing?

2. How do adult ELLs perceive the CF they receive?

3. How does CF on morphological, lexical and syntactic errors influence adult ELLs’ written accuracy?

To answer these questions, this case study relied on qualitative research methods supported by elements of quantitative techniques. Qualitative data collection methods used to address all three research questions included observations, student and teacher interviews and document analysis. Such quantitative techniques as error frequency counts and error frequency ratios were used to analyze student texts in order to address the third research question and document the effects of CF on student progress in writing.
The collected data were analyzed for recurring patterns, from which I generated broad themes. For each participant, I composed a case study narrative, organizing the data collected for that student using a list of codes (see Chapter III) and presenting the information under the following categories: Background Information, Self-Identified Strengths and Weaknesses, Perceptions of CF, Errors and Revision Efforts, and Insights about Editing Processes. The themes that emerged within and across the narratives were guided by my research questions, which allowed me to examine the influence of the classroom teacher’s CF practice on participants’ perceptions and written accuracy. This narrative construction approach offered me a coherent and systematic way of organizing, integrating and presenting data collected from multiple sources first for each student and then across all four participants.

The following sections first present general trends that emerged from the data collected from all four case study participants. They then turn to case study narratives about each of the four students to exemplify the recurring patterns seen across all participants and highlight a number of contrasts found in the student data.

General Trends in Participant Data

*CF in Student Writing*

Data collected from the teacher and student interviews, document analysis and classroom observations indicated that the teacher responded to both global issues of content and organization of student writing and local issues of grammar, vocabulary and mechanics. Thus, the teacher balanced his feedback on form with comments focused on meaning. In the first interview, the teacher said:

I focus both on the mechanics and the clarity of what they want to say because I think that’s what writing should be about. It should be clear enough and correct.
Right now, I focus more on the technical side such as correct tenses, prepositions, and the basics of sentence structure. But hopefully toward the end of the term, I will shift more toward the clarity of their ideas and paragraph structure.

In his follow-up interview, the instructor further explained his stance:

The focus of teacher response should be on all aspects of writing: it should be more logical, better organized, grammar should be better... But the main focus I would say is the organization, the logic. It should make sense. What they write should be easy to understand. As for accuracy, I would put it in the second place. Well, I do expect some improvement.

All four participants indicated in their initial and follow-up interviews that the teacher’s response focused both on grammar and content of their essays, although the majority of participants (Bilge, Saida and Maya) saw grammar commentary as more critical to their writing development. Observations of in-class writing revision sessions (e.g., 1-19-16, 1-21-16, 2-4-16, 3-28-16, 3-31-16, 4-4-16) and the analysis of student texts confirmed that the teacher’s response to grammar issues was provided alongside his feedback on the development of ideas in student writing. For example, during one such editing workshop (1-19-16) dedicated to the revision of descriptions of students’ places of residence, the following discussion was observed between the teacher and Saida:

Teacher: Your development of ideas was problematic in this paragraph. Do not put unrelated ideas in one sentence. Here [points to a section in the text] you write about different bus routes close to your apartment, but then you mention laundromats and grocery stores.

Saida: Oh, I see. Also, I don’t understand this symbol [points to a code indicating that a word is missing].

Teacher: It means that there is a missing word here. “Public transportation is easily…” What?

Saida: Available!

Teacher: Yes, “is easily available.”

As another example of the teacher’s feedback focus on both form and meaning, on Liling’s text about her apartment, the teacher used codes to mark several erroneous structures, including a wrong word, a sentence fragment and a comma splice (see
Appendix I for an excerpt from Liling’s Essay 1), but also commented on the content with a note in the margin that the sentence “The food tastes great, especially the Vietnamese cuisine” was “irrelevant.”

As seen in the above examples, when the teacher’s written CF focused on form, it was systematically provided on specific error types using an indirect approach (i.e., without giving the correct linguistic form). Not fully satisfied with his previous CF methods and looking for a way to make error correction a more engaging and productive activity for ELLs, the teacher decided to incorporate indirect feedback into his instructional practice after exploring online resources describing the approach (Interview 1). The analysis of student texts throughout the term as well as classroom observations indicated that the teacher made consistent efforts to provide focused, indirect corrections on student errors. For example, during an in-class editing session on 3-14-16, Bilge had the following conversation with the teacher about one of her errors in Essay 1:

Bilge: Why does it say “VT” here [in the sentence “I know her for twenty years”]?  
Teacher: You have been friends with this person for many years. Should you use the simple present to state that?  
Bilge: I have known her for twenty years?  
Teacher: That’s right. You need the present perfect tense in this sentence.

As another illustration, on 3-24-16, Maya was observed having the following exchange with the teacher about his feedback during a revision workshop:

Maya: I don’t understand why this is marked [points to a correction in her text].  
Teacher: Something is missing here.  
Maya: I don’t know.  
Teacher: You need punctuation here.  
Maya: What about this [points to “because this reason,” with the word “because” underlined]?  
Teacher: You wrote “because.” It should be a different word. Think of another word.
The teacher explained his reasons for choosing to use indirect CF after many years of relying on direct methods of error correction:

[The indirect approach is more effective] because the students seem to be paying more attention. They start thinking about their errors, whereas when the teacher simply writes the correct answer, many of them pay very little attention to what the teacher has written. I could see in the past that they make the same mistakes again and again, which means that they don’t take much note of what their teacher pointed out. (Interview 1)

As for correcting errors selectively, he said the following about his choice:

I draw their attention to the most obvious errors and skip over the finer points. . . . If I try to correct everything, then there would be hardly any sentences that are not corrected. And it is very discouraging for the students to see that their paper is all red or any other color I may use. I think you should do it sparingly so the students are not discouraged. (Interview 1)

Interestingly enough, all four students in the study maintained in their initial interviews that they wanted their errors to be corrected in a comprehensive manner, a point that will be further discussed in individual case narratives. Yet these participants later confessed that seeing too many errors could be upsetting to them. For instance, in her second interview, Saida admitted, “I feel bad when I see a lot of mistakes.” Bilge echoed her response: “If it is too many mistakes, I feel bad because I am not successful” (Interview 2). Thus, although the students claimed that they favored a comprehensive CF approach, their follow-up responses seemed to corroborate the teacher’s rationale for providing focused feedback.

Data from multiple sources revealed that students in the classroom consistently received focused, indirect error correction that progressed from being explicit to being unlabeled as the semester went on. Initially, the teacher chose to rely on an explicit method of indirect feedback and provide metalinguistic information to students using error codes. During Week 2, students received a list of coded error types and their brief
descriptions (see Table 4.1) and participated in two in-class training sessions discussing the selected error codes and their meanings. In his first interview, the teacher explained that he came up with the list of frequent ESL errors based on his evaluation of instructional resources and personal observations of his students’ gaps in linguistic accuracy. Since the teacher’s error code list bore many similarities to research-based compilations of typical errors in ESL writing (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Ferris, 2006; Ferris, 2011; Ferris et al., 2013), he and I agreed upon relying on his list for marking and analyzing student writing to ensure consistency in our interpretations of errors.

Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Error Type Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Punctuation is missing, unnecessary, or incorrect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= (Cap)</td>
<td>Capitalization needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VT</td>
<td>Verb tense (time) is incorrect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS</td>
<td>Tense shift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WF</td>
<td>Word form is incorrect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Article is missing, unnecessary, or incorrect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>Noun plural marker is missing, unnecessary, or incorrect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prep</td>
<td>Preposition is missing, unnecessary, or incorrect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>∼(WO)</td>
<td>Word order in sentence is incorrect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WW</td>
<td>Wrong word</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Error Type Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>Spelling error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syn</td>
<td>Syntax/Sentence structure error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ø (UW)</td>
<td>Unnecessary word(s) in sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O (MW)</td>
<td>Missing word(s) in sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN</td>
<td>Pronoun is missing, unnecessary, or incorrect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RO</td>
<td>Run-on sentence (two or more sentences incorrectly joined)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td>Comma splice (two sentences joined only with a comma)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frag</td>
<td>Sentence fragment (incomplete sentence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Subject needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>Verb needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep</td>
<td>Repetitive idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>???</td>
<td>Confusing passage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After participating in the training sessions, students were told by the teacher that their written errors would be marked with the codes from the list they received and asked to refer to that list whenever they saw coded feedback on their papers (see Appendix I for examples of student writing marked with error codes). Field notes taken during classroom observations (1-19-2016, 1-21-2016) indicated that the teacher encouraged and expected students to revise their papers after they received indirect CF. For instance, the teacher said, “You can improve your writing only by writing. It is very important for you to correct your papers. I expect you to edit your errors after you receive my corrections and submit your revised papers along with your original drafts” (1-19-2016). He again
explained the revision process during the next class meeting (1-21-2016) saying that students were expected to use the error code list to revise their writing, ask clarifying questions during in-class editing sessions and submit their revisions together with the original drafts so that the teacher could compare the two and note students’ attempts at editing their writing. These revised drafts would then be corrected and returned to the students. According to the field notes of classroom observations a couple of sessions later, the instructor addressed the cycle of writing texts and revising them once more on 2-02-2016: “The teacher asks students if they have any questions about the CF on the revisions they have just gotten back. He emphasizes that he will normally collect the first drafts, correct them, ask for revisions, provide error correction on them, but will not expect another round of rewrites. However, students are welcome to discuss the feedback with him.”

Multiple classroom observations revealed that typically, at the beginning of each writing class, the teacher held editing workshops. During these sessions, individual students were encouraged to ask questions regarding the written CF they received on their texts and spend some time revising their papers in class. If the teacher felt that a discussion about a specific error type made by an individual student could benefit the whole class, he conducted a mini-lesson that clarified the grammar rule behind that particular issue. According to the teacher, the goal of these lessons was “to reinforce and consolidate student knowledge” (Interview 1).

In the first interview, the teacher said that after providing coded error correction for a number of weeks, his goal was to make the approach less explicit toward the end of the semester and to provide indirect feedback by underlining errors instead of coding
them to promote the development of students’ self-editing skills. All other aspects of the
writing and revision process would be kept the same. About two-thirds into the semester,
he switched to the new method with relatively positive results (see Appendix J for
examples of student texts marked with underlining). The teacher himself described the
evolution of his CF strategies as “moderately successful” (Interview 2). He felt that
although the number of self-corrected errors seemed to be smaller than in the case of
coded feedback, student engagement in the process of error correction was greater:
“Maybe they can’t correct all of the errors, but at least they try, which is good in itself,”
he explained in the follow-up interview. As for the student participants, they seemed to
view the switch to the more implicit feedback quite favorably as well, although some saw
it as more beneficial than others (see the four case study narratives for discussions of
individual student opinions).

To summarize the findings, the teacher in the classroom systematically provided
indirect feedback focused on a select number of written error types and encouraged
student involvement in the editing process by making his corrections less explicit as the
semester progressed. Students received opportunities to clarify the CF on their individual
texts during in-class editing sessions and mini-lessons on various aspects of English
grammar.

Students’ Self-Identified Strengths and Weaknesses

The majority of students in the study showed low levels of confidence in their
English development (particularly, in their writing skills). In their interviews, three
participants (Liling, Saida and Maya) brought up grammar as being a particularly
troublesome area for them. In addition, they found essay organization and idea
development to be challenging. Even though they were placed in the last level of the curriculum sequence at the center, these students’ interview responses suggested that they saw themselves as weak writers with insufficient L2 skills. The fact that they mainly spoke of their weaknesses in writing during their initial interviews and did not point out their strengths was quite telling. It must be emphasized that toward the end of the study, the students seemed more confident about what they had learned from the course and from their own writing practice. In their follow-up interviews, all of them felt that their writing had improved.

The fourth participant in the study, Bilge, stood in contrast to the other three in her level of self-confidence. Her interviews indicated that she saw herself as a fairly strong writer with a good grasp of grammar knowledge and idea development skills. She described herself as a “talented” language learner and did not think that she made many serious errors in writing (Interview 1). Thus, unlike the other participants, Bilge emphasized her strengths over her weaknesses in the interviews (subsequent sections will further discuss why, in certain aspects, Bilge was seen as a bit of an outlier). In her opinion, the biggest difficulty she faced was her unfamiliarity with the coded CF approach used by the teacher. She found the task of deciphering the metalinguistic information provided by error codes challenging and tedious (Interviews 1 & 2). Nevertheless, at the end of the semester, Bilge reported that her writing improved as a result of the instruction she received that term. “I feel that I made progress because I got some tips about how to write essays,” she concluded (Interview 2). In that sense, she was similar to the other three participants in the study, as they all exhibited a greater level of
confidence in their writing development at the end of the semester compared to their initial responses.

**Student Error Patterns and Progress**

The four student participants in this study made a range of errors in their texts that reflected their status as ELLs. Their errors were consistent with the typical ESL error patterns discussed in previous research (Ferris, 2011; Silva, 2001). Plural endings, sentence fragments, wrong words, wrong word forms, articles, verbs, pronouns, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, run-on sentences, comma splices and spelling were among many concerns found in the participants’ texts (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Diagnostic Essay</th>
<th>Essay 1</th>
<th>Essay 2</th>
<th>Essay 3</th>
<th>Final Essay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liling</td>
<td>Pl, <strong>Frag</strong>, SP, SV, <strong>WW</strong>, MW, Art</td>
<td>SV, <strong>WW</strong>, P, <strong>Frag</strong></td>
<td>PN, WF, Prep</td>
<td><strong>WW</strong>, Frag</td>
<td>WF, UW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>Art, Sp, Pl, Prep, P, <strong>WF</strong>, WO</td>
<td>Sp, Prep, Cap</td>
<td>Art, Sp, WW, <strong>WF</strong>, Frag, SV, <strong>Pl</strong></td>
<td><strong>WF</strong>, SV, UW</td>
<td><strong>Pl</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Error types in bold were the most frequent ones, appearing in at least three of the five essays analyzed for that particular student.
Despite struggling with various issues in their writing, all of the students in the study made progress in addressing their errors over time. In the context of this research, this meant that some of the most frequent error patterns marked in the students’ earlier texts became less frequent or disappeared altogether in their final essays (see Table 4.2). In addition, there was an observable reduction in the total error frequency ratios (EFRs) (i.e., the total number of errors divided by the total number of words in a text), when comparing the first and the last writing assignments, for all four participants (see Table 4.3). However, the extent of progress varied among the four students. Some of the students’ persistent errors were still present in their final texts. Further, some participants displayed a greater change in their EFR scores than others. It is interesting to note that Saida and Maya, the less advanced ELLs in the participant sample, made greater progress in their EFRs than the more advanced Liling and Bilge (see Table 4.3). These findings seemed to support the notion that as ELLs’ language proficiency nears the advanced level, their progress may slow down:

Once learners have arrived at an intermediate level of language learning, progress does not always appear to be so marked, and making the transition from intermediate to the upper-intermediate/advanced level sometimes proves frustrating. Some may feel they have arrived at a plateau and making further progress seems elusive, despite the amount of time and effort they devote to it. (Richards, 2008, p. 1)

Although the participating students made varying advances in eradicating their written errors, general trends that emerged from the document analysis data suggested that each participant’s overall written accuracy improved over the course of the study. This finding could be attributed to the influence of indirect CF students received that semester on their ability to self-correct their errors.
As for a potential influence of the students’ L1 on their progress in written accuracy, no distinct patterns emerged from the collected data in that regard. All four participants, who were from diverse L1 backgrounds (Mandarin, Turkish, Arabic and Nepali), made gains in their writing, although, as discussed above, some seemed to make more progress than others. It is possible that this difference was due more to the effects of their English proficiency levels than their L1s, although the exact source of observed variation could not be established with certainty because of the qualitative nature of the investigation.

Table 4.3

*Total Error Frequency Ratios in Diagnostic and Final Texts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Diagnostic Essay</th>
<th>Final Essay</th>
<th>Change in EFR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Errors</td>
<td>Words</td>
<td>EFR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liling</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilge</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saida</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>.178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>.138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* EFR= error frequency ratio (number of errors divided by number of words in a text). Numbers were rounded to the third decimal place.
Revision Efforts and Insights about Editing Processes

In their interviews, the four participating students said that their primary revision strategy was to read through the text, analyze the teacher's error markings, ask him, if necessary, for clarifications in class, and make any corrections according to what they hypothesized to be the target form. Some also mentioned applying previously learned rules based on the course handouts.

All four students reported participating in the editing workshops held during most of the writing classes. Study participants were observed on many occasions asking the teacher questions to clarify the corrections they didn’t understand or wanted to confirm. In addition to asking the teacher questions, at least two of the participating students (Saida and Maya) were regularly observed soliciting feedback from their peers as part of the editing process, although this practice was not mentioned by the participants themselves during their interviews. Thus, these students seemed to value the input from their peers, but it did not appear that they were aware that peer feedback was a part of their revision strategy repertoire.

One subject that came up in the majority of interviews was the students’ inability to dedicate more time to their revision efforts due to other life commitments. Most participants named the lack of time as the reason for not consulting course materials or revising their texts. Even though most of the students in the study (Liling, Saida, and Maya) seemed eager to be more involved in the process of editing their papers, they were often too busy to do so. In their interviews, they talked about working on their essays either very late at night (Liling, Interview 1; Maya, Interview 2), or on the weekends (Saida, Interview 2). Despite this obstacle, the students in the study did make an effort to
revise some of their texts, and when they did so, they were successful in the majority of cases. In other words, in the texts that were revised, the participants were able to identify and self-correct most of their errors (see the four case study narratives for further discussions of the students’ rewrites).

Prior Grammar Instruction and Error Correction

All participating students had received English grammar instruction while living in their home countries including written error feedback from their former teachers. Moreover, two of the participants had prior writing instruction at the English language learning center. Although the amount of training the participants received in English writing varied greatly, they reported that all of their previous teachers used direct CF approaches in treating their written errors. All students reported that the semester during which the present study was conducted was the first time they were exposed to indirect strategies of error correction. Despite this being a new approach to all of the participants, most felt that such feedback and instruction were more effective in helping them develop their writing proficiency than the instruction they received before coming to the United States (Interviews 1 & 2). However, one participant (Bilge) seemed to favor the instructional methods (specifically, the ones related to error correction) she had been exposed to in the past (Interviews 1 & 2).

Bilge’s case stood in contrast to the majority of opinions expressed by the students in the study, who felt that indirect CF, though challenging, was more beneficial to them than the previous CF methods they experienced. At the same time, Liling, Saida and Maya wondered in their interviews whether indirect feedback would have been too difficult to understand and, hence, unproductive, for an ELL with a lower proficiency.
These student opinions supported previous research (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch, 2010b; Ferris, 2011; Van Beuningen, de Jong, & Kuiken, 2008; Van Beuningen et al., 2012) that suggested the necessity of a certain level of language development to successfully utilize the metalinguistic information provided by indirect CF.

Perceptions of CF

In contrast to the opinions expressed about their prior English instruction, most of the participants seemed highly satisfied with the indirect CF they received over the course of the study. In their interviews, they highlighted several characteristics as effective: (a) specific information about their recurrent error types, (b) opportunities to receive clarification and explanations from their teacher during in-class editing sessions and individual conferences, and (c) greater engagement in the error correction process and development of self-reliance as writers and editors.

Even Bilge, the one participant who seemed to favor a more direct approach to error correction, stated in the follow-up interview that the CF approach used in the class helped her improve her writing skills, particularly her grammar knowledge. Although she was not as enthusiastic about indirect correction methods as the rest of the participants in the study, it sounded that she developed a greater appreciation for some of its features (e.g., a greater awareness of her frequent error patterns) by the end of the term.

In his interviews, the teacher echoed his students’ positive views on the indirect CF methods employed that semester, observing that the students in the class not only improved the accuracy of their writing, but also exhibited greater engagement in writing activities and a more positive attitude toward the revision practice than his former students. In his first interview, the teacher said that he felt that most of his corrections
were largely ignored in the past, which was not the case with his present students:

I see positive changes in this class compared to my previous classes, and this is not because the students are so much better. In the past, when I practiced a more direct method, typically the students . . . were quite happy that the teacher corrected their mistake, but obviously did not pay much attention to it. So the response is different. As you could see most of them wanted an explanation or clarification. They seemed happy to get the feedback. They seem to be interested and more involved. (Interview 1)

In his follow-up interview at the end of the semester, the teacher reported an overall improvement in his students’ writing skills, which he felt was a result of his revised CF practice: “I see greater, better results. I think more than a half write better now than at the beginning. And I am talking about all aspects: the organization, the logic, the grammar and to some extent punctuation” (Interview 2). Thus, both student and teacher interview responses highlighted a positive influence of indirect CF on student engagement and writing progress.

To summarize the themes that emerged from the data, the students in this case study

• received focused, indirect CF that became less explicit over time;

• showed in most cases low levels of confidence in their writing skills at the beginning of the term, but felt more satisfied with their writing development at the end of the study;

• made a wide range of typical ESL errors, but without exception showed progress in their written accuracy at the end of the semester;

• struggled to make consistent revision efforts predominantly due to their busy schedules, but were able to self-correct most of their errors when they edited their original texts;
• relied on rereading their writing, asking the teacher clarifying questions, soliciting peer feedback, and occasionally reviewing previously learned rules in their effort to edit their papers;

• valued error correction and felt for the most part that indirect CF, though challenging, was more beneficial to their written accuracy development than the direct CF methods they experienced in their prior English instruction.

The following case study narratives contextualize the broader findings about the four participants in the study.

Case Study Narrative 1: Liling

*Background Information*

Liling was a twenty-two-year-old ELL from China. Although initially she seemed a little reserved, she quickly became active in classroom and seemed very respectful of the teacher’s opinion. In our one-on-one conversations, Liling exhibited a friendly personality and was very open to participating in the research project. Born in Beijing, Liling grew up moving to several different cities around the country with her family. Her home language was Mandarin. However, she said in class that she would like to learn Cantonese in the future mainly to be able to communicate with the large Cantonese-speaking Chinese population in Greater Boston. At the time of the study, she had lived in the United States for four months. Her mother immigrated to this country several years before her, and Liling was finally able to join her in 2015 after living apart for a long time. Liling’s father and sister remained in China.

When asked during her first interview if she had gone to college in China, Liling said with disappointment in her voice that her scores were not high enough to get into a
good college and that she didn’t want to go to a mediocre school. At the time of the study, she was working part-time at a coffee shop. In her first interview, she said that her goal was to improve her English and save money so that she could financially help her relatives in China and, eventually, pursue a college degree in the United States. Although Liling studied English in high school in China, she told me during the initial interview that she felt that she learned more on her own by watching online English lessons as well as American movies and TV shows. She said that besides the assignments she received at the English language learning center, she also tried to do online language exercises on her own. Working early morning hours at the coffee shop in one part of the city and attending the English language program in a different area, Liling complained about not having much of spare time, and yet she seemed highly motivated to improve her English and do extra work to develop both her English fluency and accuracy.

Unfortunately, as previously mentioned, due to her family’s financial hardship, Liling made a decision to take on more work hours at the coffee shop four weeks before the end of the semester, which made it impossible for her to finish her English language studies at the center. In the follow-up interview conducted her last day in the program, she expressed a strong desire to continue her English language studies on her own and possibly at a different institution in the future. I looked up a number of free online language courses and suggested them to her, for which she was very thankful.

**Self-Identified Strengths and Weaknesses**

Although Liling was placed in the top level of the English program at the center and her teacher rated her oral and written proficiency to be above class average, she expressed dissatisfaction with her written language development in her initial interview.
The first time we sat down for an interview, she said, “I have to improve, but it is not easy to improve. I have to write more.” She complained about struggling with the development of ideas in her writing: “I don’t have very good ideas for my paragraphs. If the teacher could give me more suggestions, my writing would be better” (Interview 1). She also felt that her grammar needed to improve: “Sometimes I don’t pay attention to tense or commas. Sometimes I miss them. I make my common mistakes that I always make in every writing [assignment]. If I want to improve my writing, I need to write and read more” (Interview 1).

Even though Liling seemed highly motivated to develop her oral and written English skills following the course curriculum and her own learning strategies, she complained that time management posed a problem for her:

I have a part-time job. I have to buy food and cook, and sometimes I have appointments. I also have my own way to learn English. For example, today, I have to memorize new vocabulary. Sometimes, I watch [ESL] videos on YouTube. But there is not enough time to do everything. (Interview 1)

Unfortunately, time was the reason why Liling had to withdraw from the program before the end of the semester. Due to a family issue, she had to take on an extra workload at her place of employment and, as a result, could not continue attending classes at the center. Even though Liling’s time in the program was cut short, she still felt that toward the end of the term, she improved her written accuracy: “I made progress. This class activated my knowledge. It made me aware of my most common mistakes in writing” (Interview 2).

Perceptions of CF

Overall, Liling saw error correction as a valuable component of the English language learning process and seemed to welcome her teacher’s feedback. When asked about the importance of getting her errors corrected by the teacher, she said the
following: “Oh yes, it is important! Because the teacher can show me what’s wrong with my writing… If the teacher gives me a correction, I can find my mistake. Sometimes, I don’t realize that [I made an error]. It is helpful because if I don’t have the teacher help me correct . . . if I just write by myself, I don’t know if it is right or wrong. So this is important” (Interview 1). She exhibited a positive attitude toward the teacher’s CF in both of her interviews. For instance, in the second interview she said: “I feel good about it. I am never upset about the corrections.”

Liling felt that a comprehensive, indirect approach to error correction was the most effective CF method. “If the teacher finds my mistakes, I want him to correct all of them. It will remind me to do it correctly next time,” she said in her first interview. She also explained why she saw indirect CF as superior to direct error correction:

When I get a code, I can think about it, and that will help me improve my writing. I find it preferable because sometimes if I get a code, I can change my idea. I can write something different. If the teacher just writes the correct answer, I don’t have to think about it anymore. (Interview 1)

She repeated the same sentiment about indirect feedback in the second interview: “It made me realize where I made a mistake and why I made it. . . . Calling attention to my mistakes with codes and underlining made me think about them.” When I asked her in the second interview which error correction strategy she found least helpful, she answered: “Giving the correct answer right away. I do not have time to think about what I need to do. Maybe for Level Two [i.e., a lower proficiency level] giving the correct answer is better, but I have no difficulties now at this level. There were no difficulties with this system for me” (Interview 2). Thus, during both interviews, Liling indicated a preference for an indirect CF approach. Interestingly, she did not favor any particular indirect correction method and seemed to understand the more explicit coded feedback and
underlined corrections equally well. “Either way is OK for me,” said Liling in the second interview. However, her experience with unlabeled CF (i.e., underlining) was limited, considering that she had to withdraw from the class several weeks before the end of the semester. Perhaps, given more time, she would have developed a stronger preference for one or the other indirect CF method used by the teacher.

*Errors and Revision Efforts*

Liling made the largest number of errors on her diagnostic essay. The seven patterns marked in that text included wrong words, sentence fragments, subject-verb agreement, missing plural ending, incorrect spelling, wrong article, and missing word errors (see Table 4.4). On her subsequent writing assignments, she made fewer errors, with four patterns marked on Essay 1, three on Essay 2 and two patterns on both Essay 3 and the final assignment. Moreover, her total error frequency ratio score went down from .061 on the diagnostic text to .034 on the final text, representing a change of .027 (see Table 4.3).

The smaller number of error patterns marked in Liling’s later texts as well as a decrease in the error frequency ratio were suggestive of not only an improvement in Liling’s written accuracy toward the end of the term, but also her increased ability to self-monitor her writing and self-correct her errors. Unlike many other students in the class, Liling consistently made an effort to revise her essays. She discussed her revision process in our first interview:

*First of all, I read all of my errors. Then I correct them and think about them. If I think I understand all of them and it is not too many mistakes, I do not rewrite them, but if the idea is not clear, I am going to rewrite it at home. I see what’s the problem with the paragraph; then I rewrite it. Sometimes I use my dictionary because of vocabulary. I usually use online dictionaries on my phone. (Interview 1)*
Although she was not always successful, in her revisions of Essays 1, 2 and 3, Liling was able to identify and correct the majority of errors marked by the teacher on the original drafts (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4  
*Liling’s Error Chart*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Error</th>
<th>Diagnostic</th>
<th>Essay 1</th>
<th>Essay 2</th>
<th>Essay 3</th>
<th>Final</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type</td>
<td># marked</td>
<td># marked /</td>
<td># marked /</td>
<td># marked /</td>
<td># marked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% corrected</td>
<td>% corrected</td>
<td>% corrected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1/100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prep</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1/100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1/100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WW</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1/100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1/100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frag</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1/100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2/50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pl</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sp</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SV</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UW</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Error types in bold were the most frequent ones, appearing in at least three of the five essays analyzed for that particular student. Diagnostic and final texts were not revised.

As to specific errors, two patterns emerged as problematic for Liling over the course of the study. Liling’s texts were marked by a persistent presence of wrong word
choices and sentence fragments (see Table 4.4). These error patterns appeared in three out of the five analyzed texts. However, Liling’s final text, although not error-free, did not exhibit these types of errors. Sentence fragments received a significant amount of attention from the teacher in class a few weeks before Liling’s withdrawal from the program (Observations, 2-25-16, 3-1-2016, 3-3-2016). Based on the evidence that emerged from Liling’s texts and my field notes, it can be concluded that she had gained some awareness of how to write complete sentences by the time of her final written assignment. The field notes taken during a classroom observation (3-1-2016) suggested that Liling was successful at understanding the grammar rule behind the sentence fragment issue: she was not only able to articulate several ways to correct fragments out loud when the teacher called on her to explain the rule, but also showed a classmate sitting next to her how to correct a sentence fragment in an exercise. Thus, it was not surprising that sentence fragments did not pose a problem for Liling on her final essay.

Wrong words were another problematic area in Liling’s texts, appearing in three of the five analyzed essays. For instance, on her diagnostic essay, she wrote “near” instead of “new.” She also chose a wrong word in Essay 3 (“contains” instead of “includes”), which she attempted to correct in her revision only to make an error in the word form (“including” instead of “includes”). However, Liling did not make any errors of this pattern in her final text suggesting that she developed a heightened awareness of her frequent errors and was able to self-monitor her writing to a greater degree at the end of her participation in the study.
Insights about Editing Processes

In her interviews, Liling was able to explain her revision process and her self-editing strategies. She reported that most of the time she would first re-read the whole text after getting back the corrections from the teacher and try to understand the coded errors. She would then try to apply learned grammar rules and if necessary consult course materials and a dictionary to revise her errors (Interviews 1 & 2). She said that although she often knew the grammar rules behind the teacher’s corrections, in some cases while composing a draft, she would waver between two grammatical structures and then choose the incorrect one: “Sometimes when I write something, I am not sure if it is A or B. So I choose B, but the teacher says: ‘Oh, that’s A’” (Interview 1). She gave a concrete example of this issue in the second interview when she commented on a wrong word form error in her final text: “I was not sure if it should be ‘I also like doing exercise’ or ‘I also like to exercise.’ So I chose the first one, but it was wrong. The teacher’s comment made it clear for me” (Interview 2). Thus, Liling used teacher’s feedback to confirm or revise her language knowledge during the editing sessions.

Liling saw the value of taking time to edit her original drafts. According to the first interview, she spent on average thirty minutes to one hour revising her writing. When she was asked whose responsibility it was to correct errors in student writing, her response stressed the value of self-editing:

I think I am more responsible than the teacher. If I want to improve my writing, I need to write and read more. I have more responsibility . . . because you give only one paper to the teacher. If you want to improve your English, you have to learn and work by yourself. (Interview 1)
Summary

Although Liling expressed a lack of confidence in her language learning skills at the beginning of the study, she exhibited a fairly strong English proficiency, particularly compared to the rest of the class. Thus, there was a dissonance between Liling’s perception of her language development and the teacher’s and researcher’s evaluations of her class performance. Perhaps, it was Liling’s self-image as a poor writer that fueled her intrinsic motivation to improve her writing skills. She made an active effort to do so by completing all of the class assignments, paying attention to the teacher’s CF, revising her papers and studying on her own in addition to following the course curriculum.

She expressed a positive attitude toward error correction in general and seemed appreciative of the CF strategies used by the teacher in the class. Although she was identified as a higher-than-class-average student at the beginning of the project, her writing was not error free. At the same time, she made an observable progress in written accuracy over the course of the study, which, at least in part, could be attributed to the effect of the CF she received and her efforts to analyze that feedback and revise her texts.

Liling’s case stands somewhat in contrast to that of Bilge, who, like Liling, demonstrated strong English proficiency, but was not as enthusiastic about the corrective strategies used by the teacher in the class. Her case is discussed next.

Case Study Narrative 2: Bilge

Background Information

Bilge was a thirty-seven-year-old ELL from Istanbul, Turkey. She moved to the United States in October of 2015 after marrying a U.S. citizen who was originally from Turkey. She received a college degree and worked as an event planner in Istanbul, a job
that required some knowledge of English. Before that, she studied English throughout her elementary and secondary education (Interview 1). Therefore, she had a strong foundation in English literacy. She joined the class late (about one-third into the term) after spending a few months on the program’s waiting list. She quickly established herself as possibly the most proficient student in the class and became an active participant in classroom activities. Although she expressed some dissatisfaction with trying to catch up with the curriculum and figuring out the teacher’s instructional approach (in particular his CF strategies) during her first interview, she seemed to navigate the challenge of joining the class late fairly well. She presented herself as a learner who was confident and comfortable in her command of the English vocabulary, and she agreed to take part in the current research study without hesitation. During the course of the study, Bilge appeared to be a little skeptical about the class being a good fit for her. Although she did not openly say it, based on my observations of her in the classroom and her interview responses, she might have felt that the material was not challenging enough for her. For example, in her second interview, she mentioned that she found the task of rewriting her essays as “boring.” She also stated that although her husband had been in the United States for twenty years, she felt that her English was better than his and that she was gifted when it came to language learning (Interview 1). Considering these sentiments, it was not surprising to me that although Bilge had an opportunity to repeat Level 5, she chose not to do so, and instead, signed up for a new entrepreneurship course offered by the center.
Self-Identified Strengths and Weaknesses

In both of her interviews, Bilge displayed self-confidence when describing her English proficiency. She indicated that she felt that she already had a good English language foundation as a result of her education and career: “That served as the basis,” she said about her past experiences (Interview 1). She also added: “I feel that I am not an average student. I am talented when it comes to languages” (Interview 1). In the second interview, she said that she did not normally make many errors in her writing.

At the same time, she admitted that following the teacher’s CF approach posed a relative difficulty for her. The reasons she gave in the interviews were the following: (a) She was not used to it because that was not how her former instructors corrected her writing; (b) it was not her learning style; and (c) she did not spend enough time in the class to familiarize herself with teacher’s instructional methods (Interviews 1 & 2). She also complained about not being familiar with certain grammatical terms and rules: “For example, a run-on sentence: I don’t know what run-on sentences are. If you don’t understand what it means, what it symbolizes, you will not know what you did wrong. But sometimes, the grammar rule behind it is not clear” (Interview 1). It must be added that run-on sentences were extensively covered in class before Bilge joined the program.

Perceptions of CF

During the first interview, Bilge expressed a strong belief in the overall value of written CF: “I think it plays an important role. The more feedback you have, the more you remember it. . . . Getting feedback from the teacher is useful. I don’t get upset. It should be done, and it helps” (Interview 1). She identified grammar as the most important area of writing on which teachers should focus their feedback. “Everything else is minor.”
These are just details. Grammar is what matters the most I think,” argued Bilge (Interview 1). In the first interview, she expressed a preference for a comprehensive and direct approach to error correction, saying that this was what she expected based on her previous classes and her personal learning style. While her belief in the effectiveness of having all of her errors pointed out to her seemed to be replaced by a preference for a more selective CF approach by the time of her second interview, she maintained her stance on the helpfulness of direct error correction throughout the study. Having joined the class late (after her peers had been trained in the indirect CF approach using error codes), she had to immediately learn the error codes used by the teacher. Perhaps, this was partly the reason why she voiced some frustration regarding this method:

For me, it would be easier if the teacher gave the correct answer. I don’t know the error codes. It takes more time: you have to find it [an error code] and understand what it means. Maybe you’ll get an answer what the correction means, but it is not always clear. I don’t know, maybe error codes are shown to be more effective, but for me I think it would be better to see the correct answer. That’s my learning style. This is the first time [I have seen error codes]. It is just a little bit difficult for me. (Interview 1)

In the follow-up interview at the end of the semester, Bilge was asked once again about her opinion of the indirect CF used in the class, and this time she sounded more favorable and open toward it. At this point in the term, the teacher was using a less explicit indirect approach in student writing, having moved from coding errors to underlining them. Interestingly enough, while it has been reported that adult L2 writers strongly preferred errors to be labeled by type (Ferris, 2006; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994, 1996; Rennie, 2000), Bilge seemed to favor a less explicit, unlabeled method, where the teacher just located errors and identified them by underlining
the erroneous structures in student writing. When I asked Bilge to express her thoughts on using underlining as a method of error correction, she said the following:

It is helpful. It is more clear. With symbols, I had to find out what they meant. It was time-consuming and a bit boring for me. And when it was too much, it was overwhelming. But if you can understand it [i.e., the feedback] easily, you can fix your errors better. Underlining is easy to understand. It is more effective than codes. It is still not always very clear, but I can solve it. But with codes I have to do more work to understand them. (Interview 2)

Yet she still maintained that she preferred a direct method of error correction:

It makes me see my mistakes easily . . . What did I do wrong? I can understand it. But with codes, putting so much effort to understand what I did wrong makes me . . . I just want to run away. I don’t want to . . . struggle. (Interview 2)

Even though Bilge made her preference of a direct error correction approach quite clear, she did acknowledge the overall value of the written CF she received over the course of the semester:

It helped me understand my errors and see what error types I use in writing. I think seeing it made me understand my mistakes, and it must be useful for me. It helped me with grammar and structuring my ideas, too. But mostly grammar, I would say. (Interview 2)

Errors and Revision Efforts

For all Bilge’s strengths in her oral and written English proficiency and her confidence in her language development expressed in both interviews, she still made persistent language errors in her writing reflecting her ELL status (see Table 4.5). Bilge made various common ESL errors in verb tenses, articles, prepositions and word choices. For example, she wrote the following on the diagnostic essay: “He is living in the U.S. more than 20 years” and “He settled down here most of his life.” She made errors of four different types on the diagnostic essay and continued to make errors of three to four patterns on the subsequent assignments (see Table 4.5). However, her final essay stood in
contrast to her previous texts as she made only one error in the whole text, suggesting an overall improvement in written accuracy. Comparing her diagnostic and final texts, her error frequency ratio went down from .045 to .009--an impressive change of .036 (see Table 4.3).

Bilge’s most frequent error patterns were wrong words and articles. Errors of these two patterns were marked on three of her five analyzed texts (see Table 4.5). Bilge seemed to improve at self-editing wrong word errors as time went on. This error pattern

Table 4.5

*Bilge’s Error Chart*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Error Type</th>
<th>Diagnostic # marked</th>
<th>Essay 1 # marked / % corrected</th>
<th>Essay 2 # marked / % corrected</th>
<th>Essay 3 # marked / % corrected</th>
<th>Final # marked / % corrected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WW</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2/50%</td>
<td>3/100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VT</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4/0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UW</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1/100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WF</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prep</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td>1/100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1/100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td>1/100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1/100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Error types in bold were the most frequent ones, appearing in at least three of the five essays analyzed for that particular student. Diagnostic and final texts were not revised.

did not appear in her final text. However, articles seemed to present a problem for Bilge throughout the term, and although this error pattern was not observed in Essay 2 or 3, a
missing indefinite article was marked as the only error in her final text. Bilge’s persistent article errors were not surprising, considering that even advanced ELLs often struggle with the definite and indefinite articles in English (Swiatek, 2010). According to Master (1987), the English article system is one of the most difficult aspects of English grammar for non-native speakers and one of the last to be acquired. Some ESL teachers find the article system so complex that they argue that no rules can be taught (Krech & Driver, 1996, as cited in Miller, 2005, p. 81). Articles were among the very few error patterns that the teacher in the present study often marked by directly providing the correct form. In the two interviews with the teacher, he explained his rationale saying that he occasionally did use direct CF, but only to correct written errors that were beyond the scope of the course, echoing the arguments from the authors above. He thought that coding or underlining those types of grammatical issues would not be effective because his students did not possess the necessary linguistic knowledge to understand and properly utilize the indirect feedback.

Another noteworthy observation can be made here. Although Bilge expressed a preference for direct CF and called it more effective than indirect approaches (Interviews 1 & 2), the only error pattern that appeared on her final assignment (missing article) was the one that the teacher corrected in an explicit, direct way. All other error types present in her earlier texts and marked indirectly with codes or underlining were absent from her last text. This could suggest a possible incongruity between Bilge’s perceptions of the impact different error correction methods had on her writing and the actual effect these various CF strategies had on her written accuracy.
As for editing her errors, Bilge submitted two essay revisions, but only after the teacher’s CF approach became less explicit and switched from coding errors to underlining them. In her interviews, Bilge complained about the coded CF approach as something she was not used to and saw underlining errors as an easier method to follow. As previously discussed, she joined the class after the rest of the students had familiarized themselves with the codes used by the teacher. She missed the in-class training sessions that the teacher held at the beginning of the term to explain the codes and their meaning, which could be partly the reason behind her perception of this CF strategy as confusing and not particularly helpful. At the same time, the overall progress she made in her written accuracy could be attributed to the CF she received, including the more explicit kind she did not favor. It is impossible to isolate and evaluate the influence of the coded CF alone on her writing due to the fact that Bilge did not submit any revisions after getting that type of feedback, but the observed decrease in the frequency of errors in her final text could be indicative of her learning and internalizing the rules as a result of the CF she received over the course of the study. She was successful at revising the two essays marked with unlabeled CF (Essays 2 & 3) and corrected all of the errors but one in both of the original drafts (see Table 4.5). The evidence found in Bilge’s texts suggested that in most instances when she took time to revise her writing, she was able to understand and apply the CF she received to self-correct her errors.

**Insights about Editing Processes**

The interview data suggested that, at least initially, Bilge employed a relatively limited range of revision strategies and did not dedicate much time outside of the classroom to reflect on her errors or editing practices. This is not surprising, considering
that she described the task of editing papers as “boring” (Interview 2). During the first interview, she stressed that the teacher had more responsibility when it came to correcting errors in student writing: “We [students] don’t know the correct answer. It should be the teacher because we are not the authority. Maybe we can try, but in the end the teacher has the last word” (Interview 1). When she was asked during the same interview to describe her editing process, she said the following:

I just try to examine my errors and understand them. But I don’t rewrite my essays. Not yet at least. The most important things I try to write down, but things like “the” I just try to understand and don’t rewrite . . . I examine my errors in class, but I don’t rewrite my essays at home. (Interview 1)

It is interesting to note here that Bilge did not consider her knowledge of definite and indefinite articles to be a problematic issue in her writing, even though wrong or missing articles were some of the most persistent errors in her texts.

By the second interview, Bilge seemed to develop a greater understanding of the importance of revising her papers and had already edited two original drafts (Essays 2 & 3). She reported trying to make an effort to consult her course materials and handouts and revise her texts at home (Interview 2), although she still sounded not enthusiastic about the process of editing papers. Nevertheless, the fact that toward the end of the term she started making revisions suggested that she began to take more responsibility for improving her own writing.

Summary

In many ways, Bilge stood out as one of the most advanced students in the class. She had an impressive control of sentence structure and vocabulary and seemed to have a strong foundation in English literacy. Out of the four participants in the study, she had had the greatest number of years of formal English instruction. It was, therefore,
unexpected that as an ELL with such a background, Bilge found the metalinguistic information provided by the coded CF used in the class difficult to understand and struggled to see its benefits. Considering her prior education, it came as a surprise that Bilge was not as familiar and comfortable with grammatical terminology as expected.

Another surprising finding was that as positive as Bilge was about the overall importance of error correction in improving written accuracy, she was fairly reluctant to diligently engage with the CF she received from the teacher and did not put as much energy into the process of revising her papers as she could have done. While she did start revising papers later in the term, she did not seem to strongly believe in the effectiveness of self-editing. After all, in her opinion, error correction was, first and foremost, the teacher’s responsibility (Interview 1). Thus, the task of editing her own work may have appeared to Bilge to be a waste of time.

While Bilge made an observable progress in her written accuracy over the course of the study, which could at least in part be attributed to the CF she received on her writing, there seemed to be a mismatch between what she believed constituted effective error correction strategies and the instructional approaches used in the class. It seemed highly likely that the ways Bilge’s former teachers in Turkey provided English instruction, including written CF, deeply shaped her perceptions and expectations of how teachers should correct student errors, making her reluctant to see the benefits of new types of instructional interventions. In this regard, Bilge could be seen as an outlier. The other two study participants, Saida and Maya, were much more like Liling than like Bilge in terms of their perceptions of indirect CF and efforts to engage with the received feedback and revise their writing. Their cases are discussed in the following sections.
Case Study Narrative 3: Saida

Background Information

Saida was a thirty-seven-year-old ELL from Casablanca, Morocco. She had two middle school children and worked at a dry cleaning service in Greater Boston. Her native language was Arabic, but she was also fluent in French, which she taught in Morocco. She moved to the United States in 2013 and enrolled in the English language learning center shortly after her arrival. She reported receiving limited formal English education prior to coming to the U.S. At the time of the study, she had already gone through two levels of the program (Levels 3 & 4) at the center.

Saida had a lively personality and was an active participant in classroom activities. Although when initially approached, she seemed slightly hesitant about participating in the current study primarily due to her self-perceived lack of adequate oral English skills, she eventually agreed to take part in the research project after I explained its details to her and assured her that her English skills would be sufficient for this investigation. In her initial interview, although Saida seemed open and friendly, she did experience a certain degree of difficulty and frustration expressing her ideas with fluency and accuracy that she aimed for, but she was able to articulate herself in more simple terms and answer all of my questions. Once, during the time between the initial and follow-up interviews, she joked with Maya, another participant in the study, that they spoke “baby English” (Observations, 3-24-16) and that their input would probably not be valuable to me. I once again assured them that the information I was collecting from them was key to my investigation. In our follow-up interview, Saida seemed much more at ease and confident expressing her ideas about the course and her education plans.
Although at one point in the middle of the term, she stated that she would like to attend another institution after finishing the English program at the center (Observations, 2-23-2016), in her second interview, she said that her immediate plan was to pick up more work hours and, unfortunately, postpone future studies.

*Self-Identified Strengths and Weaknesses*

Saida was identified as an average-proficiency student in the class; however, her initial hesitation to participate in the study due to her fear that she would be unable to correctly express herself and her responses in the first interview suggested that Saida was not only aware of her limitations, but also possibly saw them as greater than they actually were. On several occasions during the first interview, she complained about struggling with English grammar: “I have a problem with grammar,” she said right at the beginning of the interview. “Sometimes I am confused with grammar. I am always confused with grammar rules. That’s very difficult” (Interview 1). She also felt that she often had a specific idea she wanted to convey, but did not know the proper way to express it: “Sometimes when I write a sentence, I understand what I want to say, but I make mistakes” (Interview 1).

Just like Liling, Saida felt that she needed to improve her English and sounded motivated to do so, but raising two children and having a job often interfered with her study plans (Interview 1). She admitted that finding time to study class materials and work on her essays presented a challenge for her (Interview 1). Nevertheless, at the end of the term, Saida seemed to develop more confidence in her writing skills. She concluded our second interview with pride in her voice: “Before I couldn’t write a big paragraph or an essay. I never wrote an essay, but now I do. It’s a big difference!”
Perceptions of CF

Saida saw error correction as a crucial aspect of the language development process and was appreciative of the teacher’s CF. “I want to see my mistakes, so that I can memorize them for next time. . . . It is very important because next time we write something, we are going to write it correctly. It will be easier. . . . I feel good about the teacher’s corrections. I never get angry or upset,” she said in the first interview. She maintained the same view in the follow-up interview: “Of course, I expect the teacher to give me feedback. I am here to learn.” The statement she made at the end of our second interview summarized her overall positive perspective on written CF:

Error correction helped me a lot because before I never wrote an essay or paragraph . . . with the beginning and conclusion, but now I can do it! So it helped me to develop my ideas. With grammar, it’s hard. But now it is a little bit easier. I have more ideas; it’s not like before. Before, I was confused about past, present, passive voice, but not now. And the teacher’s comments helped me with that. (Interview 2)

When she was asked during the first interview about specific CF strategies that she thought were helpful to her writing development, she explained that she preferred a comprehensive, yet indirect error correction approach. “I prefer to see all of my errors [marked]. Having too many errors to correct is not a problem for me. I am fine with my mistakes” (Interview 1). However, as it was stated earlier in the discussion of general trends, Saida did admit in the follow-up interview that seeing too many errors could be discouraging to her. While her stance on comprehensive error correction seemed to shift over time, she maintained her preference for indirect CF throughout her initial and follow-up interviews. “When the teacher corrects the mistake, it is better when I correct it by myself. I memorize it better,” she explained in the first interview. She expressed the same viewpoint in the second interview: “[Getting the correct form] is not effective. I like
to figure out my own mistakes. Another time, in another essay, I have to pay attention. I have to think; I need time to search in the dictionary or whatever.”

Moreover, Saida seemed to favor the less explicit indirect approach (underlining), which the teacher introduced toward the end of the term. “When I see an underline, I know it’s a mistake. And the teacher gives us a chance to figure out our mistakes. But I have to make more effort to search my mistakes. But it’s good. It forces me to think about my mistakes” (Interview 2). When I asked her to compare this approach to error codes, she explained why she found unlabeled CF more effective, albeit hard:

The easy [method] . . . is the symbols. But the most helpful is underlining. . . . [Codes are] easy to figure out, but I prefer the underlining. If I have a symbol, I am going to go to the paper [i.e., the code list] right away and check. It’s easy. But when the teacher gives us an underline, it’s hard, but it is good for me to figure out my own mistakes and memorize them. He gives me a chance to search. So I feel that I can improve my writing more. (Interview 2)

Thus, Saida had a strong opinion about benefitting the most from getting unlabeled indirect feedback on as many errors in her writing as possible and was adamantly against direct CF:

If I wrote a paragraph and teacher corrected all of my mistakes [by providing the correct form], it’s nothing . . . because the teacher didn’t give me a chance to figure out my mistake. I have to figure out my mistakes. If he underlined it, yes, that’s OK, but if he wrote the correct answer, no . . . because I won’t remember it next time. If I search, if I make an effort, I can memorize my mistakes. (Interview 2)

Errors and Revision Efforts

Saida made a wide range of errors similar to the typical ESL errors discussed in Chapter II. The error patterns found in her texts included missing verbs and subjects, wrong words and wrong forms of words, pronoun and article errors, word order errors, run-on sentences and comma splices, as well as spelling and capitalization errors among others (see Table 4.6). For instance, on her diagnostic essay, Saida wrote the following
Table 4.6

*Saida’s Error Chart*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Error Type</th>
<th>Diagnostic</th>
<th>Essay 1</th>
<th>Essay 2</th>
<th>Essay 3</th>
<th>Final</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td># marked</td>
<td># marked /</td>
<td># marked /</td>
<td># marked /</td>
<td># marked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% corrected</td>
<td>% corrected</td>
<td>% corrected</td>
<td>% corrected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sp</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4/100%</td>
<td></td>
<td>5/100%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td></td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1/100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RO</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1/100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VT</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cap</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WF</td>
<td></td>
<td>1/100%</td>
<td>2/0</td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW</td>
<td></td>
<td>1/100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td></td>
<td>1/100%</td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WW</td>
<td></td>
<td>1/100%</td>
<td></td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td></td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td></td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1/100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pl</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UW</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Error types in bold were the most frequent ones, appearing in at least three of the five essays analyzed for that particular student. Diagnostic and final texts were not revised.

about her current and former jobs: “I presser. I was a teacher I teache franch language.”

Later in the term, she wrote about disciplining children: “Sometimes when punish them
for they own good” (Essay 3). As seen in Table 4.6, each of the five analyzed texts contained five to six error patterns.

Among Saida’s most persistent error patterns, which appeared in at least three of the five texts, were errors in verbs, word choices, word forms and spelling. For instance, she made a verb error when she wrote “we don’t them” instead of “we don’t want them” (Essay 3), a wrong word error when she wrote “leave” instead of “live” (Diagnostic Essay), a word form (and spelling) error when she wrote “peacefully” instead of “peaceful” (Essay 1), and spelling errors when she wrote “sitution” instead of “situation” twice in the same text (Final Essay). Out of these four frequent patterns, wrong words and spelling were marked as errors in the final text. Although this last essay contained additional error types, the fact that there was a visible decrease in the number of most prominent error patterns suggested an increase in Saida’s awareness of her most frequent errors and at least some progress in her written accuracy. Furthermore, Saida’s total error frequency ratio improved dramatically, showing an impressive change of .121 from the diagnostic text, with a ratio of .178, to the final text, with a ratio of .057 (see Table 4.3). Evidence in Saida’s texts and revisions pointed to the development of her ability to self-monitor her writing and self-correct her errors (see Table 4.6).

Saida made a strong effort to revise her essays, and while she was successful only part of the time, she seemed to understand the value of editing her writing. “I need to improve. I need to correct my mistakes myself to memorize them,” she stated in her first interview. During the follow-up interview, she again addressed the benefit of attending to the teacher’s corrective input and making revisions: “I have to figure it out. It’s good for me, yeah. I need more practice.” Given Saida’s thoughts on the importance of rewrites
and her dedication to the editing process, it is not surprising that in the two texts she had time to revise (Essays 1 & 3), she was able to identify and correct most of the errors marked by the teacher (see Table 4.6).

**Insights about Editing Processes**

Although Saida’s ability to explain her editing strategies was somewhat limited, she was able to give some details about her revision process in the initial and follow-up interviews. She reported that most of the time she would first re-read the whole text after getting back the corrections from the teacher and try to understand the coded or underlined errors: “I read the essay one time or twice. I look at my mistakes. If I have to correct it, I do it, or ask the teacher about my errors” (Interview 1). This statement was confirmed by multiple in-class observations (e.g., Observations, 1-21-16, 3-10-16, 3-24-16), during which Saida was seen asking the teacher questions about the feedback she got and confirming with him that her revisions were correct. Furthermore, she was sometimes observed conversing with Maya, another study participant, about the CF they received on their essays (e.g., Observations, 3-10-16). Thus, Saida also relied on peer feedback to address her errors, although she did not mention this revision strategy in her interviews.

Interestingly, while in the first interview, Saida reported spending on average fifteen minutes on editing her errors, during the follow-up interview, she said that she spent approximately thirty minutes on revising one paper. In addition, despite her busy schedule, she tried to set aside time at home for studying her writing materials and handouts as part of the revision process: “Of course, it is not every day, but when I have free time. . . . Three or four times a week, usually on the weekends” (Interview 2). Therefore, by the end of the semester, Saida dedicated more time to editing, which
seemed to be an indication of her strengthening her insights about the benefits of taking responsibility for the revision process.

Summary

Though Saida expressed a lack of confidence in her language development at the beginning of the study, she was fairly successful at reducing instances of specific error patterns that had been marked on her essays. She seemed appreciative of the written CF she received and made consistent efforts to attend to it and revise her writing. Thus, the progress she made in written accuracy over the course of the study could be attributed to the effect of the teacher’s CF strategies and Saida’s willingness to grapple with the teacher’s corrections, despite the various demands on her time. At the end of the term, Saida sounded quite pleased with her writing progress. She spoke with pride and even amazement about her improved ability to compose paragraphs and essays in English (Interview 2).

Case Study Narrative 4: Maya

Background Information

Maya was a forty-two-year-old ELL from Dharan, Nepal, who was somewhat reserved and quiet, but at the same time willing to participate whenever she was called on in class. Having earned a bachelor’s degree in Nepal, Maya worked at a bank for eight years before moving to the United States with her two teenage children in 2013. She enrolled in the English language learning center in May 2015. At the beginning of the study, she had already taken the previous level of the program (Level 4) twice.

Initially, Maya had reservations about taking part in the study due to her self-perceived poor verbal skills. After I described its goals and assured her that her English
level would not be an obstacle for the data collection process, she agreed to participate in the project. During her first interview, Maya said that she had English classes in Nepal, but could not recall much information about them. Although she seemed motivated to learn English and tried to submit all of the assignments on time, she admitted that keeping up with the course workload was challenging for her. At the time of the study, she was working part-time at a local coffee shop and babysitting for a family with small children. She explained that raising her children by herself and having two part-time jobs did not allow her to dedicate as much time as she wished to her language studies (Interview 1).

**Self-Identified Strengths and Weaknesses**

Maya was identified as a below-average-proficiency student in the class, and her initial concerns about being unable to explain herself clearly as a participant in the study indicated that she was well aware of her weaknesses. Although her interview responses were not very detailed and often called for probing questions to encourage her to elaborate on some of her thoughts, it was clear that Maya had specific ideas she wanted to communicate. What was frustrating for her was that she did not know how to structure them in English. As a result, she appeared somewhat passive during her interviews, and when she was pressed with follow-up questions to elicit her views on different topics, she often gave up on trying to articulate her ideas and concluded with a shy smile: “I can’t explain” (Interview 1). Maya had a low opinion of her language skills, particularly her grammar, which she believed often obscured the intended meaning of her sentences. “Grammar is what I need the most. If I speak or write, and my grammar is not correct, it gives a different meaning,” she complained (Interview 1).
Like Liling and Saida, Maya talked about the need to improve her writing skills and seemed motivated to do so. “I need to practice more. It would be good for me,” she said during the initial interview. However, taking care of family and holding two part-time jobs posed serious obstacles for Maya in creating a balance between her studies and other commitments in her life. She raised the issue of time being a problem on multiple occasions during both of her interviews. In the first interview, she said the following about editing her essays: “I try to practice and want to practice, but I don’t have a lot of time because of work. Me and my children are here, and my husband is over there in my home country. I am alone here.” She brought up the issue of time management again in the follow-up interview: “I look at [the class handouts] at home, but not too much because now I am so busy. Because of family issues and work, it is difficult for me to find the balance.” In spite of these challenges, Maya sounded more confident in her writing and editing skills at the end of the study. In the second interview, she said, “I made a little bit of progress. My writing has improved. After class when I am home, I look and try . . . to correct my grammar and essays. I correct them myself!”

Perceptions of CF

Maya valued error correction and sounded highly appreciative of the teacher’s CF. Although she had a difficult time giving detailed responses, Maya’s overall positive attitude toward the feedback she received was obvious in her interviews: “Teacher does corrections, and it helps me. Practicing helps me. Yeah, we do lots of practice and it is good for us,” she said in the first interview. “I am happy when teacher shows me what is wrong. Teacher encourages us. . . . I am never upset about the corrections. . . . I want the feedback,” she maintained in the follow-up interview. When she was asked about her
opinion on the role of error correction in improving her writing, she said the following:

“The teacher’s comments helped my writing. They helped me a little bit with development of ideas, but mostly grammar” (Interview 2).

As for specific written CF strategies, Maya’s perspective was reminiscent of the views expressed by Liling and Saida in that she favored comprehensive, indirect approach. She initially said the following: “I want all of my mistakes pointed [out] to me. It is good for me! If I have five errors, I want the teacher to point out five of them. I want to know where my mistakes are. In the future, I will practice and pay more attention to those areas (Interview 1). However, Maya stated a little later that seeing too many errors in her texts made her “feel bad” (Interview 1). Therefore, it seemed questionable whether Maya preferred a truly comprehensive error correction method. As for her preference of indirect CF, she argued, “I think it is good for the teacher to show your mistake, but let you try to [correct it] (Interview 1). In the follow-up interview, she provided more information about why she found the indirect strategies used in the class more effective than direct CF: “[Getting] the correct answer is easy, but it is not good for us. When the teacher gives us the correct answer, I don’t think about the answer. I fix what I see, but then I can’t try again. In the future, I will not know what to do” (Interview 2). She brought up this idea once more at the conclusion of the follow-up interview: “When the teacher gives me the answer, I never try to find out the correct answer. Maybe for a few minutes, it is good for me, but in the future I cannot remember the correct rule and do it again” (Interview 2). Thus, Maya sounded adamant about not benefiting from receiving direct feedback as much as she did from indirect error correction.
Although Maya viewed both coded and underlined indirect feedback as helpful (Interviews 1 & 2), she seemed to favor the coded approach as an easier and less time-consuming correction technique: “Codes are an easy way. Underlining is difficult, but I think the teacher thinks that the students think more. It is good, but takes more time than codes. That is one of the difficulties” (Interview 2). It seemed that Maya was aware of the potential cognitive engagement benefits of the less explicit CF, but her perception of the effectiveness of the two indirect approaches used by the teacher was impacted by her busy schedule. “Underlining is good. It means thinking more about our mistakes. When we think, it is good. But there is no time,” she explained at the end of the second interview. Therefore, to Maya, coded feedback seemed to be the optimal method of error correction due to its ease and efficiency.

Errors and Revision Efforts

Maya made various types of errors in her writing reflecting her ELL status. The error patterns marked in her texts included articles, plural endings, prepositions, wrong words, wrong word forms and unnecessary words, subject-verb agreement, sentence fragments, word order, punctuation, spelling, and capitalization (see Table 4.7). For instance, on her diagnostic essay, Maya wrote: “I worked at bank for 8 year in my country. I left that job because I came U.S.” In Essay 3, she wrote about disciplining children: “Beating children can affect a child mental health. They can suffer from many terrible issues that goes through their mind.”

As seen in Table 4.7, while Maya’s Diagnostic Essay and Essay 2 had seven error types marked in each and her Essays 1 and 3 had three error patterns marked, the final text, which was the most complex writing she produced that term, had only one error type
Table 4.7

*Maya’s Error Chart*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Error Type</th>
<th>Diagnostic</th>
<th>Essay 1</th>
<th>Essay 2</th>
<th>Essay 3</th>
<th>Final</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2/100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sp</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2/100%</td>
<td>4/100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pl</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1/100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prep</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4/100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WF</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1/100%</td>
<td>1/100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WO</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cap</td>
<td></td>
<td>1/100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WW</td>
<td></td>
<td>2/100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frag</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SV</td>
<td></td>
<td>1/100%</td>
<td>1/100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UW</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4/100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Error types in bold were the most frequent ones, appearing in at least three of the five essays analyzed for that particular student. Diagnostic and final texts were not marked. Thus, apart from the spike in the number of error patterns seen in Essay 2, there seemed to be a general trend of error reduction in Maya’s essays over the course of the study. The large number of identified error patterns in Essay 2 could be explained by the fact that this was a considerably longer text compared to the other four analyzed essays. Previous research has indicated that “sentence-level errors may increase as student writing gets longer” (Ferris et al., 2013, p. 319). Perhaps a more unanticipated and
important finding was the dramatic reduction in the total error frequency ratio when Maya’s first and last papers were compared. An analysis of these two papers, which were approximately equal in length, revealed that Maya’s error frequency ratio went from .138 on the Diagnostic Essay to .024 on the Final Essay, representing a notable change of .114 (see Table 4.3).

As for Maya’s most frequent error patterns, wrong word forms, plural endings and spelling were noted as persistent error types in three out of the five analyzed texts. For example, she made a word form error when she wrote “easily transportation” instead of “easy transportation” (Essay 2), a plural ending error in “different financial and economics problem” (Final Essay), and spelling errors when she wrote “avilable” (Essay 1) and “phisical” (Essay 2). Out of these three problematic patterns, only plural endings were marked on the final paper (see Table 4.7). This observable decrease in the number of most prominent error patterns and a dramatic reduction in Maya’s EFR score suggested an increase in Maya’s awareness of her most troublesome issues in writing and an overall progress in her written accuracy.

Maya’s positive results in the development of her writing skills could be attributed to her diligent efforts to self-monitor her writing and self-correct her errors (see Table 4.7). Maya consistently revised her essays and seemed to recognize the importance of editing her writing. Even though she struggled to articulate why she thought revising her texts was crucial to her writing development, the idea of practicing her composing skills and self-correcting her errors as being “good” for her surfaced multiple times during our first and follow-up interviews. In the three essays that Maya revised, she
managed to successfully identify and correct all of the marked errors, except one sentence fragment in Essay 2 (see Table 4.7), which was an impressive accomplishment.

*Insights about Editing Processes*

Similar to Saida’s case, Maya’s ability to explain her editing processes was limited. However, she was able to give a general picture of her revision strategies during her interviews: “If I have time, I read where I am wrong and sometimes practice at home. I give the corrected paper [back to the teacher]. If I have time, I sometimes open my grammar papers [i.e., class handouts]” (Interview 1). Thus, Maya tried to engage with the corrective input she got from the teacher and rely on class handouts to revise her writing, even though time was a serious obstacle to her revision efforts. She again mentioned the lack of time being a problem later in the same interview: “I don’t have lots of time, but if I have time, I correct a paper and give it to the teacher. . . . Sometimes [his corrections] are confusing. But then I ask the teacher and the teacher explains them” (Interview 1). Multiple classroom observations (e.g., Observations, 1-21-16, 1-26-16, 3-10-16, 3-17-16, 3-24-16, 4-4-16) confirmed that whenever Maya did not understand the teacher’s feedback or wanted to confirm her revision choices, she asked him questions either in or after class. Moreover, Maya was observed engaging in frequent peer review sessions with other classmates, including Saida, to discuss the CF they received on their essays (e.g., Observations, 2-2-16, 3-10-16, 3-14-16, 4-4-16). Although Maya did not discuss peer feedback as an editing strategy in her interviews, she seemed to rely on it to some extent to analyze and correct her errors.

When I asked Maya in the first interview how much time she spent on revising one paper, she said: “Some days half an hour; some days none” (Interview 1).
Considering that Maya consistently mentioned various demands on her time and energy, it was, therefore, a bit of a surprise when in the follow-up interview she reported spending one hour on average on her revision efforts. This unexpected finding was possibly an indication of Maya’s increasing awareness of the benefits of taking more responsibility for improving her own writing.

**Summary**

Among the four participants in the study, Maya had the lowest level of English writing proficiency. She seemed to be aware of her writing weaknesses and language knowledge gaps and showed a positive attitude toward the written CF she received and the task of revising her texts. Her view of the teacher’s input as helpful and effective and diligence in her efforts to rewrite her essays may have helped her persevere through many challenges she faced due to her busy schedule and succeed in considerably improving her writing. Findings that emerged from the interview, observation and document analysis data suggested that the progress Maya made in reducing specific error patterns over the course of the study could be attributed to the influence of the teacher’s CF, Maya’s teachable attitude and determination to attend to the corrections she received. Maya acknowledged her written accuracy development in her follow-up interview. Assessing her own writing improvement at the end of the study, she concluded with simple, yet important words: “I am happy” (Interview 2).

**Summary of Chapter IV**

The three research questions for this study sought to explore how CF might influence adult ELLs’ perceptions and writing. Data analysis suggested a marked improvement in the four participating ELLs’ written accuracy after receiving focused,
indirect CF over the course of one semester. Students expressed positive attitudes toward the practice of error correction and appreciated the feedback that was provided to them. To summarize, the participants in this study (a) made a wide range of errors of different patterns in their texts, which the teacher corrected using a focused, indirect approach; (b) appeared in the majority of cases to lack confidence about their writing and self-editing skills, but improved their self-images as writers by the end of the term; (c) valued error correction and felt that the CF they received over the course of the study helped them improve their writing; (d) struggled to find time to revise their texts, but were able to self-correct the majority of their errors; (e) relied on rereading their texts, soliciting teacher and peer feedback, and occasionally referring to previously learned rules in their revision efforts; and (f) exhibited progress in their writing by the end of the study in terms of reduced error frequency counts and total error frequency ratios. Table 4.8 outlines major findings of this investigation.

The four case study narratives were presented to illustrate the above broad themes via in-depth portrayals of the participants in this study. Furthermore, although Liling, Bilge, Saida and Maya all showed improvement in their writing development, which at least in part could be attributed to the written CF they received in the study, their individual cases revealed interesting contrasts to one another. These case study narratives underscored the significance of student attitudes, learning styles, confidence, motivation, and effort, along with such factors as prior instruction and time constraints when engaging with and responding to written CF.

In the following chapter, the findings of this study are discussed in order to answer the three research questions that guided this investigation. A summary of the
research is presented, along with implications for ESL specialists and writing instructors. Lastly, it offers suggestions for future research of different factors that may influence how written CF impacts ELLs and their texts.

Table 4.8

Summary of Major Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How does the teacher in an adult ESL writing class provide CF on morphological, lexical and syntactic errors in student writing?</td>
<td>The teacher used focused, indirect CF that became more inexplicit over time to correct errors in student writing. In-class editing workshops and targeted mini-lessons complemented written CF.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do adult ELLs perceive the CF they receive?</td>
<td>Although individual variations were observed, generally, students valued CF and believed that it helped them develop their writing and editing skills. They appreciated a greater awareness of their frequent error patterns, deeper engagement in the editing process, and increased self-reliance as writers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How does CF on morphological, lexical and syntactic errors influence adult ELLs’ written accuracy?</td>
<td>All students showed progress in their written accuracy by the end of the semester in terms of the number of persistent errors and total error frequency ratios in their texts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this longitudinal study was to investigate the role of error correction in an adult ESL writing course and examine its effects on student perceptions and written accuracy over time. The setting for the case study was an English language learning center located in the Greater Boston area. A high intermediate writing class taught for fifteen weeks during the winter semester of 2016 was identified as the main unit of analysis, while four students in that course with varying language proficiency levels were selected as subcases in order to obtain concrete measures before taking the inquiry to a higher level and uncover broad themes about the written CF practice in the classroom under investigation.

The following questions guided this study:
1. How does the teacher in an adult ESL writing class provide CF on morphological, lexical and syntactic errors in student writing?
2. How do adult ELLs perceive the CF they receive?
3. How does CF on morphological, lexical and syntactic errors influence adult ELLs’ written accuracy?

In order to answer these three questions, I, as the researcher, relied on multiple sources of data. These included classroom observations over the course of fifteen weeks,
initial and follow-up interviews with the student participants and the teacher and a continuous analysis of student texts. Observations of classroom interactions were recorded in field notes, while interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed, and student texts were examined for recurrent error patterns by calculating error frequency counts and error frequency ratios and summarizing results in document analysis notes. All of the collected data were continually analyzed following the constant comparative method of data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) within each participant case and across the four cases. During the data analysis phase, several themes emerged in reference to the influence of written CF on the four ELLs’ perceptions and writing. The results of the analysis were compared to previous research findings on error correction in ESL writing in order to support the conclusions of the present study.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the results of data analysis. First, I present conclusions in terms of the research questions that guided this study. Then, I look at several practical implications of this study’s findings for L2 writing specialists and teachers. Finally, I suggest potential areas for further research.

Conclusions

In the introduction to this chapter, I reiterated that the present case study was guided by three questions. The first one asked the following: How does the teacher in an adult ESL writing class provide CF on morphological, lexical and syntactic errors in student writing? Findings that emerged from observations, interviews and document analysis suggested that the teacher consistently relied on focused, indirect feedback to address student errors and that his feedback progressed from being explicit to being unlabeled as the semester went on. In his interviews, the teacher reported noting greater
gains (both short- and long-term) in students’ written accuracy in that class compared to his previous classes, in which he used a more comprehensive and direct CF approach. Based on his observations, he was confident that his new approach was superior to his former methods of providing written corrective input in that it promoted greater student engagement in the revision process and, ultimately, stronger writing skills and better written products.

Recent investigations in the area of written CF seem to validate the teacher’s rationale for choosing the error correction methods outlined above. While written CF research has not followed a smooth path and has produced inconclusive results in the past, the majority of recent examinations of this topic have provided strong evidence in favor of CF that is focused and indirect. Several leading ESL researchers have asserted that specific feedback on a limited number of error types has the potential of being more beneficial to students than comprehensive error correction (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009, 2010a, 2010b; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008; Ferris, 2010; Sheen, 2007; Sheen, Wright, & Moldawa, 2009; Van Beuningen, de Jong, & Kuiken, 2012). For example, in their study of the effects of focused versus unfocused feedback, Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, and Takashima (2008) observed:

A mass of corrections directed at a diverse set of linguistic phenomena . . . hardly likely to foster the noticing and cognizing that may be needed for CF to work for acquisition. In contrast, correction directed repeatedly at a very specific grammatical problem may well have greater effect. (p. 368)

Ferris (2010) presented a similar argument advocating focused error correction:

A comprehensive, yet vague approach to written CF, compared with selective treatment of targeted error types, is less likely to yield empirically robust findings and be pedagogically effective. It only makes sense that students would utilize written CF more effectively for long-term language acquisition and writing
development when there are fewer, clearer error types on which to focus attention. (p. 182)

As for relying on indirect CF, the teacher’s approach seemed to have support from the research by Ferris (2006), Ferris and Helt (2000), Ferris et al. (2010, 2013), Hendrickson (1980) and Lalande (1982). According to these authors, in the context of writing development, indirect CF produces better long-term outcomes than direct error correction. The results that emerged from the interviews with the teacher in the present study corroborated the findings of these previous investigations by suggesting that indirect error correction was more valuable because it promoted, as Ferris et al. (2013) put it, “reflection and problem-solving on the part of the learner, leading to more long-term growth in writing/self-monitoring ability” (p. 309).

Development of writing autonomy was also the reason behind the teacher’s decision to move from giving ELLs more explicit feedback with metalinguistic explanations to providing corrections via minimal marking (underlining) as the semester progressed. The question of how explicit teachers’ feedback should be has been debated by several ESL writing researchers without offering any clear-cut answers for practitioners. Chandler (2003), Ferris (2006), Ferris and Roberts (2001), and Haswell (1983) have all indicated that even minimally explicit indirect CF can be beneficial to student writers. However, whether unlabeled feedback (such as underlining or checkmarks) is more helpful than explicit techniques (such as codes or other metalinguistic information) remains a debatable topic. In fact, some recent studies have found that it was explicit CF that seemed to be more effective for some students than unlabeled corrections (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008, 2010a; Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Ellis et al., 2008; Ferris, 2006; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Sheen,
Bitchener and Ferris (2012) suggested that implicit CF techniques “may be most appropriate for relatively advanced L2 writers who are proficient enough to self-edit substantial portions of their own texts with limited assistance” (p. 150). Thus, if the goal of the written CF is to promote students’ “self-sufficiency and independence as editors” (Ferris, 2011, p. 87), then unlabeled error correction seems to be a warranted approach. In the present study, that exact idea seemed to be the teacher’s rationale for switching from coding to underlining student errors. Bitchener and Ferris (2012) also recommended varying the level of explicitness of written CF at different times in the term and with different students based on their proficiency levels and needs. While in the current study, the teacher chose to provide less explicit feedback to the whole class toward the end of the term, he said in his follow-up interview that in the future he would most likely vary his approach based on individual student abilities. Therefore, the teacher’s observations seemed to align with what Bitchener and Ferris (2012) advocated in their work.

Even when a particular CF approach has been supported by robust research findings across several studies, its effectiveness cannot be comprehensively assessed without looking at student perceptions of error correction (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Ferris, 2003; Leki, 1991). Leki (1991) warned that ignoring student views and preferences could hinder their motivation. ELLs’ willingness to engage with the corrective input they receive is an important variable that can dictate how successful they will be at applying the feedback to their writing. Thus, as Leki (1991) pointed out:

> It seems at best counter-productive, at worst high-handed and disrespectful of our students, to simply insist that they trust our preferences. . . . We do well at least to become aware of students’ perceptions of their needs and their sense of what helps them progress. (p. 210)

Guided by these insights, the second research question in this case study was: How do
adult ELLs perceive the CF they receive? The study findings regarding students’ testimonies about what was most useful to them were fairly consistent with recent written CF investigations.

All four participants in the present research valued and expected written CF and viewed grammar as an important area on which they wanted to receive teacher feedback. These conclusions were similar to the findings of several previous studies of student opinion (Chandler, 2003; Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Ferris, 1995; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Leki, 1991; Williams, 2005). For example, studies by Ferris (1995) and Leki (1991) noted “a strong and consistent preference for grammar feedback on the part of L2 student writers” (Ferris, 2011, p. 43). As for whether teacher feedback on grammar should be direct or indirect, the majority of students in the present study felt that indirect CF was considerably more helpful to them than getting errors directly corrected by the teacher. In particular, they highlighted the long-term benefit of indirect feedback in that it facilitated the development of their self-monitoring skills and improvement of accuracy in new pieces of writing. Even Bilge, the one student who seemed to favor direct error correction over indirect methods (primarily due to the lesser effort it took her to correct her texts), acknowledged the positive influence of indirect CF on her increased awareness of her frequent errors. In a summary of previous research on student views about error correction, Ferris (2011) pointed out that generally “students recognized that they were likely to learn more and become more independent as writers and editors if they had some investment in the process, rather than simply copying or noting direct corrections the teacher had made” (pp. 44-45). Hence, student opinions expressed in the present case study appeared to support the results of earlier investigations.
Similar to a substantial percentage of student participants in previous studies (e.g., Chandler, 2003; Ferris et al., 2010, Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Leki 1991), the four students in this research claimed to favor comprehensive feedback. At the same time, most of them indicated in their follow-up responses that although they welcomed CF, realizing that they made too many errors was upsetting to them. This finding appeared to underscore the merit of providing focused error correction, which could target a select number of error patterns without overwhelming student writers.

As for student perceptions of labeled (explicit) versus unlabeled (implicit) CF, the present study seemed to draw a more complex picture compared to what was previously reported in written CF research (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Ferris, 2006; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994, 1996; Rennie, 2000). According to these previous studies, students strongly preferred errors to be coded by type instead of being simply located in their texts. As Bitchener and Ferris (2012) observed, “students, especially L2 writers, tend to believe that they cannot possibly correct their own errors without that specific information” (p. 151). In this study, the four ELLs’ did not have a unanimous opinion on the subject. While Liling did not exhibit a preference between the two methods and found them equally effective (possibly due to the fact that she did not receive enough exposure to the more implicit option) and Maya seemed to favor the coded error correction technique because it offered her concise and clear information about her error patterns, Saida and Bilge both preferred the less explicit CF method, although for different reasons. These two participants thought that underlining was more effective than error codes. However, while Saida found the implicit method of underlining errors to be more helpful because this demanding technique challenged her to
become more proficient at self-monitoring her texts for errors and, thus, more independent as a writer, Bilge liked this approach because she felt it was not as confusing and time-consuming as deciphering unfamiliar error codes, which she found demotivating.

Thus, the four student participants in this study at times expressed different (or even opposite) preferences for various forms of written CF. These findings emphasized the importance of taking individual student preferences and differences into consideration when implementing a particular instructional intervention. This does not mean that student desires should necessarily override the instructor’s decision to use a certain method. However, being conscious of how different students in the classroom perceive a CF approach may help the teacher better understand the reasons behind that instructional method’s success with some learners or a lack thereof with others.

Lastly, perhaps the most critical factor in assessing the effectiveness of written CF is its short- and long-term effects on ELLs’ texts. To investigate this issue, the third research question posed in this study was: How does CF on morphological, lexical and syntactic errors influence adult ELLs’ written accuracy? The findings of this study suggested that the four ELLs were successful in producing more accurate writing in response to the CF they received. The positive effect was apparent not only in revised drafts carried out in response to feedback, but also in new texts composed later. The results indicated that the focused, indirect CF the students received over the course of fifteen weeks enabled them to enhance their linguistic accuracy and transfer writing improvement to new tasks. Despite individual variations in the amount of progress made, all four participants improved their writing skills between the beginning and the end of
the study by exhibiting a reduction in the frequency of persistent error patterns and total error frequency ratios.

The findings of the present study constituted strong evidence in favor of providing written CF. Truscott (1996, 1999, 2004, 2007, 2009) has repeatedly argued that error correction should be abandoned by L2 teachers because it hinders writing development. Contrary to Truscott’s assertion of CF’s harmful effects, evidence that emerged from the data in the present study suggested that focused, indirect feedback could be a successful means of facilitating ELLs’ written accuracy improvement over time. These results corroborated and extended the breadth of earlier research (e.g., Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b; Ellis et al., 2008; Sheen, 2007, 2010) by examining the effect of CF on accuracy both in revisions of original texts and in new pieces of writing over one academic term. Truscott (1996, 1999, 2004) and Ferris (1999, 2003, 2004, 2011) have both emphasized that the effectiveness of written CF cannot be comprehensively evaluated without looking at student production of new texts over time. In the present study, the observable short- and long-term effects of CF on the accuracy of student texts in a fifteen-week course were strongly suggestive of the positive influence of focused, indirect error correction on L2 writing progress.

An important contribution of the present case study to the existing literature lies in the longitudinal and contextualized dimensions of its design. In her critique of previous written CF research, Ferris (2010) pointed out that most of the studies either followed a pretest-posttest-delayed posttest design, which was “detached from the day-to-day activities of a typical writing class” since students wrote under timed conditions without an opportunity for revisions, or a design where students revised a single text in
response to the teacher’s feedback, which did not include a longitudinal element (p. 194). Although scarce, studies that have evaluated the effects of written CF via contextualized and longitudinal designs (e.g., Ferris, 2006; Ferris et al., 2010, 2013; Hyland, 2003) served as useful models for this case study. This research was conducted in an intact adult ESL writing class to address the aforementioned gap in the current research database and investigate whether the effects of the written CF provided by the classroom teacher endured beyond revisions of a single text to subsequent writing. It also considered individual student responses to error correction and examined student variations in their perceptions of written CF via in-depth case-study narratives in order to complement and extend the existing written CF research, which has predominantly focused on controlled, experimental investigations (Ferris et al., 2013). It concluded that focused, indirect feedback has a strong potential to be helpful to L2 student writers over time. Even though, as F. Hyland (2003) has pointed out, “it is unlikely that feedback alone is responsible for language accuracy improvement over a complete course” (p. 219), the data in this case study suggested that written CF should be viewed as an important factor in adult ELLs’ writing development.

Practical Implications

I set out to conduct the present study guided by the social constructionist assumption that writers must satisfy the expectations of the audiences for which their texts are written in order to be successful and the belief held by many L2 writing researchers and practitioners that “accuracy in writing matters to academic and professional audiences and that obvious L2 error may stigmatize writers in some contexts” (Ferris, 2006, p. 81). The social constructionist idea that teaching academic
discourse standards and focusing on the dynamic interaction, instead of the dichotomy, between the form and content of writing promote student progress and empowerment served as the theoretical foundation for my inquiry. The goal of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of written CF’s role in helping ELLs become more proficient and self-reliant writers and socializing them into academic discourse communities. The findings suggested that by creating a balance between the emphasis on the process and the finished product of writing and using a selective, indirect CF approach, the teacher seemed to succeed in facilitating student progress. In their interviews, the ELLs reflected on the increase in both the accuracy and fluency of their written work. They found that the instructional methods used in the course, including CF, helped them develop confidence in their writing and editing abilities, promoted their metalinguistic awareness and enhanced the overall quality (i.e., the form and content) of their writing. The results of the study indicated that these ELLs walked away from the course with an improved self-image as writers and a stronger command of academic literacy. The insights gained from this research have several practical implications for L2 writing specialists and teachers.

There seems to be enough robust evidence from the study to recommend that L2 researchers and practitioners view focused, indirect written CF, limited in its scope to a select number of linguistic error types as helpful to L2 student writers, providing students are ready to engage with it, in terms of their language proficiency levels and their understanding of the merits of focusing their editing efforts on specific error patterns and developing self-reliance as writers. The case study findings further suggested that vague CF that attempts to address a comprehensive range of student errors—a practice that the
four study participants were exposed to in their prior instruction—may not adequately prepare ELLs to produce linguistically accurate writing. However, as Ferris et al. (2013) have warned, even focused, indirect error correction “may fall short of meeting students’ needs if there are no opportunities for follow-up discussion and clarification” (p. 323).

Thus, one implication from this case study is that L2 writing teachers should consider how they might modify their CF practices to make them more selective and indirect and create opportunities for students to receive contextualized grammar instruction tied to their problematic issues and ask questions during in-class revision workshops or in one-on-one conferences. This kind of CF approach may offer students specific insights about their gaps in linguistic knowledge and practical information on how to resolve those issues. Like the instructor in the present study, L2 teachers may find it effective to provide mini-lessons to the whole class on specific error types that most students struggle with, instead of giving decontextualized grammar instruction. Additionally, indirect CF approaches, such as error coding or underlining, can only be helpful if students receive some training in the metalinguistic information provided by the feedback (a practice that requires L2 writing teachers themselves to have sufficient preparation in formal grammar). For instance, some class time needs to be set aside for students to learn the meaning of different error codes and rules that govern them, similarly to what was observed in the present study. Finally, what happens post-feedback is just as important as what happens before CF is provided to students. Whole-class revision sessions and individual teacher-student conferences should have a prominent place in L2 writing classrooms as a means for ELLs to ask questions, receive explanations regarding the feedback that they received and build their metalinguistic
knowledge. In summary, L2 writing teachers need to establish communication channels with their students to discuss the features of their chosen feedback approaches, the focus and frequency of the feedback and editing strategies that students can use in response to the feedback.

Based on the findings of the study, another pedagogical recommendation that can be offered is that in designing and providing CF to ELLs, writing specialists and teachers should try to understand to the best of their ability who the learners are and how their backgrounds may influence their writing progress and their perceptions and preferences of written CF. As discussed in Chapter II, adult ELLs constitute a diverse student population, including international students, late-arriving immigrants and Generation 1.5 learners. While it has been suggested that these different groups of ELLs have different educational backgrounds and learning needs (e.g., Ferris, 2011), the results of the present study indicated that these delineations are not always clear-cut. For example, contrary to what may have been expected, Bilge, a student with many years of formal English language instruction and strong oral and written skills, did not seem comfortable with key grammatical terms, which seemed to be the root of her objection to error codes. On the other hand, Saida and Maya, who were more typical immigrant learners in the sense that they had not received as extensive of English instruction as Bilge and their exposure to English was primarily informal, did not complain about struggling with grammatical terminology (however, unlike Bilge, they came into the class after receiving several semesters of instruction at the English language learning center). Variations in the pedagogic focus of prior instruction may be a factor in such individual student differences. It is, therefore, crucial for L2 researchers and practitioners to assess ELLs’
knowledge of formal grammar via class discussions, questionnaires or writing activities before integrating a particular CF system into practice.

Furthermore, other factors such as students’ language proficiency levels, overall personalities, confidence and motivation levels, and learning styles, as well as such matters as learners’ busy schedules and multiple social roles and responsibilities may need to be considered when using a particular error correction format with adult ELLs. These internal characteristics and external issues may influence students’ self-images as writers and perceptions of and preferences toward different instructional interventions, including written CF. For instance, as indicated in written CF research (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch, 2010b; Ferris, 2011; Van Beuningen, de Jong, & Kuiken, 2008; Van Beuningen et al., 2012), students’ ability to engage with different types of CF (particularly, the more indirect forms of feedback) may relate to their L2 language proficiency levels, which impact the range of their linguistic and metalinguistic repertoire. Thus, students may require “a certain threshold amount of knowledge of English” (Ferris, 2011, p. 87) to successfully process particular types of error correction. Certainly, the above factors pose a complex task for L2 teachers. As Ferris et al. (2013) have observed, “in most situations, teachers may have minimal control over students’ individual qualities or the larger contextual factors of placement, assessment, curriculum, and course design” (p. 324). However, it is prudent to be aware of individual student differences and try to structure writing activities that are sensitive toward student needs and abilities.

Recommendations for Further Research

The focus of this case study was on understanding in depth a particular instructional practice—written CF. This investigation added to previous error correction
research by providing a detailed, longitudinal, contextualized analysis of how students in a specific adult ESL writing classroom received, viewed and engaged with CF over time. It was my hope that L2 writing specialists and teachers would see the results of this study as pertinent to their situations. However, in order to generalize (in the statistical sense) these findings to a broader population of adult ELLs, there need to be follow-up investigations, including true-experimental or quasi-experimental studies, to further examine the effects of written CF on student perceptions and their written products.

The present research highlighted a number of issues that call for a closer examination. For instance, the study identified such factors as students’ past English education, proficiency levels, learning styles, confidence and motivation levels, as well as lack of time due to life commitments to be potential variables that may explain individual ELL variations in processing and applying written CF. Flahive (2010) noted that “few studies have been undertaken in the L2 writing literature whose primary focus is individual differences” (p. 135). Similarly, Reynolds (2010) observed that “individual differences . . . may serve as a useful direction for future second language writing research” (p. 167). Future studies could isolate and carefully operationalize the aforementioned variables and measure them over large adult ELL samples to gain a better picture of their role in how written CF impacts students’ written accuracy development over time. To summarize this direction for further research, which has not received sufficient attention, I would like to use F. Hyland’s (2003) words:

We need more studies focusing on individual students, to help us to build up a picture of the various ways that students incorporate feedback into their language learning processes. Such studies would enhance our understanding of the feedback process and help us to give more useful feedback to students. (p. 229)
Although an interaction between the participants’ L1 backgrounds and CF efficacy was not observed in this study, it was not the primary focus of the investigation and may have been impacted by the small participant sample. Therefore, it may be worthwhile to specifically investigate the influence of students’ L1s on the extent to which they benefit from different types of written CF in future investigations. As previous research has indicated (e.g., Ferris, 2011), speakers of different L1s may make different errors in English as a result of the influence of the syntactic, morphological and lexical systems of their native languages. For instance, a native speaker of Russian may struggle with the English article system (Ionin, 2003) and word order (Ferris, 2011), while an Arabic speaker may have difficulty with certain English prepositions (Al-Badawi, 2012). There is some evidence from previous studies (e.g., Chaney, 1999; Ferris, 2006) that certain L2 errors may be better addressed with indirect feedback than others; however, this research area remains underexplored. Further studies are thus necessary to investigate the interaction between students’ L1s, the types of errors they make and the effects of different CF approaches on their written production.

Investigations are also needed to further assess the potential of various error correction techniques utilized in this study and evaluate their effects in other L2 classroom settings. Indirect feedback focused on select number of error types and provided on multiple drafts, grammar mini-lessons, in-class revision sessions focused on student errors and teacher feedback, and various editing strategies employed by students could be isolated and measured against other corrective techniques to investigate the extent to which they help student writers. In particular, the timing of error feedback and the level of explicitness of indirect CF are the areas that could benefit from additional
research. According to Ferris (2011), the timing of CF is a controversial issue in L2 writing. There have been arguments (e.g., Sommers, 1982; Zamel, 1982) that premature error correction may inhibit students’ ability to develop their ideas (i.e., their fluency). However, other researchers (e.g., Evans et al., 2010; Hartshorn et al., 2010) have maintained that giving grammar feedback only on the final draft “misses the opportunity to provide feedback at a teachable moment” (Ferris, 2011, p. 92). Furthermore, some empirical evidence (e.g., Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Ferris, 1997) has suggested that students are capable of simultaneously attending to both form and content feedback on the same draft. Likewise, in the present study, form-focused feedback on multiple drafts did not seem to interfere with the students’ ability to revise the content of their texts. However, more research is needed to provide a firmer answer on the appropriate timing of CF in the writing process.

Existing studies, including the present investigation, have not been able to present an unequivocal case for marking errors in an explicit manner (e.g., error codes) and show its unquestionable superiority to the more implicit methods (e.g., underlining). Ferris (2011) has pointed out that “there is to date no evidence that this more precise labeling of errors makes a difference in students’ short- or long-term progress in accuracy (Ferris, 2006; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986)” (p. 45). Considering that the present study did not attempt to isolate explicit from implicit CF and compare the effects of the two on student progress and that the participants in the study seemed to have different responses toward these two indirect feedback techniques, further research focused on this issue is needed to reach more conclusive results.
In addition, future studies are required to determine the success of written CF with specific types of linguistic error categories. As Bitchener and Ferris (2012) pointed out, “the extent to which written CF is effective for different domains and categories of linguistic knowledge has yet to be more fully explored” (p. 63). While the present study analyzed the effect of CF on a broad range of error types and observed a positive influence of focused, indirect feedback on the overall accuracy improvement over time, it did not specifically consider whether the feedback was able to target certain error patterns better than others. Thus, it remains to be seen which categories of morphological, syntactic and lexical forms and structures can be effectively treated by written CF. What complicates this potential direction of research is that categorizing different types of errors is far from being a simple matter. Error taxonomies tend to vary among different authors (Llach, 2011). Furthermore, it has been suggested that the gravity of different types of errors and their classification may depend on their surrounding context (e.g., Ferris, 2011). These factors should be carefully considered when investigating the effects of written CF on different categories of linguistic errors.

Finally, this study evaluated written accuracy improvement over one academic semester, but further research could extend its scope to assess the effects of written CF on student progress over a longer period of time (e.g., one academic year). To underscore an earlier point, the definitive value of error correction can only be determined if more longitudinal investigations are added to the current research base. Thus, work that continues to explore the long-term role of written CF in treating ELLs’ errors is worthy of further pursuit.
Summary of Chapter V

This chapter has presented conclusions, practical implications and further research recommendations based on the data collected to answer the three research questions selected for the study to shed light on the influence of written CF on adult ELLs’ perceptions and written accuracy. Findings from the data suggested that when the ELLs in the study received indirect, focused CF and actively engaged with it, they improved the accuracy of not only their revised texts but also new pieces of writing. The majority of students found the error correction approaches used in the class to be helpful to their writing development. They emphasized the long-term effectiveness of indirect feedback in facilitating their ability to monitor frequent errors, their progress in self-editing skills, and their overall growth as writers.

Individual student variations were observed in this study, the role of which were discussed in practical implications of this research, along with suggestions on how L2 writing specialists and teachers can modify their CF methods to make them more responsive to student abilities, needs and preferences. In addition, several directions for further research of the effects of written CF were recommended.

In conclusion, Silva (1990) famously described the multitude of conflicting approaches to teaching L2 writing as a “merry-go-round” that produced “more heat than light” (p. 18). It is my hope that the present study, which corroborates and extends a number of recent investigations regarding the benefits of providing focused, indirect written CF, has offered L2 writing specialists and teachers at least partial answers to the dilemma of how to incorporate error correction into ESL writing classrooms and foster the development of written accuracy of adult ELLs.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL LETTER

NOTICE OF APPROVAL

Date: January 19, 2016

To: Vivianne Naderova,
Curriculum and Instructional Studies

From: Shawn McWhorter, IRB Administrator

IRB Number: 2016004

Title: Corrective Feedback in English Language Learners' Writing

Appraisal Date: January 19, 2016

Thank you for submitting your IRB Application for review. Your protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and matches the following federal category for exemption:

☐ Exception 1 – Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices.

☐ Exception 2 – Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interviews procedures, or observation of public behavior.

☐ Exception 5 – Research and demonstration projects conducted by or under the auspices of Department or agency agencies, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise improve public programs or benefits.

☐ Exception 6 – Those food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies.

Annual continuation applications are not required for exempt projects. If you make changes to the study’s design or procedures that impact the risk to subjects or include activities that do not fall within the approved exception category, please contact the IRB to discuss whether or not a new application must be submitted. Any such changes or modifications must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Please retain this letter for your file. This office will hold your exemption application for a period of three years from the approval date. If you wish to continue this protocol beyond this period, you will need to submit another Exemption Request. If the research is being conducted for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, the student must file a copy of this letter with the university dissertation.

☑ Approved consent forms enclosed

OHIO'S POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY
Uniting the Arts & Humanities with Science & Technology

180
APPENDIX B

TEACHER CONSENT FORM

TEACHER CONSENT
CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS’ WRITING

You are being asked to participate in a study being conducted by Vladislava Sidorova, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Curricular and Instructional Studies at the University of Akron.

This study will explore the role of corrective feedback in an adult ESL writing classroom and examine student responses to error correction, in terms of their perceptions and writing. The purpose of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of corrective feedback techniques and their impact on English language learners’ views and written work over time. To reach the goals of this investigation, Ms. Sidorova will visit your class over a period of one term, observe classroom activities, collect samples of student written work with corrective feedback and talk with you and select student participants about error correction in several digitally recorded 30-minute interviews.

There are no known risks associated with this research. Participants will receive no direct benefit from participation in this study, but your participation will help ESL specialists better understand the role of error correction in English language learners’ writing. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may refuse to participate and may choose to discontinue your participation at any time without penalty.

Any information collected will be kept in a secure location: paper records will be kept in a locked cabinet, while digital data will be stored on a password-protected computer. Only Ms. Sidorova will have access to the data. To preserve confidentiality, participants will not be identified by name or other personal information in any presentation or publication of the research results, and pseudonyms will be used when individual participant responses are given as illustrative examples. Your signed consent form will be kept separate from your data, and nobody will be able to link your responses to you. All written and audio data collected, including writing samples and recordings/transcriptions of participant interviews, will be stripped of identifying information, assigned codes and destroyed after the conclusion of the study.

If you have any questions about this study, you may call Ms. Sidorova at (330) 245-4656 or Dr. Shernavaz Vakil, Ms. Sidorova’s dissertation advisor, at (330) 972-6747. This project has been reviewed and approved by The University of Akron Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the IRB at (330) 972-7666.

I have read the information provided above, and all of my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I will receive a copy of this consent form for my information.

_______________________________   ____________________
Participant Signature          Date

Department of Curricular and Instructional Studies
College of Education
Akron, OH 44325-4205
330-972-7765 Office • 330-972-8150 Office • 330-972-5209 Fax

The University of Akron is an Equal Education and Employment Institution
APPENDIX C

STUDENT CONSENT FORM

STUDENT CONSENT
CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS’ WRITING

My name is Vladislava Sidorova. I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Curricular and Instructional Studies at the University of Akron.

I am asking you to take part in a research study because I am trying to learn more about error correction in English language learners’ writing. I would like to find out how students feel about their teacher’s error correction techniques and how error correction influences student written work. I will visit your class during this term and observe classroom activities. If you agree to be in this study, I will collect samples of your writing with your teacher’s corrections and talk with you in several digitally recorded 30-minute interviews about your views on error correction.

There are no known risks associated with this study. You will receive no direct benefit from participation in this study, but your participation will help me better understand the role of error correction in English language learners’ writing. If you don’t want to be in this study, you don’t have to participate. Being in this study is up to you, and there is no penalty if you don’t want to participate or even if you change your mind later and want to stop.

All information collected from you will be kept in a secure location: paper records will be kept in a locked cabinet, and digital information will be stored on a password-protected computer. Only I will have access to this information. To protect your confidentiality, you will not be identified by your name or other personal information in any presentation or publication of the research results, and a pseudonym will be used if your individual responses are given as examples to illustrate a point. Your signed consent form will be kept separate from the information collected from you, and nobody will be able to link your responses to you. Any identifying information in your writing samples and the recordings/transcriptions of your interviews will be deleted, and the records collected from you will be destroyed after the study is complete.

You can ask any questions that you have about the study. If you have a question later that you didn’t think of now, you can call me at (330) 245-4656 or Dr. Shernavaz Vakil, my dissertation advisor, at (330) 972-6747. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Akron Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the IRB at (330) 972-7666.

Signing your name at the bottom means that you agree to be in this study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant Signature ______________________ Date __________

Department of Curricular and Instructional Studies  
College of Education  
Akron, OH 44325-4205  
330-972-7765 Office • 330-972-8150 Office • 330-972-5209 Fax

The University of Akron is an Equal Education and Employment Institution
APPENDIX D

TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The purpose of the teacher interviews was to investigate the teacher’s beliefs about written CF as an instructional method for improving students’ written accuracy and to better understand the role of error correction in the classroom. The following set of open-ended questions adapted from Corpuz (2011) and Lee (2004, 2009) was used in the initial teacher interview in order to elicit the instructor’s opinions regarding the practice of written CF:

1. What is the English proficiency level of your students? How did you gauge their proficiency level?

2. What areas do you focus on in your feedback on student writing? Why?

3. In your opinion, what should be the primary focus of error correction in student writing (for example, sentence structure or meaning)? Why?

4. How do you correct morphological, syntactic and vocabulary errors in your students’ writing? (Probing questions: What error correction strategies do you use? Why have you chosen these strategies?)

5. How has your error correction approach changed/evolved over the years?

6. How are your error correction strategies linked to your classroom grammar instruction?

7. What is your preferred method of marking errors: selective or comprehensive? Why?

8. How do you feel about direct error feedback (i.e., explicitly providing the correct form in student writing)?
9. How do you feel about indirect error feedback (i.e., indicating that an error is present without giving the correct form)?

10. What do you think about using error codes? How effective do you think they are?  
10a. What problems, if any, can you see in using error codes? How can these problems be solved?

11. If you provide comments on student writing, what is their primary function?

12. What are the advantages of the corrective feedback strategies you have chosen to use?

13. What are the disadvantages of the strategies you have chosen?

14. Whose job is it to locate and correct errors in student writing?

15. How much time do you usually spend marking one paper?

16. What do you expect your students to do after you provide corrective feedback on their writing? (Probing questions: What happens after students have received your feedback? What do you ask them to do?)

17. What concerns, if any, do you have in providing corrective feedback on student writing?

18. In your experience as a teacher, how does providing error correction affect students’ written accuracy?

19. In your opinion, what is the most effective way to go about error correction?

20. In your opinion, how do your students feel about the corrective feedback they receive?

21. How has your previous training affected your practice of providing feedback on student writing?

22. In your opinion, what is the importance, if any, of special training in corrective feedback?
APPENDIX E
FOLLOW-UP TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The results of the initial teacher interview guided the focus of the subsequent interview and were used to formulate and refine follow-up interview questions. The purpose of the follow-up interview was to further investigate the teacher’s beliefs regarding written error correction and examine the extent to which the instructor’s beliefs translated into an actual CF practice. The following is a list of questions that were asked during the follow-up teacher interview:

1. In your opinion, what is the main purpose of providing corrective feedback on students’ written errors?

2. In your opinion, what is the role of your students’ ability to self-correct in improving their written accuracy?

3. How do you correct morphological, syntactic and vocabulary errors in student writing at this point in the semester?

4. How has your error correction approach evolved over the course of this term?

5. How would you compare the corrective feedback approach you are using now with the one used earlier in the term?

6. How would you compare the corrective feedback strategies you have used this term and your error correction practice in the past?

7. What is the relationship, if any, between your corrective feedback strategies and your students’ English proficiency levels?

8. How do you adapt your corrective feedback strategies based on your students’ written proficiency?
9. What do you do if a student finds your corrective feedback strategies difficult or confusing to understand?

10. How would you evaluate the overall effectiveness of your corrective feedback practice on student progress in written accuracy this term? (In other words, how much help has your corrective feedback provided in improving students’ written accuracy?)
APPENDIX F

STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The goal of conducting interviews with student participants was to explore their opinions and preferences regarding their teacher’s practice of written CF.

The following set of open-ended questions adapted from Corpuz (2011) and Lee (2004) was asked to investigate their perspectives on written error correction:

1. If you studied English in your home country, how did your teacher(s) correct errors/mistakes in your writing?

2. If you studied English in the United States before this term, how did your English teachers in your previous classes correct errors/mistakes in your writing? (Probing question: Did the teacher give you the correct form or perhaps indicate an error with a correction code?)

3. What areas of writing do you prefer your teacher’s corrections to focus on (Examples: grammar, punctuations, vocabulary, organization and development of ideas)?

4. How do you prefer your teacher to respond to your errors in writing: by marking all errors or only some errors? Why?

5. How do you prefer your teacher to correct your errors: by providing corrections for all errors or by indicating where errors are in your writing, but then letting you fix them on your own? Why?

6. How does the teacher in this class correct your errors (Researcher may probe the participant by mentioning some corrective strategies including error codes, underlining, circling, or providing the correct form)?

6a. Overall, how effective do you think your teacher’s correction strategies are?
6b. If your teacher uses several different error correction techniques, which one(s) do you prefer and why?

7. How easy or difficult is it for you to understand your teacher’s preferred error correction technique(s)?
8. In your opinion, what is the role of error correction in helping you improve your writing?

9. Whose responsibility is it to correct errors in student writing? Why?

10. What do you usually do after you read your teacher’s comments and corrections?

11. How much time do you spend correcting one paper after getting your teacher’s comments?

12. How do you feel about your teacher’s corrections?

13. What are some of the problems or difficulties you have experienced when revising a paper after getting corrections from your teacher (If a participant struggles to articulate an issue, the researcher may provide such examples as confusing corrections, insufficient time to revise the paper, too many errors to revise, fear to make more errors in revisions, or lack of knowledge of the grammar rules behind the teacher’s corrections)手脚或抖动。
APPENDIX G

FOLLOW-UP STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Follow-up student interview questions were developed primarily based on the student responses during the initial interviews in order to further elicit participant beliefs and preferences regarding written CF. The following is a list of questions that were asked during the follow-up interview with the student participants:

1. Please describe how your teacher corrects errors in your writing.
   1a. How is this approach different from the way your teacher made corrections earlier in this class?

2. How helpful is the way your teacher corrects your writing?

3. How do you feel about the way your teacher responds to your errors in writing?

4. In your opinion, how effective is getting the correct answer right away from the teacher?

5. In your opinion, how effective is getting an error underlined or circled instead of receiving the correct answer from the teacher?

6. In your opinion, how effective is getting an error correction code instead of receiving the correct answer from the teacher?

7. How easy is it for you to understand different error correction strategies in this class?

8. Why do you sometimes find it difficult to understand a certain error correction strategy?

9. Out of all the error correction methods we have discussed, which strategy do you find most helpful? Why?

10. Which error correction strategy do you find least helpful? Why?
11. How much time do you spend outside of the classroom consulting your writing materials and handouts?
11a. How much time do you spend on revising a paper after you get your teacher’s corrections?

12. How would you describe your writing progress this term?

13. How has error correction helped you in improving your writing this term?
APPENDIX H

PROMPTS FOR PARTICIPANTS’ WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Prompts for Liling’s texts

Diagnostic: Write about yourself. Please answers some of the following questions: Where do you come from? How long have you been in the United States? How big is your family? How many languages do you speak? What do you do for work?

Essay 1: Write about your house or apartment. Explain what you like or do not like about it. Provide specific support for your statements.

Essay 2: What are the benefits of living with an older person? Add specific details to clarify your supporting points.

Essay 3: What are the qualities of a good doctor? Provide specific support for your statements.

Final: Write a description of yourself. Please describe what you look and act like.

Prompts for Bilge’s texts

Diagnostic: Why did you decide to come to the United States?

Essay 1: Choose a friend or a family member and describe what he or she is like.

Essay 2: Give your opinion on marrying someone of a different culture or religion.

Essay 3: What are the effects of unemployment?

Final: What are the effects of divorce on family life?

Prompts for Saida’s texts

Diagnostic: Write about yourself. Please answers some of the following questions: Where do you come from? How long have you been in the United States? How big is your family? How many languages do you speak? What do you do for work?

Essay 1: Write about your house or apartment. Explain what you like or do not like about it. Provide specific support for your statements.
Essay 2: Choose a friend or a family member and describe what he or she is like.

Essay 3: Should parents use corporal punishment to discipline children?

Final: What are the effects of divorce on family life?

Prompts for Maya’s texts

Diagnostic: Write about yourself. Please answers some of the following questions: Where do you come from? How long have you been in the United States? How big is your family? How many languages do you speak? What do you do for work?

Essay 1: Write about your house or apartment. Explain what you like or do not like about it. Provide specific support for your statements.

Essay 2: Write a description of yourself. Please describe what you look and act like.

Essay 3: Should parents use corporal punishment to discipline children?

Final: What are the effects of a natural disaster such as an earthquake or hurricane?
APPENDIX I

SAMPLES OF STUDENT TEXTS MARKED WITH ERROR CODES

Liling: Excerpt from Essay 1

In addition, my roommates are very nice. Some of them are from the same country with me. And the others are from Nepal. Sometimes, we cook in the kitchen at the same time, and then share the food. We get along well with each other. Finally, the heating works very well, so I feel warm in my apartment.

Maya: Excerpt from Essay 2

My height is 5'12 inches. I have black hair, brown eyes, and oval face. I wear casual clothes and sometimes I wear traditional as well. I work at a coffee shop so I make coffee and sandwiches. I don't like my job because it's so hard. My favorite hobbies is badminton, so I play at least once or twice a week because it has physical exercise. I also like to cook new dishes every once in a while. I live
APPENDIX J

SAMPLES OF STUDENT TEXTS MARKED WITH UNDERLINING

Bilge: Excerpt from Essay 3

I think there are several effects of unemployment. The first effect is of course the economic crisis that it can cause. Expenses and the bills still continue to load unless you are employed or unemployed.

Saida: Excerpt from Final Essay

First of all, those are the effects on family. Undoubtedly, separation of father and mother affects their children the most. Usually, divorce brings to a lot of different changes in daily life of the children, and most of such changes are sad, like stresses, nervousness.