

“I hate when she says *word choice*”: Critical discourse analysis of feedback  
on English as an Additional Language academic writing using a cognitive (in)justices lens

by

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### Abstract

In this study, I conceptualize feedback as a complex discourse that is rooted in an imbalance of power. The primary objective of this research was to investigate assumptions about academic writing in English that are present in feedback on the writing of English as an additional language (EAL) students in a Canadian university. A second objective was to investigate how accessible the academic construct of feedback on written assignments is to students whose first language is not English. To carry out this investigation, I used a critical discourse analysis method, which engaged both the students and their instructors, to characterize and analyze the feedback on the disciplinary academic writing of five self-identified EAL students in a university setting. The theoretical lens for this study is *cognitive (in)justices*. This lens draws together concepts of epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007) and epistemology of blindness (Santos, 2007) to question how knowledge practices, particularly in North America, reflect a mono-epistemicism that excludes non-dominant knowledges or ways of knowing. The analysis uses Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensions of discourse analysis to characterize the types, language, and focus of the feedback, analyze the reception and production of the feedback, and discuss the sociocultural practice in which the feedback is set. As a whole, this three-part analysis problematizes feedback on the disciplinary academic writing of EAL students. There are dissonances between the feedback text, student interpretations of the text, and reported instructor purposes for the text that raise further questions about the role of feedback in perpetuating power structures in educational settings and about the perceived and actual purposes of feedback in university practice. The examination suggests that certain types of feedback could privilege some students over others based on their knowledge of language structures, academic discourse, and educational practices in North American postsecondary settings.

**Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my family who were with me every step of the way.

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This journey has been a long one on a winding path. I have had many companions along the way who have led me, walked alongside me, supported me, challenged me, and loved me. For all of you and your roles in my journey, I am grateful.

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“[F]eedback as communication is particularly complex.  
Giving and receiving feedback occurs within...complex  
contexts, and so is mediated by power relationships and the  
nature of the predominant discourse within each setting”  
- Higgins, Hartley, & Skelton, 2001, p. 273

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### **Preamble: Researcher Positioning**

I have a preoccupation with the concept of feedback in academic settings. It did not start with this dissertation project; it stems from much earlier than that. Though I have received both formal and informal feedback on academic work throughout my life, three specific instances, from different times in my life and different academic settings, stand out. These instances are ones I remember not because they were particularly helpful, but because of their distinct *un-*helpfulness. I have recounted these experiences on several occasions, as examples of what I try *not* to do when providing feedback to my students and, I think, to try to understand the thread that pulls these three incidents together in my mind.

The first incident occurred when I was in Grade 10. I received a lower grade than anticipated on an essay about “epiphany” in Dickens’s *Great Expectations*. As the child of teachers, it had been suggested to me frequently that if I wanted to improve, I should speak to the teacher about it. When I asked her how I could improve my writing for next time, she said (something like), “Oh, there is really nothing that you can do; your writing is just not strong enough and your thoughts aren’t mature enough.” I was floored and totally deflated; I felt as though the teacher had given up on me. That comment has sat with me ever since and rises to the surface whenever I write. It sits in the back of my mind when I am speaking with students about their work or writing comments on their essays. It reminds me to choose my words carefully when I am speaking with students about their writing.

The second incident was different – it was not so blatantly deflating – but equally unhelpful. In the second or third year of my undergraduate studies I took an elective in the philosophy department, the Philosophy of Law. Though I do not remember anything else from the course, I vividly remember feedback that I received on the (only) essay assignment I had to

submit. The comment read: “This is lazy and self-indulgent. A-.” At the time, I remember thinking that the comment summed up my impression of the course (and potentially my impression of philosophy as a discipline in general<sup>1</sup>). But I also understood that “lazy and self-indulgent” was enough, in this course at least, to warrant an A-. What would warrant an A remained a mystery.

Finally, on a recent conference proposal to present some of my preliminary work on this dissertation study, I received the following comments from anonymous reviewer #1:

I get it that the comments instructors write on students' papers are often not helpful. I think that an analysis of these comments and how they are perceived by students is very important and that an eventual paper published on this topic could be an invaluable aid in helping instructors to improve their feedback. I don't think that the tone of the proposal or that politicizing this issue is constructive at all.

Ultimately, as is likely evident, the proposal was rejected. Yet, I remain unclear as to why or how the proposal was deemed tonally wrong or why taking a political stance on the issue was deemed inappropriate and therefore useless to the conference audience.

A lack of mindfulness about the writer is a main thread that weaves through these feedback experiences; none of the feedback providers provided specific, evidence-based, examples of what was lacking in the writing and none provided information about how I might have revised my writing to more appropriately align with their expectations. In addition, the experiences (or at least how I remember them) did not provide an opportunity for dialogue about the feedback; they were all somewhat final in their proclamations about my writing. Even the feedback that was provided verbally, and that might have invited some discussion, did not offer

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<sup>1</sup> With apologies to philosophy and philosophers.

an opportunity for any exchange of ideas. This feedback also emphasizes a power relationship that is inherent in much feedback, especially in academic settings. This power is about knowledge; in an academic setting, the feedback provider is presumed to have more knowledge than the writer and is, therefore, able to comment on the writing. The power is also about evaluation or assessment. Inherent in North American academic settings is the connection between feedback and evaluation; the feedback provider is often in a position to evaluate or assess the writer – a teacher, instructor, or professor, for example – and the feedback can be perceived as an extension of that evaluation or assessment. Finally, as I have recounted the stories more recently, I have come to understand that I have remembered them so vividly because these examples of feedback do not align with my own ideas about the role of feedback in educational settings: that feedback can provide constructive guidance for students.

Over time, as an EAL and academic writing instructor both abroad and in Canada, I cannot imagine how many words and pages of feedback I have written; yet, I remain unclear about how students perceive and use my feedback and how it supports them in reaching their academic goals. To try to understand how different forms of feedback work for students, I have used codes, handwritten feedback, and computer-mediated means; I have focused on writing holistically, and I have focused on specific stylistic and correctness aspects of writing. On innumerable paragraphs and essays, I have written marginal comments like: “It is not clear what you mean here,” “I know what you mean, but this is not the best word to use here,” “be more concise,” “can you be more precise here?,” and “can you expand on this?.” I have also written longer comments at the end of assignments that often give the ‘highlights’ of these marginal comments and try to suggest some sort of modification or creation of a writing habit: “in the future you might consider...” or “continue to work on....” In formulating these comments, I have

become acutely aware that I perceive this feedback as having multiple purposes: “alerting students to their strengths and weaknesses” (Hyland, 2013a, p. 240) in order to “lead to improvements in subsequent pieces of work” (Aoun, Vatanasakdakul, & Ang, 2016, p. 3), and providing some basis for the assessment of that writing (Higgins, Hartley, & Skelton, 2001). That is, I understand feedback as a process for assessing student writing, which might include evaluating or assessing<sup>2</sup> the writing by giving the student a mark that “is fair to the student, fair to the system of grading devised for all of the students in the class, and fair to stakeholders in the courses and fields the students will be entering” (Zawicki & Habib, 2014, p. 202).

For over 10 years, I taught academic writing courses in a university; most students at the institution were required to complete an academic writing course before graduating. These courses were meant to provide students with skills and strategies for writing in university. Therefore, I am also aware that an assumed purpose of my feedback to students was to contribute to “their acquisition of disciplinary subject matter and writing conventions” (Hyland, 2013a, p. 240), that is, to develop students’ proficiency in academic discourse. So, in addition to wondering how my students used the feedback I wrote on their academic writing assignments, I also wondered about its role in helping them meet their academic goals. What type of feedback ‘works’ for these students? How could I address individual students’ writing needs in my course and in future courses? When these students were English as an Additional Language (EAL) writers, these questions also considered the role of this feedback in their development as writers in English: how should feedback address perceived language errors? (How) does the feedback

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<sup>2</sup> Though I use both the terms *assess* and *evaluate* here to describe my understanding of the function of feedback, I realize that these terms have specific meanings as activities in educational settings. The parsing of these meanings is not in the scope of this dissertation study. Throughout the study, when needed and except if it is part of a source reference, I will use the terms interchangeably, or I will use both terms together again acknowledging that there are specific meanings of these terms that is not discussed here.

ask the writer to limit or change their writing voice, developed in another language, in order to conform to structures in North American academic writing practice?

My approach to academic writing is inextricably tied with feedback. I consider feedback part of a writing process. I think that it is important to provide feedback at various points in this process, not just at the end as an evaluative response to the final product, so response and revising are built into the assignments in my classes. In developing this dissertation study, I began with some assumptions: like Canagarajah (2011a) and Séror (2008), among others, I understand writing to be a main way to evaluate student knowledge in a discipline. This means that it is through writing that students demonstrate their knowledge of a subject, and the evaluation of this writing validates the student’s level of understanding. At the outset of this study, it was my assumption that this writing took the form of essays, responses, summaries, critiques, some of which might be accompanied by presentations, but it is by writing that students demonstrate the bulk of their knowledge in the discipline. This means that writing is high stakes for students (French, 2013) because if students are not able to communicate their knowledge in a way that is understandable or accepted by the reader, in the (often) one or (sometimes) two written assignments in the term, the students might fail or at least not do as well as they had hoped. For English as an additional language (EAL) writers, the stakes are even higher because they need to demonstrate their knowledge in a language that is perhaps not as facile for them. In addition, I assumed that most instructors who provide feedback about student writing—whatever the discipline—tend to provide a similar amount of feedback in the same way that I do. The feedback that I provide, modeled originally on some of the more positive models of feedback that I have received in the past, and refined over time by experience and practicality, considers the writing as a whole. I include comments that ask students to consider how the

writing works together. This includes writing comments about the content, the structure, and the format throughout the student’s writing and then providing a short list of specific suggestions for revisions for the next iteration of the assignment, and future writing.

Therefore, I have come to this research with my preconceived ideas about academic writing (AW), language learning and communication, and what these mean in an academic setting. I have always been successful in writing for academic purposes, despite my reluctance as a writer. I know the structures and processes for writing, and I have not always been patient with those who do not. Because I understand this about my perspective, I realize I have to be even more aware of my biases, especially as I look at this information through a cognitive (in)justices lens. As I interviewed student participants about their writing and the feedback they received on that writing, I began to question the feedback I gave in my own AW classes. I wondered what I was ‘preparing’ the students in my classes for and how I may be perpetuating the very feedback structures that I question in this research project. Therefore, while this dissertation reports overtly on the study about feedback on second language writing, it does not as overtly represent my struggle with understanding how the theoretical framework I use in the study intertwines with my practice. That struggle is an on-going project.

### Definitions of Key Terms

Several of the key terms of this study have complex—and sometimes contested—definitions and conceptualizations. The following explanations outline how these elements are conceptualized and used in this study.

#### Academic Writing

As Thaiss and Zawicki (2006) argued, *academic writing* is “one of those terms that is often invoked, usually solemnly, as if everyone agreed on its meaning, and so is used imprecisely yet almost always for what the user regards as a precise purpose” (p. 4). As such, the term is used generally to denote any writing completed in an educational context or specifically to describe “professional writing that trained ‘academics’ do for publications read and conferences attended by other academics” (Thaiss & Zawicki, 2006, p. 4). In postsecondary settings, academic writing is a “form of evaluation” that asks the (student) writer to “demonstrate knowledge and show proficiency with certain disciplinary skills of thinking, interpreting, and presenting” (Irvine, 2010, p. 8). For the writing under examination in this study, academic writing will be “any writing that fulfills a purpose of education” (Thaiss & Zawicki, 2006, p. 4) in a university course. This means that it is “student writing in response to an academic assignment” (p. 4) that has been returned to the student with substantial feedback, either in the form of notations throughout or of summative comments. These assignments can be a variety of texts including conventional academic writing such as “articles, essays, reviews, term papers, reports, exams” (Soles, 2014, p. 6), but they can also be other types of writing undertaken in response to an assignment such as journal entries, blogs, responses, or creative writing. For this study, I included any writing by participants that responded to an assignment. However, transcripts or notes of presentations are not, in this study, included in my working definition of academic writing.

**English as an Additional Language (EAL)**

In literature about learners “for whom English is not their heritage language,” the “proliferation of terms” like “second-language learners” that is used to refer to these learners is “inconsistent and can create both confusion and a lack of conciseness in writing” (Webster & Lu, 2012, p. 83). *English as a second language (ESL)*, *English as an additional Language (EAL)*, *English language learner (ELL)* and *second language learner (SLL)* are among the designations used in literature to describe these students. *L2* is also commonly used as shorthand to denote that English is not necessarily the ‘first’ language of the learners being described. While it is not the focus of this research, it is important to note that categorizations of people as a group, rather than as individuals is contested because it “marks a boundary between first-language English speakers and those acquiring English as an additional language” that is not neutral (Webster & Lu, 2012, p. 83). In this study, in which concepts of a hierarchy of knowledges and epistemic dominance are called into question, acknowledging the problematic nature of this terminology and the “potential consequences or value assumptions” (Webster & Lu, 2012, p. 84) is particularly important.

While acknowledging the problematic nature of these designations, except when the terminology is part of source quotation, in this dissertation I use *English as an Additional Language (EAL)* where possible to designate individuals whose heritage language is not English. The use of *additional* instead of *second* “emphasizes the act of *uniting* or *joining* (something) to something else so as to increase size, number, value, or capacity” (Webster & Lu, 2012, p. 91, emphasis in original). This approach is compatible with the project’s focus on cognitive (in)justices, which also emphasizes a multiplicity of knowledge frameworks.

**Feedback**

In published research about feedback, the definition of feedback provided is often conceptual. It is, for example, defined as “information communicated to the learner that is intended to modify his or her thinking or behaviour for the purpose of improving learning” (Shute, 2008, p. 154) or as “a process through which learners make sense of information from various sources and use it to enhance their work or learning strategies” (Carless & Boud, 2018, p. 1315). Hattie & Timperley (2007) were similarly conceptual in their definition of feedback as “information provided by an agent regarding aspects of one’s performance or understanding” (p.81). Ideologically, these definitions provide some type of focus for the provision of feedback. Practically, they do not explain the format of feedback, which is varied—written, oral, computer-mediated, peer. Ideological definitions of feedback are what are, partially, under examination in this study, so I will not provide a working definition of feedback that is conceptual. More importantly, it is the format of feedback that is important for the scope of this study. In this study, *feedback* is considered to be any written or typed words, notations or symbols that respond to or comment on academic writing.

**Introduction: The Problem of Feedback for University EAL Writers**

Feedback is an industrial, not educational, construct. It is a process adapted from (Western) industrial practices that provided input to a machine to correct or fix a part of the process that was not working as it should have (Boud & Molloy, 2013). In industrial practices, feedback was used so that a system “could be regulated through monitoring its output and feeding this information back into the system to control it” (Boud & Molloy, 2013, p. 700). This industrial concept of feedback was taken up in educational practices in the mid-twentieth century as a way of providing information to students to influence them, with few checks in place to ensure the information was understood and used (Boud & Molloy, 2013). The focus of feedback in early stages was on the input of information to correct a process, so the role of the learner was secondary to the information being input (the feedback) (Boud & Molloy, 2013). Boud and Molloy (2013) described educational assumptions around feedback in this way:

Feedback became synonymous with ‘telling’, that is the one-way transmission of information from teacher to student, as if students did not need to be involved and make their own judgements about what they should do. The assumption being that, if only students acted on what they were told, they could improve their performance. Such an assumption rested on an even bolder set of assumptions that the information transmitted was sufficient for such change to occur, that it was unambiguous and would be interpreted the same way by the student as was intended by the teacher. The piling up of one assumption upon another has been an act of faith on which generation after generation of teachers has proceeded. (p. 701)

The assumptions about feedback in education that have “piled up” since its inception in the industrial model of feedback position students in this system as passive producers and

instructors as the active supervisors of the production, a model which reinforces the hierarchy within education. These assumptions also position the instructors as the knowers. The students receive input from the knowers to conform to the standards required by the system, whether that be the institution, the discipline, or the instructor. Students are involved in a production model that involves “the socially recognised conventions of writing and the established practices of knowledge construction” (Hyland, 2013a, p. 243). Power in our educational systems and institutions lies in knowing and demonstrating that knowledge in an acceptable way. Often, if the knowledge is not represented in a way that is understandable to the reader – usually the instructor or teacher – then it is deemed wrong.

There is no dearth of research about feedback in educational settings, including feedback on academic writing at the postsecondary level. Methods and systems of giving feedback on academic writing (Ajjawi & Boud, 2017; Bitchener, 2012; Ferris et al., 2013; Hashemnezhad, & Mohammadnejad, 2012), purposes for feedback (Mahboob, 2015; Van Heerden et al., 2016), and characteristics of effective feedback (Dunworth & Sanchez, 2016; Evans, Hartshorn, McCollum, & Wolfersberger, 2010) remain contested topics in research about academic writing. Some of the research about feedback in postsecondary settings acknowledges and counters the assumptions about feedback identified by Boud and Molloy (2013) by detailing student perceptions of feedback (Hyland, 2013b; Taylor, 2017), or by analyzing feedback to identify language usage and patterns (Austen, 2016; Brown & Glover, 2014; Hyatt, 2005). Yet, much of this research finds that the assumptions about feedback that Boud and Molloy (2013) describe as the early concepts of feedback have not necessarily changed in practice.

This research about feedback often starts by making assumptions about the feedback that postsecondary students receive on their academic writing. These assumptions are evidenced in

the research design: an instructor or class is identified as participants in the study and are aware of the study from its inception (Austen, 2015; Batt, 2005), or the feedback that is used in the study to understand student perceptions is not feedback that the students have received on any of their own writing, but generic feedback (Kang & Dykema, 2017). In these research designs, the feedback and the perceptions of the feedback may not necessarily be authentic; having knowledge of the study might cause instructors to provide different feedback than they might usually provide, and student perceptions might be removed from their feelings about their own feedback. Another assumption is that, whatever the feedback is, students will be able to read and understand it. I do not mean that the studies assume that students will be able to read the feedback and then act on it. I mean that much of the research about feedback assumes that the students will be able to read the feedback and understand what the words mean. In fact, most of the research (with an exception being written-corrective feedback research in applied linguistics) about feedback assumes that the feedback is mostly linguistic feedback, with fully formed sentences to guide the student in their writing. This study starts, ideologically, before the feedback. That is, it characterizes the authentic feedback that EAL university students receive on their academic writing before addressing how (if) the students understand the feedback and how they negotiate it. One of the assumptions that this study makes is that for some students, like EAL students, before the feedback is useable it has to be understandable.

### **Feedback and EAL Writers**

In North American university contexts, academic writing is a staple of academic work and a main way of evaluating student knowledge in a field. This production and evaluation of knowledge is formalized through adherence to specific rules or genre that include, among other things, paragraph structure, organization of information and ideas, word choice, formality, and tone. The adherence to these rules formalizes a dominant episteme. If academic writing is a site

of formalization of a dominant episteme, then feedback on academic writing is a practice that can monitor this episteme by acknowledging that certain conventions or standards are met: feedback provided by instructors on academic writing often points out where the writer has adhered to, or deviated from, the dominant practices whether in format or content.

Writing is a high-stakes activity for all students, but for EAL students in university settings academic writing is particularly so. This is because these students work not only within new linguistic structures but also within academic discourse which, as Duff (2010) suggested, involves “enculturation, social practice, positioning, representation, and stance-taking” through the negotiation of “institutional and disciplinary ideologies” (p. 170). Written feedback is part of this academic discourse yet in EAL courses we do not often teach students about feedback as an academic structure in the same way that we teach other skills like grammar, sentence structure, argumentation, or essay writing. Furthermore, the language of this feedback is often different from the language that is formally taught in EAL classes.

Research in applied linguistics addresses the role that feedback plays in language acquisition. Attention is paid, for example, to the contribution that feedback makes to the accuracy of additional language writing (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Chandler, 2004; Farid & Samad, 2012; Ferris & Roberts, 2001). Over time, researchers have discussed the types of feedback that best support EAL writers (Ahmadi, Maftoon, & Mehrdad, 2012; Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Mohebbi, 2013), the effects of feedback on certain elements of language (Bitchener, 2008; Ferris, 1999; Hashemnezhad & Mohammadnejad, 2012) and the role of research design and interpretation in producing conflicting conclusions about the effectiveness of feedback (Guénette, 2007; Storch, 2010; Truscott, 1996; Wang & Jiang, 2014). Other recent additional language scholarship investigates

instructor and student perceptions of feedback (Best et al., 2015; Hyland, 2013a,b; Junqueira & Payant, 2015; McMartin-Miller, 2014) and the differences in the perceptions of feedback between teachers and students (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010) in order to understand how feedback is a relationship that should be negotiated (Zawacki & Habib, 2014b) and how power is perceived in it (Séror, 2008). While teacher-given feedback remains a focus, discussions of peer feedback and technology-mediated feedback are also part of the larger conversation (for examples of peer feedback see, Hu 2005 and Hu & Lam, 2010 and of technology-mediated feedback see Abuseileek, 2013 and Yusof, Manan, & Ashaari, 2012)<sup>3</sup>.

While much of this research acknowledges that feedback often includes discipline-specific vocabulary and concepts (Hyland, 2013b), variations of English (Séror, 2008), implied concepts (Hyland & Hyland, 2001), and symbols or other non-linguistic notation (Basturkmen, East, & Bitchener, 2014; Séror, 2009), it often glosses over what such elements mean for students who are trying to make sense of feedback, especially in non-EAL courses. With few exceptions (eg. Hyland & Hyland, 2001), this research focusses on feedback on student writing in language-focused classes such as EAL, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), or writing classes. In these cases, the topic of the course is language learning or writing and so the feedback is focused on language structures and discourse features rather than content per se. Such research does not address how students perceive and negotiate the feedback in other disciplinary courses.

Another strain of research suggests that feedback on EAL writing is important to help students understand and enter into the discourse community of the discipline in which they are

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<sup>3</sup> Issues related to peer feedback and technology-mediated feedback form large discussions on their own (see Hyland & Hyland, 2006); therefore, except where it is relevant to the discussion, I have focused here on teacher-given feedback. Similarly, although oral feedback also finds a place among the research on feedback (for example, Farid & Samad, 2012, Lee, 2011, Saito, 1987, to name a few) for the sake of this discussion, and out of the necessity of space constraints, I have examined primarily written feedback.

writing. Some of this research has found that the messages about the appropriate discourse for the community are “implicit” (Basturkmen, East, & Bitchener, 2014, p. 433) or “hidden” Hyland (2013b) in the feedback. The implication is that messages need to be found, searched for, or interpreted by the writers whose understanding of feedback practices and language may not be the same as those assumed by the instructor or the conventions of the discipline. Naming the feedback messages as implicit or hidden also assumes a certain knowledge of linguistic and pedagogical structures to interpret the feedback.

Particularly for additional language writers, these implicit and hidden messages can be even more difficult to find or interpret because of the language used in the feedback. Not only is the feedback in a language (English, in the case of this study) with which they may not be comfortable, but it is also a different form of English language than what is taught in most EAL classes. There may be a disconnect between the literal and implied meaning of feedback language for these students. This disconnect suggests the need to cast a critical eye on feedback. The idea that students, who are already at a disadvantage because of their position as language learners and outsiders to academic discourse, need to *find* the messages in their feedback can be understood as an injustice to them. It is necessary, then, to examine the practice and discourse of feedback on second language writing as an issue of justice in university settings.

Recent scholarship has examined feedback from a variety of justice perspectives (MacArthur, 2015; MacFarlane, 2017; Chang, 2014; Hanesworth, Bracken, & Elkington, 2019). This dissertation study aims at extending this scholarship to include a cognitive justice approach to examining authentic feedback discourse.

### **Conceptualizing a Research Space: A Critical Approach to Feedback**

This dissertation engages a critical research study that asks questions about feedback as a pedagogical construct that involves a relationship based on a difference in power. This study

reflects a critical approach to questioning the role of feedback in academic structures that prescribe and evaluate the production of knowledge in that setting. It examines, specifically, how feedback on EAL student academic writing is written and received, and how these processes function to stabilize or destabilize structures embedded in North-American university contexts that dictate what type of knowledge is legitimate, who has access to that knowledge (and how), and whose knowledge is valued in these settings. It questions, therefore, tacit explanations about the purposes of feedback and how feedback functions in academic discourse of EAL students. These questions are examined through a critical discourse analysis methodology that focuses on feedback that second language writers receive on their academic writing in disciplinary courses.

This study is also critical in approach because at the heart of this examination are the academic writers—the students who have offered up their writing as evidence of knowledge in a subject area. These students are multilingual writers, who are providing evidence of their knowledge in a language—English—that is not necessarily the first language they would choose to demonstrate their knowledge. These students are also providing evidence of this knowledge in a system—a Canadian university context—with which they are not necessarily familiar. This system uses particular discourse styles, processes, and methods that require entrants into that system to acculturate and socialize into the discourse in order to be able to function successfully within the system. Often, because of their seemingly *incomplete* mastery of the dominant language, their unfamiliarity with North American academic writing structures, and their role in the institution as newcomers (whether as immigrants, refugees, or international students), these students are marginalized, provided with few academic supports, or misunderstood within their disciplinary classes in the institution (Mitchell, 2012; Zhou & Zhang, 2014). In placing the writer at the centre of the study and foregrounding their reactions to, and negotiations with, the

feedback they receive on their writing, this study aligns with van Dijk’s (1993) assertion that the critical discourse analyst works in “solidarity with those who need it most” (p. 252).

Theoretically, this dissertation works with a critical discourse analysis methodology with a cognitive (in)justices lens.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

In this study, I conceptualize feedback as a complex discourse. To investigate feedback within the context of the research questions, I used a critical discourse analysis (CDA) methodology. CDA considers discourse as a “social activity of making meaning” (Forchtner, 2013, p. 1440) and examines “how knowledge, and the access to privilege and power through knowledge, can be a dividing force in society, resulting in clear power differentiations between those who have access to legitimized forms of it and those who do not” (Toh, 2013, p. 1408). I draw primarily on Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of discourse analysis to uncover “opaque aspects” of feedback discourse (Wodak, 2011, p. 40). This model includes a detailed description of the feedback texts under examination and an examination of those texts in relation to the processes and structures in which they are produced and consumed.

Though there are multiple methods of approaching the critical analysis of discourse this study responds to the research questions by uncovering “opaque aspects” of feedback discourse (Wodak, 2011, p. 40) through “theorization and description of both the social processes and structures which give rise to the production” (Wodak, 2001, p. 3) of the feedback text(s) under examination and “some form of close textual...analysis” (Wodak, 2011, p. 40).

### **Knowledge Practices and Cognitive (In)justices**

The theoretical lens used to examine feedback in this study, which I have termed *cognitive (in)justices*, contributes to the critical approach taken in this study. This lens draws on

Santos’s (2007a,b) theories of cognitive justice and Fricker’s (2008) philosophical concepts of epistemic injustice, both of which connect knowledge and justice to consider “what it means to know,” “what counts as knowledge,” and “how knowledge is produced” (Santos, Nunes, & Meneses, 2007, p. xxi) in educational contexts. These theoretical underpinnings of this study question how knowledge practices, particularly in North America, reflect a mono-epistemicism that excludes other “forms of knowledges” and the “groups whose social practices were informed by such knowledges” (Santos, Nunes and Meneses, 2007, p. xix). Cognitive (in)justices, which I will detail further throughout the dissertation, raises questions about what types of knowledge are privileged and how that privilege is represented (Andreotti, Ahenakew, & Cooper, 2011; Fricker, 2008; Santos, 2011; Santos, Nunes, & Meneses, 2007) in educational practices.

In examining feedback through a cognitive (in)justices lens, this study responds to the suggestion by Kuokkanen (2008) that the academy “take a critical look at its own discourses and assumptions and address the sanctioned epistemic ignorance that prevails in the institution” (p. 60). Since writing is a staple of academic work and because “higher education assessment regimes retain the written text as the main assessment mechanism” (Wingate & Tribble, 2012, p. 489) for evaluating student knowledge in a field (Canagarajah, 2011a; Séror, 2008), academic discourse is one area that can be examined through a cognitive (in)justices lens. As such, this study considers what it means to be fully conversant in academic discourse. Understanding and becoming conversant in academic discourse can be viewed as a type of socialization into a community (Duff, 2010; Séror, 2008). Another view of the process of becoming part of an academic discourse community understands academic discourse as a type of “gate-keeping device” (Burke, 2008, p. 205) that privileges certain knowledge and methods of representing that

knowledge. As a key activity in academic writing, feedback plays a role in this gate-keeping by conveying information about “the community’s expectations, values and beliefs, the nature of disciplinary knowledge” (Basturkmen, East, & Bitchener, 2014, p. 433). While messages about these expectations, values, and beliefs have been identified in other research as “implicit” (Basturkmen, East, & Bitchener, 2014, p. 433) and “hidden” (Hyland, 2013b), the examination of feedback in this study seeks to uncover assumptions about knowledge in this feedback which may be misunderstood by or inaccessible to EAL writers.

Viewing feedback through this lens may precipitate changes to the ways in which the feedback is practiced in English as an additional language academic writing contexts.

Considering the micro context of feedback on English as an additional language academic writing can point toward potential implications for the examination of the macro context of academic practice through a cognitive (in)justices lens.

### **Research Objectives and Questions**

Providing feedback on academic writing is a delicate balance of multiple considerations: student, institutional, and discipline expectations, feedback focus, type and language, and instructor time and energy (Sérór, 2009). This research project acknowledges the complexity of feedback, making the argument that despite (or perhaps because of) this complexity, it is necessary to understand how feedback functions as a discourse. The theoretical lens described above leads to important questions about the justness of feedback on the writing of EAL students. The primary objective of this research was to investigate assumptions about academic writing in English that are present in feedback on the writing of EAL students in a Canadian university. A second objective was to investigate whether and how the academic construct of feedback on written assignments is accessible to students whose first language is not English.

The research questions guiding this dissertation are presented as one overarching question with a series of sub-questions. The overarching question is: *What are the relationships among instructor language, student perceptions, and considerations of justice in the feedback on academic writing of undergraduate EAL students in a Canadian university?* The sub-questions are:

- **Feedback types:** *What kinds of feedback do EAL students receive when writing papers for their non-EAL disciplinary courses? What areas of discourse do these kinds of feedback address? What language is used in this feedback?*
- **Production and reception of feedback:** *How do disciplinary instructors perceive their process of providing feedback on academic writing? How do EAL students perceive and negotiate feedback about their academic writing in non-EAL disciplinary courses?*

It is helpful to understand these feedback constructs because they are not questioned sufficiently in research about feedback. These feedback constructs are part of a larger academic process that is inherent in North American English-language based institutions and that may favour those participants who, because of their language backgrounds or knowledge of North American educational systems (which may be because of their background as part of the dominant linguistic group) are better able to make sense of these constructs.

To investigate these questions, I followed five students from different academic disciplines over one term. During that time, I gathered the feedback they received on any writing assignments and interviewed them about their perceptions of the specific feedback they had received and about their ideas about feedback, and academic writing, in general. Where possible,<sup>4</sup> I interviewed the instructors who had provided the feedback to the students. In the

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<sup>4</sup> Interviews with all instructors were not possible, and the process for obtaining the approval to interview both students and instructors was circuitous, which I explain in detail in the methodology chapter.

study, I was concerned only with feedback that was written (or typed) and provided to the student directly on their writing whether done so by hand or word processing. I did not include oral feedback, peer feedback, or feedback through another mediated means, such as Facebook, or other social media.

### **Significance of the Study**

If there is no dearth of research on feedback on academic writing, not to mention feedback on the writing of EAL students, what can another study contribute to the field of feedback on EAL writing? This research distinguishes itself from the existing scholarship in a number of ways.

The study method and design is the primary contribution of the study. Though critical discourse analysis is not uncommon as a methodology in education to “describe, interpret, and explain the relationships among language and important educational issues” (Rogers, 2004, p. 1), it is less common as a method of examining feedback on academic writing. Some recent research about feedback using a critical discourse analysis framework examines student responses to feedback (Kang & Dykema, 2017; Sutton & Gill, 2010), characterizes feedback over time through a corpus study (Hyatt, 2005), and analyzes one type of feedback such as end comments (Batt, 2005). Aside from Hyatt’s (2005) corpus study, these studies use feedback that might not be authentic because the instructors were aware of the study before providing the feedback (Batt, 2005) or because the feedback was a sample written by the researchers specifically for the study (Kang & Dykema, 2017). The design of this study, as I will explain in the Research Methods chapter, ensures that the feedback in the study is authentic; at the time that they wrote the feedback, the instructors were not aware that the feedback was part of this study. The feedback is included in the study as it was provided on student writing; it was not feedback that was contrived for the study or feedback that was provided on writing that was not the student

participants’. In addition, in the study design, the categorization of the feedback took into account all of the feedback markings; every mark that the instructor made on the student’s writing is accounted for in the study. A critical discourse analysis of feedback will extend the existing research on feedback that takes a discourse analysis approach (Ajjawi & Boud, 2017; Mirador, 2000; Nurmukhademov & Kim, 2010; Yelland, 2011) to describe the language of feedback and analyze it within established purposes for feedback—to improve writing and induct students into academic discourse communities. A critical perspective on feedback can not only inform feedback practices but also research about academic discourse and additional language writing pedagogy.

The study’s theoretical framework also provides a lens for looking at feedback that is different from other studies. Though some recent work has been done to understand the relationship between justice and feedback/assessment/evaluation (Chang, 2014; Hanesworth, Bracken, & Elkington, 2019; MacArthur, 2016), as I will further explain in the literature review, the convergence of the cognitive (in)justices theoretical framework and critical discourse analysis methodology is an approach to investigating feedback on additional language writing that has yet to be undertaken in the research literature. By using a cognitive (in)justices framework, this research will initiate a discussion about knowledge assumptions that underpin feedback on additional language writing and how those assumptions may affect EAL students. While a broader conversation about what type of knowledge is privileged and how it is distributed is taking place in other areas of educational research (for example, curriculum studies; see Shay and Peseta, 2016), the existing research about feedback on academic writing hasn’t considered it as a knowledge practice in this way. Positing feedback as an issue of cognitive justice in university contexts will expand the conversation about knowledge practices

in education and reveals insights that can extend beyond linguistic knowledges to other knowledges that are represented in the diverse populations of Canadian universities.

Finally, it is possible that understanding the connections between the language of feedback, how it is perceived by students, and what assumptions about knowledge are inherent in that feedback can inform English for Academic Purposes programs, academic writing courses and other academic success programs that prepare students for writing in high-stakes academic settings. Further understandings of the roles that knowledge, language, and power play in feedback on academic writing could provide these programs with insight into these expectations in order to prepare students for not only the explicit “institutional and faculty expectations” (Benesch, 2001, p. 23) in postsecondary settings, but also the expectations and assumptions of academic work that may be hidden, or at least opaque.

### **Dissertation Structure**

This introductory chapter has provided a context for the inception and development of the study and outlined the research objectives and questions. The following chapter places these research questions within existing literature about feedback on EAL writing, knowledge practices in postsecondary settings, and feedback as a justice issue. Then, in a separate chapter, I outline the theoretical lens for the study. The next chapter outlines the research method in detail, in order to demonstrate that this research was systematically undertaken and so that it can be extended, replicated, and verified. The research methods chapter is followed by a chapter describing the study participants. The study findings and discussion of the findings are presented together in a chapter that is divided into two parts that are based on Fairclough’s (1995) model of discourse analysis. The first part focuses on the text – the feedback the student participants received on their writing. The second part focuses on the discourse practice – the production and consumption of the text – which is the student and instructor perceptions of the feedback.

Fairclough’s model includes a third dimension: sociocultural practice. This dimension is taken up in the conclusion which also provides suggestions about feedback practices for instructors and institutions and suggestions for future research.

The structure of this dissertation is quite conventional while throughout the dissertation the theories, findings, and discussion question English North American academic writing conventions and the mono-epistemicism to which they adhere. The tensions that arise from this structure/content disconnect are not lost on me. At the outset of the project I considered how I might navigate and negotiate these tensions: could I write the dissertation in a non-traditional format? Would it be possible for the form to better reflect the critical approach that I was taking to feedback analysis? Ultimately, though, the structure I chose is conventional. This is the structure that I am best at writing in and that showcases my skills. I am comfortable in this structure because of my linguistic, social, and cultural context: my first language is English and I have lived and learned in a North American setting for my entire life. Comfort with the structure also comes from spending much of my adult life in post-secondary institutions as a student and as an academic writing instructor. I realize that the simple choice of this dissertation structure reflects my biases about academic writing. Throughout the dissertation, I have attempted to acknowledge my biases and bring a critical perspective to these constructs which I know well.

### **Literature Review Feedback, Assumptions about Language, and Knowledge Practices**

Starting from the position that research about feedback on academic writing, knowledge practices, and justice are co-informants in this study, this chapter details some of the published literature that connects these three themes in order to situate this study within this literature. The thread through the chapter is feedback and the review considers how feedback has been examined in two main ways: as a way of monitoring knowledge in academic writing, and as a justice issue. This chapter first surveys some of the themes in research about feedback on academic writing in general and on academic writing by EAL students. Then, it connects literature about feedback<sup>5</sup> to the themes that co-inform the study: knowledge practices in postsecondary education, and recent literature that considers feedback as a justice issue. The review of these areas of research about feedback opens up a space for this study. As a methodology, critical discourse analysis (CDA) is suited to research the questions that this study poses in this relatively under-investigated space. Therefore, the last part of this chapter, discusses the literature about CDA in education and in applied linguistics that also informs this study.

#### **Feedback on Postsecondary Academic Writing**

The range of ideas, investigations, and issues involved with this research about postsecondary<sup>6</sup> academic writing demonstrates that feedback remains a “complex concept” (Mulliner

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<sup>5</sup> Because of the amount of literature about feedback on academic writing in general, as well as on additional language academic writing, for the purposes of this review of literature I have included research about teacher-given feedback on academic writing. I have not included research about peer feedback, oral feedback, or technology-mediated feedback, which form major discussions on their own (see Hyland & Hyland, 2006). I have, however, included literature about feedback in both additional language and non-additional language (disciplinary) postsecondary settings because this literature is cross-referential and informs the discussion about the role of feedback in academic writing and academic discourse.

<sup>6</sup> In the literature postsecondary, higher education, the university, and even the academy are used to designate this educational context. I use *higher education* or *postsecondary* when the source does not make a distinction about the type of higher education. When I refer specifically to this study, I use *university*, since that is the type of postsecondary education institution represented in this study. I have used *postsecondary*, rather than *university* in this section of the literature review because although this dissertation study is about student writing in university, the literature reviewed includes mostly university settings, but often refers to it as postsecondary.

& Tucker, 2017, p. 267) in writing pedagogy. A common perception in research about feedback on academic writing is that it is an essential part of student learning (Ahmadi, Maftoon, & Mehrdad, 2012; Carless & Boud, 2018; Hyland, 1998; Poulos & Mahoney, 2008; Taylor & Burke da Silva, 2014; Torres & Anguiano, 2016; Wang & Li, 2011). The research examines a range of ideas about this significance and complexity. Among other things, recent research suggests methods and modes for providing feedback (Bitchener, 2012; Ferris, Liu, Sinha & Senna, 2013; Hashemnezhad & Mohammadnejad, 2012), analyzes how students use feedback (Bijami, Pandian, Singh, M., & Kaur 2016; Farid & Samad, 2012; Harran, 2011; Pitt & Norton, 2016; Zhao, 2010), suggests alternatives to instructor-written feedback (AbuSeileek, 2013; Chen, 2016; Yu & Li, 2015; Yusof, Manan, & Alias, 2014), and posits the characteristics of effective feedback (Dunworth & Sanchez, 2016; Evans, Hartshorn, McCollum, & Wolfersberger, 2010).

### **Feedback on the Academic Writing of EAL Students**

Applied linguistics research about feedback on additional language writing has taken two general approaches. One focus is a type of causal view of feedback. This approach, centered on debate (Bruton, 2009; Chandler, 2004; Ferris, 1999; Truscott, 1999; Truscott, 2010) about Truscott's (1996) assertion that the “correction of grammatical errors for the purpose of improving a student's ability to write accurately” (p. 329) does not work and may even be detrimental to language learning, takes a prescriptive approach to feedback. It suggests that with the right combination—a certain type of feedback, with a certain type of error, with a certain type of student, with a certain type of writing—it is possible to find the most effective way to improve the accuracy – in these studies explained as adherence to English grammatical conventions and spelling – of student writing. This approach understands feedback as “an instructional procedure given to inform a learner of the accuracy of a learning task” (Amara,

2015, p. 36) and therefore debates whether feedback “contributes to improved accuracy in student writing” (McMartin-Miller, 2015, p. 25, see also AbuSeileek, 2013; Bruton, 2009; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Guénette, 2007; Storch, 2010; Truscott, 2007). This research is predicated primarily on quantitative studies (Ahmadi, Maftoon, & Mehrdad, 2012, Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Chandler, 2004; Farid & Samad, 2012; Ferris & Roberts, 2001) that attempt to determine “which method” of feedback “is effective” (Wang & Jiang, 2014, p. 114) for improving accuracy in writing. In making this determination, the language used to categorize methods of feedback essentializes it by using oppositional and dichotomous phrases: direct/indirect (Ahmadi et al., 2012; Bitchener, 2008; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Wang & Jiang, 2015), focused/unfocused (Ferris, Liu, Sinha, & Senna., 2013; van Beuningen, 2010), and treatable errors/non-treatable errors (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Ferris, 1999).

The second type of research approaches feedback as relational and dialogical (Ajjawi & Boud, 2017). This focus views “writing as a social event” (Séror, 2008, p. 161) in which it is necessary for additional language writers to “go beyond the need to produce language that is accurate and mechanically correct” (Séror, 2008, p. 161). Although, in 1985, Zamel hinted at this relationship by suggesting that feedback should “respond not so much to student *writing* but to student *writers*” (p. 97, emphasis in original), the idea that feedback is relational has recently gained more traction (Jones, 2011; Séror, 2008, 2009; Unlu & Wharton, 2015; Wang & Li, 2011; Zawacki & Habib, 2014b), and is in dialogue with similar research that is not specific to EAL contexts (Ajjawi & Boud, 2017; Basturkmen, East, & Bitchener, 2014; Sutton & Gill, 2010; Yelland, 2011). Rather than considering specific types of feedback that 'work best', this discussion uses qualitative approaches to understand the terms of this relationship including the role of language (Canagarajah, 2006a; Hyland, 2013b; Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Treglia, 2008)

and student and faculty perceptions of feedback (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Best et al., 2014; Dunworth & Sanchez, 2016; Hyland, 2013a,b; Junqueira & Payant, 2015; Mulliner & Tucker, 2017).

Although they differ in methods, research purposes, and approaches to understanding feedback on academic writing, these two focal points raise queries about the practice of feedback in additional language writing. These questions, which consider assumptions that underlie feedback in relation to language and knowledge practices, include: What does it mean to 'write accurately'? How do changing notions of language affect concepts of accuracy? What knowledge about academic discourse is assumed in feedback? This dissertation study, which investigates assumptions about academic writing in English in the feedback on postsecondary additional language writing, finds a place in this body of literature because of its critical approach, through critical discourse analysis (CDA), to the intersections among assumptions about knowledge and language, instructor feedback, and student perceptions of feedback.

### **Feedback and the Representation of Knowledge**

The next chapter, which outlines the theoretical lens for this study, details a broader discussion about how knowledge and knowledge practices in (Western) postsecondary settings engage with questions of mono-epistemicism, education and justice, and academic discourse. However, as will be highlighted in this section of the literature review, connections between feedback and epistemological dominance have been under-investigated. The literature that informs the theoretical lens argues that a singular concept of knowledge, particularly as reflected in knowledge practices in the West, does not recognize suppressed forms of knowledge and knowledge production and that there is a need to examine assumptions about knowledge, particularly in educational contexts. It suggests that it is important to consider the limitations of the use of a single framework in our understanding of what knowledge is and what it means to

create new knowledge in academic settings and develop new frameworks. Since the next chapter will outline philosophical and post-colonial concepts of knowledges, cognitive justice, and epistemic injustice and discuss some of the ways in which academic practices can be considered sites for the examination of cognitive (in)justices, here I will review literature that details such examinations, including those few that suggest that feedback is a site for this examination.

### **Examining Knowledge Production in Postsecondary Settings**

For researchers who participate in this discussion, understanding the possibilities for epistemological equity means examining the ways in which knowledge is produced in postsecondary settings, including what types of processes are valued and who makes this determination. In his explanation of abyssal thinking, for example, Santos (2007a) noted the monopoly afforded to “modern science” for making the distinction between “true and false” so that other knowledge processes that include “popular, lay, plebeian, peasant, or indigenous knowledges” are essentially invisible (p. 2). Since it is a main activity of academia and a means of knowledge production, research—and the ways in which research is taught in postsecondary settings—is one of the practices that is examined by writers concerned with justice in knowledge practice. These studies provide context—and potentially models—for the examination of academic writing as a way of representing knowledge, which is the focus of this dissertation project.

#### **Research as knowledge production.**

Modern science’s monopoly on determining *truth* and therefore its position “on this side” of Santos’s (2007a) abyssal line, is a focus for researchers and theorists who consider knowledge production in higher education. Appadurai (2000) connected knowledge production with research. He acknowledged that “research is virtually synonymous with our sense of what it

means to be scholars and members of the academy” (p. 9), but he pointed out that it is a practice that is based in Western intellectual tradition. In “Grassroots globalization and the research imagination,” he attempted to understand the relationship among “pedagogy, activism, and research in the era of globalization” (Appadurai, 2000, p. 3) by problematizing the “naive” concept of research as the “pursuit of the not-yet-known” that results in the production of “new knowledge” (p. 9). He suggested that this new knowledge is the product of “some sort of systematic procedure” that meets “certain criteria” rather than “intuition, revelation, rumor, or mimicry” (Appadurai, 2000, p. 9-10). In a Western concept of research, the criteria for producing “reliable new knowledge” includes being rooted in prior knowledge—“the review of the literature, the strategic citation, the delineation of the appropriate universe...of prior, usually disciplinary, knowledge”—as well as being “interesting” to its intended audience (p. 10). The paradox, then, is that research requires a certain capacity to make “disciplined inquiries into those things we need to know, but do not know yet” (Appadurai, 2006, p. 167). Appadurai (2000) suggested that ideas of research from various “societies and traditions of inquiry” need to be considered in a dialogic way to emphasize multiple understandings about what “counts as new knowledge” and what elements are “central in the pursuit of such knowledge” (p. 14). Although he did not use the terms, Appadurai was arguing for a type of cognitive justice<sup>7</sup> in which research practices are not dominated by a singular epistemology or concept of knowledge.

Boden and Epstein (2006) tied impediments to Appadurai’s call for multiple knowledges in research to neo-liberal ideas and a market economy where knowledge is a ‘production’ based

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<sup>7</sup> In “The Right to Research”, Appadurai (2006) argued for the recognition of research as “a specialised name for a generalised capacity” (p. 167) that all human beings possess. Although he framed this argument as a recognition of a “special kind” (Appadurai, 2006, p. 176) of right, the suggestion that all people are capable of research also means that there are a variety of knowledges with which to approach research, connecting it to considerations of cognitive justice.

on adherence to a “defined set of research rules rather than genuine debate about ideas and theories” (p. 230). They argued that research knowledge is “marked by” what “counts as research knowledge” on a global scale (Boden & Epstein, 2006, p. 230) and that universities participate in the determination of this knowledge through “globalised standards, recruitment criteria and the shaping of journal editorial policies” (p. 230).<sup>8</sup> As knowledge producers, universities have been “colonised by neo-liberal regimes of truth and practice” that result in the production of knowledge that is based on “economic utility” (p. 234). This critique of the hegemonic system of knowledge production in universities further urges the examination of the ways in which research as knowledge production enacts cognitive injustice in these settings. Boden and Epstein (2006) suggested that it is necessary to look for the “contradictions and chinks within university systems” (p. 236) where these examinations can take place.

Coleman and Dionisio (2009), in their examination of how a transnational research project in which they were involved did not address “the problem of epistemological exclusion and cognitive injustice” (p. 392), followed up on Appadurai’s (2000) suggestion that concepts of research from various traditions must be considered in understanding knowledge production processes. They asked how researchers can “construct a dialogue between different knowledges and epistemologies given the academic hierarchy still present from imperialism and colonialism” and “the distinctive and highly different cultural contexts in which these knowledges are embedded” (Coleman & Dionisio, 2009, p. 395). They suggested that such research collaborations must “must take cognitive injustice into consideration” (p. 390) but that these are hindered by “structures and practices” that are part of “the West’s dominant standpoint” (p. 402),

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<sup>8</sup> For further discussion about the global production of knowledge through publications, and particularly the dominance of a Western model (in English) for that production, see Canagarajah’s (2002) *A Geopolitics of Academic Writing* and, more recently, Hyland’s (2016) “Academic publishing and the myth of linguistic injustice.”

because of the codified research practices and the commodification of knowledge production described by Boden and Epstein (2006).

### **Pedagogy and knowledge production.**

Processes for knowledge production have also been examined from a pedagogical perspective. That is, through investigating the ways in which educators teach knowledge production practices such as research and writing. Purdy and Walker (2013), for example, examined the ways in which composition textbooks “construct” (p. 12) students as researchers in introductory composition classes. Their study revealed that the texts “provide a focus for the institution’s desire to control and direct students’ movement into the established practices of research that academics use to construct students’ knowledge making, their learning spaces, and themselves” (p. 12). The implication of the study is that the existing knowledges about research that students bring to their introductory composition classes are inadequate; thus, their “knowledge and practices must be transformed” (p. 12) so that they can participate with some agency in a postsecondary setting. Purdy and Walker (2013) found that the “range of research practices” (p. 12) that students already possess (such as digital practices) were not considered in the textbooks that they studied. Although their purpose was not to examine these books within a cognitive justice framework, their findings are consistent with Fricker’s (2007) concept of epistemic injustice that does not acknowledge someone’s capacity as a *knower*. So, while examining the pedagogy involved with knowledge production processes, Purdy and Walker’s (2013) study also highlights how cognitive (in)justices are present in postsecondary processes.

Also from a pedagogical perspective, Andreotti, Ahenakew, and Cooper (2011) conceptualized a model for introducing epistemological pluralism into higher education. They argued that in postsecondary settings, knowledge production is based on the necessity for

“controversy” in order to “improve students’ analyses, promote intellectual freedom and equip students to engage with complexity, diversity and uncertainty in higher education” (p. 45). They presented two lenses through which it is possible to introduce controversy in higher education; each lens is an interpretation of possible epistemologies in higher education. The first lens “is grounded in unequivocal and universal knowing” and is characterised by a win-lose debate, objectivity in analysis, autonomous thought, and “managing and reducing complexity, diversity and uncertainty” (p. 45). The second lens “is grounded on a premise of equivocal knowing” and is characterised by multiple worldviews, situatedness in analysis, ontological responsibility and “living with complexity, diversity and uncertainty” (p. 45). Because this second lens is “informed by” their “interpretations of aboriginal cosmologies as lecturers in indigenous studies” (p. 45), they posited it as a way of making visible “the other side of the line” in Santos’s (2007a) characterization of abyssal thinking. While it highlights a different aspect of the cognitive (in)justices lens than does Purdy and Walker’s (2013) study, this examination of knowledge production and pedagogy equally points to the limitations of using a single framework for defining knowledge. These studies also suggest that it is not only the linguistic *code* that is an important part of academic discourse, but that the code of format or structure is also an aspect of this discourse that should be examined in relation to the representation of knowledge.

A recent (2016) special issue of the journal *Teaching in Higher Education* (volume 21, issue 4) with a focus on “Curriculum as contestation” takes up concepts of knowledge in Higher Education and questions curriculum as a method of distributing knowledge. The journal editors, Shay and Peseta (2016) stated that “the role of curriculum in the redistribution of powerful knowledge is critical” (p. 363) and suggested that curriculum reform calls for “critical analysis of the ways in which curricula misrecognize particular forms of cultural capital and values as

normal and/or universal” (p. 363). The journal issue includes articles which discussed “the extent to which curriculum maldistributes powerful knowledge and misrecognizes knowers” (Shay & Peseta, 2016, p. 364) and therefore perpetuates injustices. Contributors to the volume discuss the role of regional and local knowledges in curriculum (Clegg, 2016), knowledge value in higher education curriculum (Hordern, 2016) and de-colonizing the curriculum (Lockett, 2016).

### **Academic discourse and representations of knowledge.**

Academic discourse and its role in perpetuating a singular epistemological framework is also an area of investigation for scholars who are concerned about knowledge practices in postsecondary settings. Hyland (2011) argued that academic discourse sustains “the creation of knowledge” because it “constructs the social roles and relationships which create academics and students” (p. 171). Like Santos (2007a, 2007b) and Appadurai (2000), among the reasons Hyland (2011) noted for studying academic discourse is to question empiricist views of scientific knowledge that are present in research processes (p. 173).

Although not framed in terms of cognitive (in)justices, questions about the ways in which a dominant academic discourse is perpetuated through academic writing and writing instruction are not new. Bartholomae (1986), in his pivotal essay “Inventing the University,” argued that it is through composition classes that students are inducted into a certain type of academic discourse. He suggested that successful progress in this induction is “marked by [students’] abilities to take on the role of privilege” and “by their abilities to establish authority” (p. 20). He noted that it is “knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing” (Bartholomae, 1986, p. 4) in specific ways that define this authority. The academic literacies model, developed from the New Literacies movement, suggests that these skills should be approached at an epistemological level, where students “acquire a repertoire of linguistic practices” based on “complex sets of

discourses, identities and values” (Paltridge, 2002, p. 18). In this model, writing is a social phenomenon (Wingate & Tribble, 2012) through which “students acquire new ways of knowing and making sense of the world, and themselves” (Sutton & Gill, 2010, p. 4). For some, this means that academic literacy is a “singular phenomenon” which is made up of a “set of skills to be acquired” and transferred to other contexts (Paltridge, 2002, p. 18). Another view from Paltridge (2002) is that academic literacy is a type of as “socialization in which students learn ‘university culture’ as a kind of apprenticeship” (p. 18).

While the study of academic literacies is concerned with “meaning making, identity, power and authority” in education and “foregrounds the institutional nature of what 'counts' as knowledge in any particular academic context” (Lea & Street, 2006, pp. 227-228), it attempts to understand the ways in which academic discourse is constructed so that pedagogical practices can help students to succeed within these structures. In language pedagogy, critical English for academic purposes (EAP) is another way of understanding academic literacy that brings critical pedagogy into additional language teaching and learning to “question the status quo: why are things the way they are? Who decides? What are other possibilities?” (Benesch, 2001, p. xv). Critical EAP views students as “active participants who can help shape academic goals and assignments rather than passively carrying them out” (Benesch, 2001, p. xv). It questions assumptions about language, discourse, and writing in academic settings, as well as the concept that students are “novices or outsiders” who need to be inducted into discourse; instead, according to Benesch (2001), students are “active members of the academy” (p. 139). Again, although not framed by a cognitive (in)justices lens, by “making explicit the power relations, values and assumptions on which teaching in various institutions is based” (Benesch, 2001, p.

139), critical EAP practices are involved in revealing sites where knowledge practices involve epistemic dominance.

### **Academic writing.**

Academic writing is high stakes for students (French, 2013), and specifically for additional language writers because it is a dominant way of evaluating student knowledge (Canagarajah, 2011a; Séror, 2008). Kuokkanen’s (2008) concerns with the “problem of speaking” in a different epistemological framework than the dominant one raises questions about evaluating student knowledge using a singular framework. The “problem of speaking” relates to Fricker’s (2007) concepts of testimonial injustice because it questions the writer as a knower and therefore undermines the agency of the writer within the academic discourse community. Deficit discourse in academic writing research contributes to this epistemic injustice because it assumes that “there is one mainstream discourse and that languages and literacies other than those of the dominant mainstream represent a deficit or a deficiency on the part of students who do not possess them” (Lawrence, 2003, n.p.).

Instead of interpreting differences between the expectations and the actuality of student writing as a deficit on the part of the student, Burke (2008) argued that it is necessary to analyze the ways in which “writing practices might serve as a form of exclusion” (p. 199) in postsecondary settings. In her analysis of academic writing practices in higher education “as a form of regulation over access to higher education” she also suggested ways of “pushing the boundaries of who can write and how” (p. 199). She argued that individuals do not “simply learn the ‘right’ skills and then use them to produce writing that clearly, logically and coherently reflects their thinking” (p. 200). Instead, as a social practice writing is “deeply enmeshed in wider power relations that construct the ‘author’ in classed, gendered and racialised ways” and in

“a wider politics of identity and knowledge” (p. 200). Despite this, students must work within the “contested, contextualised and heterogeneous” conventions of the academy which regulate the construction of academic knowledge” (p. 204). Burke (2008) suggested that “[o]ther’ bodies of knowledge that the student might bring to their work are often invalidated” (p. 204) if that knowledge is not constructed in such a way that fits with the established expectations of academic writing.

Similarly, French (2013) argued that because of its role as the “established, authoritative vehicle for autonomous self-expression throughout Western culture” (p. 241), specifically in higher education, academic writing practices function with disciplinary power. With Bartholomae (1986) and Purdy and Walker (2013), she suggested that in postsecondary settings students are expected to construct a “suitable academic writing identity” through conforming to certain academic writing practices. She asserted that despite its disciplinary power, “the concept of ‘good’ academic writing remains stubbornly elusive” (French, 2008, p. 242). French (2008) suggested that one possible reason for this elusiveness is that “[p]revious educational experiences, in school and beyond” likely “affect students’ familiarity and confidence with dominant academic writing practices” (p. 242). The need to question assumptions about ‘good’ writing suggests that academic writing emphasizes an epistemological privilege and should be examined through a cognitive (in)justices lens.

### **Feedback as Knowledge Practice and Social Process**

In a relational approach to feedback, perceptions about feedback and the social processes involved with it are particularly important. Recent studies have investigated instructor perceptions and practices about feedback (Hyland, 2013a, 2013b; Junqueira & Payant, 2015), student perceptions of feedback (Best et al., 2015; McMartin-Miller, 2014), and the differences in the perceptions of feedback between teachers and students (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010). One

area of interest in relation to perceptions of feedback is the ways in which feedback is perceived as “a means of socialising students into the community’s discursive practices” (Basturkmen, East, & Bitchener, 2014, p. 433; see also Séror, 2009 and Sutton & Gill, 2010). In their study of feedback by supervisors of dissertation drafts, for example, Basturkmen, East, and Bitchener (2014) found that socialization into a discourse community was evident not only in the feedback but also in the views expressed by the supervisors who understood that their “role was to help in the creation of clear writing and observance of technical conventions” (p. 443). Hyland (2013a) also asserted that feedback relates to “the acquisition of an academic competence in both disciplinary knowledge and the ability to discuss it appropriately” (p. 241). His study of the perceptions and practices of faculty in relation to feedback reveals, among other things, that faculty “may be exercising their personal preferences when giving feedback,” but they also seek “to accomplish disciplinary-specific pedagogic goals” (Hyland, 2013a, p. 251). So, decisions about feedback reflect the “ideologies and expectations of their academic community” (Hyland, 2013a, p. 251).

In discussing how second-language postsecondary students interpret tutorial feedback on their writing, Hyland (2013b) pointed out that “not all the messages conveyed [in feedback] are explicit or...related to the work at hand” but that they “inform students of their tutors’ beliefs about their subject, about learning, and about the value of literacy in their disciplines” (p. 180). While it is possible to add “beliefs about language” to this list, the more striking point that can be made about this assertion is that these messages are, as Hyland termed them, *hidden*. Hyland (2013b) concluded that the students in the study are “rarely provided with feedback which helps them to conceptualize the varied epistemological frameworks of the academy” and therefore are “unable to see how these relate to disciplinary communication” (p. 186). So, these assumptions

about knowledge and discourse in the academy need to be interpreted or ‘found’ by the students, whose understanding of feedback practices may not be the same as those assumed by the instructor or the conventions of the discipline. Hyland (2013b) framed his conclusion as a type of disconnect between academic expectations and the communication of these expectations through feedback and therefore suggested “alignment between student expectation and tutor practice which can only be achieved through dialogue and training” (p. 186). However, viewed through the cognitive (in)justices lens, this disconnect raises questions about how the academic construct of feedback on written assignments represents an epistemological privilege that relies on a singular concept of knowledge and if and how it excludes knowledges that are not part of this concept. The undertones of cognitive (in)justices in Hyland’s conclusions, which suggest that a certain knowledge (about language, about disciplinary epistemologies) is assumed in the feedback on the student writing in his study, have informed the research questions for this dissertation study.

### **Feedback, Assessment, and Justice**

Considerations of social justice are not new to educational research and practice, but regarding feedback from a justice perspective has not been as common. As has already been discussed, researchers acknowledge that feedback can be hard to decipher (Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, & Parker, 2016) and particularly so for EAL students (Hyland, 2013b), but do not necessarily consider the lack of understanding as potentially unjust, or a social justice issue.

Chang (2014) is one of the few who use a different discourse to name the difficulties that EAL students may have in deciphering feedback. She called feedback an *exclusionary practice* (Chang, 2014) in academia because in her examination of the connection between feedback on international EAL students’ writing and inclusion in the “community of academia” (Chang, 2014, p. 262), she found that the feedback students received was non-existent, illegible, or too general

and therefore puzzling to the participants. She concluded that feedback, as it is currently practiced in the institution in her study, “instils in the students a sense of insecurity” so that the students are excluded from the “broad communities of academia and English language writers” (Chang, 2014, p. 273). Because of this exclusion, the students did not move out of “a peripheral position” in their programs (Chang, 2014, p. 273).

This research about feedback and justice is part of a broader area of research that considers justice and assessment practices. Although assessment is not synonymous with feedback, the two can be tied together as feedback is often a part of assessment or can be perceived as a type of assessment. Two volumes of the *Perspectives on Writing* series from the Writing Across the Curriculum Clearinghouse tie writing assessment to justice directly. Inoue’s (2015) book, *Anti-racist Assessment Ecologies: Teaching and Assessing Writing for a Socially Just Future* aimed to “theorize and illustrate an antiracist writing assessment theory...by theorizing writing assessment as an ecology, a complex system made up of several interconnected elements” (p. 9). Its intended audience is writing instructors and writing programs. Throughout the volume, Inoue (2015) discussed racism as a structural problem within the teaching and assessment of writing and asserts that this problem can only be solved by conceiving writing assessment as an “antiracist ecology” (p. 14). The more recent volume in the series, *Writing Assessment, Social Justice, and the Advancement of Opportunity*, is an edited collection of essays that apply social justice theories to writing instruction and assessment to demonstrate how this can advance student opportunity. Collectively, the essays aim to demonstrate that the “enactment of social justice must result not solely in the identification of injustice but in demonstrable change for educational communities” (Poe, Inoue, & Elliott, 2018, p. 17).

Also from a theoretical perspective, McArthur (2016) made a case for assessment for social justice primarily based on the assumption that assessment has a big influence on learning and therefore is important to social justice. However, because assessment is associated with proceduralism, there are limitations to how just assessment can be since objectivity and fairness are assumptions in which assessment is based. Therefore, within assessment, difference and diversity are sometimes essentialized. McArthur (2016) made the point that “rules are themselves social constructions” (p. 973) and therefore there are hidden assumptions that underlie these constructions which may be fair or just for those who create the rules, but not necessarily for those who have to abide by them. In classes, for example, students are often informed about the standards or outcomes in a course outline but have no opportunity to engage with these standards and outcomes, and so are not necessarily “party to an informed contract” (McArthur, 2016, p. 970) in the course outline. For McArthur (2016), the need to investigate justice in assessment is not localized to the classroom; she sees the need for institutions to rethink “the curriculum and assessment in the light of a more diverse student body” (p. 970) that is a result of the internationalization of campuses. Hanesworth, Bracken, & Elkington (2019) extended MacArthur’s (2016) work by proposing an approach to assessment that is based on social justice theory that “aims to tackle the inhibiting effects of current systemic inequities in assessment outcomes, especially as experienced among minoritised groups” (p. 100). The approach they proposed is an institutional and systemic one that is both “universal and anticipatory” and “responsive to individual learning requirements” (Hanesworth, Bracken, & Elkington, 2019, p. 103) particularly for students who may not have epistemic privilege.

Other research approaches justice and feedback from a student perspective. Studies by Nesbitt and Burton (2006) and MacFarlane (2016), which are primarily quantitative, asked

students about their perceptions of how just the feedback they receive is. Based on their findings, Nesbitt and Burton (2006) suggested that perceptions of injustice in feedback can reduce student motivation. Although they discussed some broad implications for their findings – such as pressure on instructors to inflate grades because of low evaluations – they did not consider the systemic roots of the perceived injustice. MacFarlane’s (2016) study of post-secondary students in Hong Kong that investigated “student attitudes toward forms of assessment that measure student behaviour and attitudes” (MacFarlane, 2016, p. 4) also emphasized the need for rethinking assessment from a rights perspective. Although he did not clearly indicate a rights-based theory within which he is working, students in his study perceived that assessment of behaviour and attitudes was unfair. Based on his results, MacFarlane (2016) argued that there is a need to increase the emphasis on “rights *within* the curriculum, such as fairness in group assessment, respecting ‘passive’ as well as ‘active’ learning preferences” and respecting adult learners’ choices (p. 13, emphasis in the original). In these two studies, frameworks for justice are not clearly articulated so to some extent the studies can be viewed as asking students how *fair* they think the feedback assessment is, rather than the justness of the feedback. While fairness can be equated with justice and rights, a clearer definition of the local and institutional sites of injustice or perceived unfairness is needed. In addition, these works highlight an overarching question (one that is beyond the scope of this dissertation): who determines what is just in these contexts and what criteria is used to make this determination?

Assessment, and feedback, have been investigated from justice perspectives, though not from a cognitive justice perspective. This dissertation study introduces concepts of cognitive (in)justices into this conversation.

### **The Research Space**

#### **Feedback, Knowledge Practices, Justice, and Critical Discourse Analysis**

It is possible, then, to trace connections among literature about knowledge practices, justice, and feedback in postsecondary settings. Academic discourse, including academic writing, in these settings is a potential site for examining epistemic privilege and assumptions about language and linguistic accuracy. As a type of academic discourse that plays a large role in the socialization of students into discursive practices, including into linguistic structures and standards, this study proposes that feedback on academic writing warrants further examination, specifically what role feedback takes in a cognitive (in)justices lens. The research objectives and proposed research questions suggest that the examination consider both the assumptions about knowledge that are reflected in the feedback and whether the language used in the feedback is accessible to EAL students. Essentially, the questions ask what a close examination of feedback, may reveal about epistemic privilege and mono-epistemicism in this feedback. Critical discourse analysis is a methodology that provides a framework for such a close examination from a critical perspective. This final section of the literature review provides some examples of previous studies that have employed a critical – or not so critical – discourse analysis methodology to examine feedback.

### **Feedback and (Critical) Discourse Analysis**

While research about feedback foregrounds perceptions about feedback in a relational approach, what the language of that relationship is and how it is negotiated has been less prominent. Acknowledging that “decoding the meaning of academic language in feedback discourse can be problematic” (Sutton & Gill, 2010, p. 8; see also Zamel, 1985), some research about feedback examines the language of feedback through various types of discourse analysis. Mirador (2000), for example, used a moves analysis of feedback to determine the patterns used in organizing written feedback to understand whether there is a match between instructor

intentions and student perceptions in academic writing. She identified 12 moves in three different patterns in the feedback that she studied. Yelland (2011) took up Mirador's (2000) model to investigate whether it “adequately describes a larger sample” (Yelland, 2011, p. 220) and suggests modifications to it. Nurmukhademov and Kim (2010) identified mitigation, such as paired act patterns (the combination of criticism and praise in feedback) and hedged comments (the use of language that mitigates criticism), in the language of instructor feedback. Ajjawi and Boud (2017) used conversational analysis to understand “the function of dialogue in the collaborative construction of shared understandings” (pp. 255) in feedback.

Hyland and Hyland (2001) studied instructor comments on student writing in terms of their “functions as praise, criticism, and suggestions” (p. 207). They described the “use of hedges, question forms, and personal attribution” used in the comments and concluded that through these comments, instructors “sought to enhance their relationship, minimise the threat of judgement, and mitigate the full force of their criticisms and suggestions” (p. 407). They noted, however, that the result of the mitigation was sometimes “confusion and misunderstanding” (p. 407) on the part of the student. Their suggestion that this miscommunication means that “it may be a good idea for teachers to look critically at their own responses and to consider ways of making them clear to students” (Hyland & Hyland, 2001, p. 407) hints at a need to examine the assumptions inherent in feedback, but does not necessarily point to the critical examination of the role of feedback in academic discourse and wider knowledge production in postsecondary settings. Treglia (2008) equally examined mitigation in feedback and disputed Hyland and Hyland's (2001) conclusion, instead concluding that “students seemed to appreciate mitigated commentary” (Treglia, 2008, p. 130). These differing conclusions could provide some room for a critical analysis. Why do Treglia's participants appreciate the mitigations rather than find them

confusing? What are the sociocultural or discourse practices in which the students and instructors in these studies are situated and how do they inform the findings? Instead, both studies employed descriptive, rather than critical, analyses.

On an institutional level, Randall and Mirador (2008) looked at the “congruence” between feedback on writing in an MA program and “formal discourse produced by the institution” (p. 525). They considered the choice of words in feedback a “political act, expressing beliefs and value systems” and their study looks at lexical choice “as a marker of these intentions” (Randall & Mirador, 2008, p. 518). They analyzed the word choices in a range of feedback and institutional documents to “provide a collective view of the way that the two different groups (the tutors and the institution) signal different meanings” (p. 518). Finally, they concluded that “both the wider institutional discourse and the tutor discourse place a lot of emphasis on academic conventions” (p. 525) but that although both feedback and institutional documents “place a lot of emphasis on the student acquiring and using the correct academic conventions in their work” (p. 525), this emphasis is not reflected in the assessment criteria in the programs under study. However, in making this conclusion, beyond suggesting that “programmes will need to ensure that the necessary academic literacy skills are understood by the students and staff on the programmes” (p. 526), similarly to Hyland and Hyland (2001), they did not draw connections between what the incongruence between feedback and institutional messages and assessment criteria means from a critical pedagogical perspective. For example, how does feedback reflect an imbalance in power relations within the institution and how does it suggest what constitutes knowledge in that setting? It is a similar case in a recent study by Green (2019) who classified feedback on the writing of one MA student in TESOL. He found that the student had a limited understanding of the feedback she received even though Green (2019)

himself considered the feedback “not reflective of a careless, tokenistic practice” (p. 89).

Congruent with the assertions of Higgins, Hartley, and Skelton (2001) and Boud and Molloy (2013), Green (2019) asserted that his findings demonstrate that “feedback events depend on shared understandings” (p. 89) and that there are limits to monologic feedback that *tells* rather than engages in a dialogue. As a result, feedback can empower or disempower students. Green (2019) advocated for a dialogic process for feedback where feedback recipients are “active constructors of meaning both empowered and constrained by the understandings they bring to the process” (p. 84).

In these discourse studies about feedback, then, the analysis primarily takes the form of “linguistic description” which, as Lin (2014) noted, is not the same as CDA, in which the description “must also be linked to the interpretation and explanation of the relationship between discursive and social processes” (p. 219). These studies seem to describe the language of feedback and analyze it within established purposes for feedback—to improve writing and induct students into academic discourse communities. Therefore, while critical discourse analysis is “gaining currency in applied linguistics” (Lin, 2014, p. 228) and in rhetoric and composition studies it has been posited as a “promising methodology for the study of many traditional objects of writing studies and rhetorical criticism” (Huckin, Andrus, & Clary-Lemon, 2012, p.110), in research about feedback, CDA has been a less commonly used methodology, specifically in examining the language of feedback. In fact, in a review of corpus-based CDA studies over the last 20 years, Cheng (2013) suggested that future studies might consider a range of text types in education, including feedback comments.

Among the few studies<sup>9</sup> that used critical discourse analysis to examine feedback on

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<sup>9</sup> Although it “predates the adoption of the term ‘critical’ in applied linguistics” (Mahboob & Paltridge, 2013, p. 1446), Zamel’s (1985) investigation of teachers’ responses to student writing in university-level EAL writing classes

academic writing is Hyatt's (2005) critical genre analysis of feedback commentaries on Master of Education assignments. Hyatt (2005) discussed his analysis in terms of how authority is exerted in the feedback, noting that it reveals “a number of linguistic factors which could contribute to an unquestionable authority set-up for the commentator” (p. 349). These factors include the use of imperatives and well as “obliging modalities” (Hyatt, 2005, p. 349). In keeping with CDA's goal of working toward a change in practices, Hyatt (2005) argued that based on his findings, feedback could be a “catalyst for a dialogue on how these comment types can construct a hierarchical relationship” and “offers suggestions for diminishing power imbalances and for re-placing the student writer at the centre of academic discourse” (p. 339). In addition, Hyatt (2005) suggested that the analysis also demonstrates that “written feedback plays an important pedagogic role” (p. 351). Rather than merely an assessment tool, it “facilitates learning and plays an induction role into the academic discourse community” (Hyatt, 2005, p. 350). As such, he called for “closer critical discourse analysis of feedback commentaries as institutionally located texts, in the acknowledgement that such texts themselves represent social practices” (p. 351).

Although she did use the term Critical Discourse Analysis to describe the methodology of her study, Austen (2016) focused on the language in the end comments of student writing. Like this dissertation study, she approaches feedback as a social construct. She found that there was much linguistic variation in the comments, including language which could be considered exclusionary for the students. She argued that the linguistic variation signifies “an unequal

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could be viewed as a type of critical discourse analysis. Her study revealed that these teachers “misread student texts, are inconsistent in their reactions, make arbitrary corrections, write contradictory comments, provide vague prescriptions, impose abstract rules and standards, respond to texts as fixed and final products, and rarely make content-specific comments or offer specific strategies for revising the text” (p. 86). Based on her study, Zamel argued that the kinds of responses that teachers make to student writing “and the underlying assumptions about writing that these responses reflect” (p. 83) should be the primary consideration of research about feedback.

discursive relationship between the marker and the student” and that “reflect academic gatekeeping, and the interpersonal aspect of feedback” (Austen, 2016, p. 67). A difference between Austen’s (2016) study and this dissertation study is that she employed a selective process to screen the comments included in the study and all of the instructors who provided the comments were aware of the study before providing the comments.

Critical discourse analysis has also been used to examine interviews with students about their experiences with and perceptions of feedback. Sutton and Gill (2010) used a CDA approach within an academic literacies framework to “explore student experiences of feedback on written assessments” (p. 3) in a postsecondary setting. They were primarily interested in how “feedback practice is shaped by and shapes the social identities of tutor and student,” how feedback is located in the “social relations of learning and teaching,” and “how feedback contributes to the construction of academic knowledge systems” (Sutton & Gill, 2010, p. 5). They investigated corpus analysis of student interviews about feedback, not the feedback itself. Among other things, they found that “decoding the meaning of academic language in feedback discourse can be problematic” for students (Sutton & Gill, 2010, p. 8). In Kang and Dykema’s (2017) investigation, CDA was also employed to analyze the transcripts of interviews about feedback (and not feedback on students’ own writing) conducted with undergraduate students, not to analyze the feedback itself, as occurs in this dissertation study. They found, similar to Sutton and Gill (2010), that students should be “empowered to become active agents in the feedback process” in order to “move closer to socialization into the academic community” (Kang & Dykema, 2017, p. 27).

Although not from a CDA perspective, the conclusions of Séror’s (2009) study of institutional forces and feedback on additional language writing suggest a need for additional

examination of feedback through CDA. Séror (2009) used critical perspectives within a case study design to analyze the relationship between feedback, specifically feedback on additional language writing, and institutional considerations. He argued that to understand the “success or failure” of feedback it is necessary to pay attention to the often unexamined “interpersonal aspects at stake in feedback interactions” including the idea that feedback “fulfills social purposes by reflecting and reinforcing individual desires, power relations, and specific institutional contexts” (Séror, 2009, p. 206). Although both students and instructors in his study noted the importance of feedback, instructors also viewed feedback as an “onerous and undervalued task in a university setting where ideal feedback practices were, in fact, incompatible with institutional pressures to limit resource expenditures, maximize research productivity, and adhere to strict grade distributions” (p. 223). Séror (2009) suggested that these results point to a need “to include in textual and pedagogic descriptions of feedback practices the details of the larger institutional forces and practices...linked to these writing practices in universities (p. 223). These descriptions, as part of a CDA of feedback, should also take into consideration assumptions about knowledge practices within these “institutional forces.”

Critical discourse analysis has been employed as a method for investigating feedback on academic writing to various ends: as a corpus study of feedback over time (Hyatt, 2005), to analyze student responses to feedback (Kang & Dykema, 2017) or to analyze one type of feedback such as end comments (Batt, 2005). In these studies, there is an emphasis on the analysis of discourse, not necessarily connections between the actual students and instructors who have received and written the feedback, and the feedback itself. In addition, in most of these studies, the focus is on feedback that is comprised of words or phrases. Feedback that is non-linguistic is set aside or mentioned briefly (Taylor, 2011). In short, the definition of feedback

used in these studies is less broad than what I have used in this dissertation study and may not represent the range of authentic markings students receive on their writing potentially because instructors were aware of the study before providing the feedback, or because the feedback under analysis was chosen by the researcher. In addition, an underlying assumption in many of these studies is that students will be able to understand the feedback, interpret it, and subsume it into their future writing in order to socialize into the discourse of the university.

### Summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed literature about feedback, knowledge practices in postsecondary settings, assumptions about language, and justice to demonstrate the need for this dissertation research. Causal and relational approaches to feedback show that, especially in additional language contexts, it is a complex process that involves assumptions about knowledge and language. The epigraph for this chapter from Higgins, Hartley, and Skelton (2001) further suggested that the complexity of feedback has to be investigated through viewing feedback as “process of communication” (p. 270). They noted that “our everyday communication ‘works’ because it is based on shared understandings. Both parties have access to appropriate discourses which enable them to construct and reconstruct meaning from implicit messages” (Higgins, Hartley, & Skelton, 2001, p. 273). As some of the research about feedback on academic writing reviewed above suggests, feedback communication may be difficult for students to understand because of a lack of “shared understanding,” or because of the hidden messages (Hyland, 2013b) that students must interpret. Higgins, Hartley, and Skelton (2001) argued that that feedback must be viewed as an “essentially *problematic* form of communication” (p. 273, emphasis in the original). By viewing feedback as problematic, they suggest, it is possible to begin to uncover “how external conditions interplay, mediate (and are mediated by) patterns of power, authority,

emotion and identity, and how students’ abilities to access appropriate discourses are shaped (p. 273). By examining feedback using a CDA methodology, as well as by learning more about student perceptions of that language, this research study becomes part of the larger project of investigating feedback as a “problematic form of communication.”

**Theoretical Lens  
Cognitive (In)Justices**

“[T]here is no global social justice without global cognitive justice.”  
(Santos, Nunes, & Meneses, 2007, p. xix)

At the core of the theoretical lens that I have employed in this study are conceptions about knowledge practices in higher education in the West with a specific focus on the “culturally embedded character of knowledge and...of producing knowledge” (Coleman & Dionisio, 2009, p. 397) in postsecondary settings. This lens assumes that knowledge practices in these settings are informed by “epistemological privilege” (Santos, Nunes, & Meneses, 2007, p. xix) or “epistemological dominance” (Andreotti, Ahenekew, & Cooper, 2011, p. 40), which are a result of the suppression, through colonialism, of other “forms of knowledges and...the subaltern social groups whose social practices were informed by such knowledges” (Santos, Nunes, & Meneses, 2007, p. xix). To understand this epistemological dominance, this lens questions how knowledge practices, specifically in the West, reflect a mono-epistemicism. Further, it asks what this means for groups whose knowledge frameworks are excluded from this singular concept of knowledge and how it is possible to break down hegemonic knowledge practices so that suppressed forms of knowledges are not only recognized but understood as ways of producing knowledge. In short, this lens magnifies what it means to work toward “global cognitive justice.”

As such, the lens brings into focus several correlative positions. The first is the position that it is necessary to understand this “exclusion, oppression and discrimination” (Santos, Nunes, & Meneses, 2007, p. xix) of knowledges and to confront the paradigm of privileged knowledge practices. To confront this paradigm of privilege, Santos, Nunes, and Meneses (2007) suggested that there is a need for a “new critical theory” that begins “from the premise that the epistemological diversity of the world is immense” and that this diversity must be recognized (p. xix). The result of understanding and recognizing this diversity, as well as confronting the

paradigm of privileged knowledge, they argued, is “global cognitive justice” (xix). A step toward this recognition, then, is considering what conceptual processes are required for understanding knowledges beyond the dominant one. Part of these processes is questioning the hierarchy of power inherent in the suppression of knowledges. The second position asserts that because of the role of educational systems in “establishing and maintaining cognitive standards” (Code, 1987, p. 247), concepts of knowledge and justice are particularly pertinent in educational contexts. To identify epistemological privilege in these educational contexts, it is necessary to recognize “the assumptions that underlie the institutionalization of epistemic authority in educational systems” (Code, 1987, p. 247). Further, as Andreotti (2012) pointed out, if education is “the means to right wrongs” of epistemic privilege, then it is necessary to examine “what kind of education could take account of the complexity, multiplicity, complicity, and inequality inherent in the politics of knowledge production (including those happening through education itself)” (p. 23).

Third, as an academic practice, educational discourse, particularly academic writing, is a “culturally embedded” method of “producing knowledge” (Coleman & Dionisio, 2009, p. 397). As a social practice, writing is “relational” and is located in a “politics of identity and knowledge” in which it is possible to question “[w]hat counts as ‘knowledge’ in different higher education contexts?” and “[w]ho can be recognised as a legitimate ‘knower’?” (Burke, 2008, p. 200). Academic writing in particular is a type of “gate-keeping device” (p. 205) that perpetuates a specific, dominant, episteme and gives “legitimacy to certain knowers” (p. 205) while undermining other knowledges. As a part of academic discourse, feedback on academic writing can be viewed as a key activity in this gate-keeping.

Finally, language, particularly the English language, plays a role in controlling understanding of knowledges beyond the dominant one. Languages have been used “as an

exercise of colonial control” (Widdowson, 1997, p. 136), and in many ways they still are being used “in deplorable ways for exploitation and suppression” (Widdowson, 1998, p. 398), not only of people but also of their knowledges. However, the post-colonial reality of language—specifically the English language—is that “the number of non-native speakers is substantially larger than its native speakers” (House, 2003, p. 557; see also Canagarajah 2006a, Ives 2010, & Yano 2001). In addition, these ‘non-native’ speakers are often plurilingual speakers who are “social actor[s]” who develop repertoires made up of “various languages and varieties of languages and *different forms of knowledge*” (Marshall & Moore, 2013, p. 474, emphasis added). Part of moving beyond mono-epistemicism, then, is recognizing that there are connections between language and knowledge that are repressed by insistence on a monolingual imperative, particularly in educational settings.

In this study, the research questions ask what epistemological dominance and related assumptions about knowledge practices mean in the micro context of feedback on additional language academic writing, and potential implications for the recognition of epistemological diversity in the macro context of academic practice. In this chapter, I begin to detail a theoretical lens for this study by drawing from theories that map connections between justice and knowledge practices in order to both reveal injustices related to epistemic dominance and to understand the possibilities for recognizing multiple knowledge practices. First, I consider the naming of the theoretical lens as an important aspect of defining it. I then discuss the implications for recognizing epistemic privilege in educational contexts, particularly in postsecondary contexts. Next, I discuss how academic discourse as a knowledge practice can be examined through this lens. Finally, I address the connections between cognitive justice and critical discourse analysis, the research methodology I use for this study.

### **Naming the Lens: Cognitive (In)Justices**

To make sense of what it means to work toward “global cognitive justice,” it is necessary to consider the lexicon used in discussions about knowledge practices and justice. There are several designations given to theories that question epistemic privilege and outline ways of understanding what this privilege means to knowledge frameworks that have been suppressed: cognitive justice (Santos, 2007a, 2007b; Santos, Nunes, & Meneses, 2007; Visvanathan, 2009), epistemic responsibility (Code, 1987), epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007), and epistemic ignorance (Kuokkanen, 2007, 2008). Each of these individual terms—cognitive, epistemic, justice, injustice, ignorance, and responsibility—carries denotations and connotations within disciplines, practices, and criticism. “Cognition,” for example, can be interpreted differently in various disciplinary contexts. Cognitive science, as a study of “the mind and its operation” (Thagard, 2014), includes such fields as artificial intelligence, cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and evolutionary biology. Within this context, “cognitive justice” might include what considerations of justice mean to “nonconscious cognitive devices” (Hayles, 2014, p. 212) such as computers. However, the philosophical (Code, 1987; Fricker, 2007) and post-colonial theories (Kuokkanen, 2007, 2008; Santos, 2007a, 2007b; Santos, Nunes, & Meneses, 2007) I draw on to define this theoretical lens use “cognitive” in a way that is less specific to the workings of the mind and more synonymous with knowledge frameworks or epistemology in general.

Equally, though, “epistemology” does not have one single usage. In philosophy, for example, it is a “long-standing branch” of the discipline that deals with “theory of knowledge” (Ruitenberg & Phillips, 2012, p. 4). Within this discipline, a history of discussion and debate informs a certain understanding of “epistemology.” As Ruitenberg and Phillips (2012) noted, though, in other disciplines discussion about “knowledge” and other “cognate expressions”—like

“ways of knowing”—are used in ways that are different from the philosophical usage (p. 2). They point out that in educational scholarship various actors—such as researchers operating within different traditions or paradigms, classroom teachers, and students themselves—can adhere to different epistemologies (Ruitenberg & Phillips, 2012, p. 2). While their central purpose—to critically examine what it means to education for culture and epistemology to be intertwined—is not the purpose of this study, their assertion that the issue of naming is not “merely” a verbal one (p. 3) is important. In defining the parameters of a framework for this study, it is not enough to simply state that the framework is “epistemic justice” or “cognitive justice” because, as has been described above, there are various ways of understanding the interaction between knowledge practices and justice. It is cumbersome, though, to use “considerations of knowledge and justice” in referring to this framework throughout the study.

There are several possible ways to reason out the use of specific designations for the framework for this study. As noted, since *epistemic* can mean “knowledge practices” and feedback and academic writing—the focuses of this study—can be considered knowledge practices in educational contexts, *epistemic* would be suitable to use in a study of this sort. For example, Kuokkanen (2008) uses the term *epistemic ignorance* to question how “academic theories and practices ignore, marginalize and exclude other than dominant” (p. 63) knowledge traditions. Since these concerns are similar to the ones overarching this study, it would be possible to use *epistemic* as a signifier for *knowledge* in this lens. However, I have chosen not to use this designation because while *epistemic* does have a close connection to *knowledge*, a case can also be made for using *cognitive* as the designation for *knowledge* in this theoretical lens. This choice is based on the use of the term by, among others, Santos (2007a, 2007b), Andreotti (2011), Andreotti, Aheneke, and Cooper (2011), and Guilherme (2014), who also draw close

connections between cognitive justice and academic knowledge practices. The statement that “the need for cognitive justice” (Andreotti, 2011, p. 381) is central to the “quest for epistemological exchange, balance, and equity that is currently at the centre of academic discussion and research” (Guilherme, 2014, p. 69) seems appropriate in a discussion that involves pedagogical practices in academic writing. Similarly, these cognitive justice frameworks suggest a transnationalism that is appropriate for considering knowledge frameworks in additional language learning.

Since the theoretical lens for this study draws from various frameworks that connect knowledge and justice, I use the term *cognitive (in)justices* to name this lens. This term acknowledges the influence of the cognitive justice theories that work across and within transnational pedagogy and, through the use of *(in)justices*, acknowledges the dual concepts of examining the injustices in knowledge practices, and the ways in which it is possible to work toward “global cognitive justice.” In their article outlining some of the obstacles to transnational collaborative research, Coleman and Dionisio (2009) suggested that there are “steps that might be taken to build collaborations that meet *the* condition of cognitive justice” (p. 390, emphasis added). Given the variety of concepts that describe potential “conditions of cognitive justice,” as outlined above, I wonder if it is possible to specify what a singular “condition of cognitive justice” might be. Is the condition the same for each collaborative relationship? For each group whose knowledge has been suppressed? Therefore, in addition to using the plural *knowledges*, I have chosen to pluralize *(in)justice* in order to acknowledge multiple possibilities for situations of cognitive justice/injustice. The plural *justices* acknowledges that, like knowledge, there is not one model or one condition of cognitive justice or injustice; on the contrary, just like knowledges, there is more than one possible idea of what constitutes “global cognitive justice.”

### **Understanding Epistemic Privilege: Towards Conceptualizing Cognitive (In)justices**

Santos, Nunes, and Meneses's (2007) concept of cognitive justice included in the epigraph and introductory section of this chapter provides one way of theorizing and naming the interplay between knowledge practices and justice that form the framework for this study. There are a few lenses through which this interplay can be viewed that, though nuanced in the details, ask questions about what kinds of knowledges are excluded, included and valued in certain knowledge practices. These lenses are concerned with the examination of two correlating concepts. The first is to understand the concept of *knowledges* as the idea that there is not one way of knowing. The second is that it is necessary to examine epistemological privilege by determining the ways in which non-dominant “knowledge-producing frameworks” (Guilherme, 2014, p. 55) have been suppressed. That is, to determine the ways in which dominant knowledge practices are unjust. This study's theoretical lens considers these two ideas and draws on both postcolonial and philosophical theories that connect knowledge and justice to contemplate “what it means to know,” “what counts as knowledge,” and “how knowledge is produced” (Santos, Nunes, & Meneses, 2007, p. xxi) in educational contexts.

### **Understanding Knowledges: An Ecology of Knowledges**

To understand the concept of *knowledges*, this theoretical lens draws on the description of an *ecology of knowledges* provided by Santos (2007a, 2007b), which is the foundation of the concept of cognitive justice noted by Santos, Nunes, and Meneses (2007) in the epigraph. The ecology of knowledges calls for the “validation of previously discredited knowledge(s)” (Guilherme, 2014, p. 57) through a recognition that the epistemological diversity of the world is just as immense as its cultural diversity (Santos, Nunes, & Meneses, 2007). Therefore the “conceptions of knowledge, of what it means to know, of what counts as knowledge and how

that knowledge is produced” (Santos, Nunes, & Meneses, 2007, p. xxi) are as diverse and multifaceted as the “cosmologies” in the world. An ecology of knowledges promotes “non-relativistic dialogues among knowledges” that are aimed at maximizing the contributions of these knowledges to “build a more democratic and just society” and to “decolonize knowledge and power” (Santos, Nunes, & Meneses, 2007, p. xx). An ecology of knowledges is different from the “contested concept” of multiculturalism, which implies a “description of cultural differences and the ways in which they interrelate” (Santos, Nunes, & Meneses, 2007, p. xxii) and is associated with policies that are imposed by the nation-state. Global cognitive justice goes beyond “tolerance or liberalism to an active recognition of the need for diversity” by recognizing and advocating the “right of different forms of knowledge to co-exist” (Visvanathan, 2009, n.p.).

Santos (2007a, 2007b) suggested that the ecology of knowledges requires a “break from the mono-epistemicism” (Andreotti, Ahenakew, & Cooper, 2011, p. 43) associated with epistemic privilege. Since an ecology of knowledges recognizes that each knowledge is “insufficient” *and* “interdependent on other knowledges” (Santos, 2007a, p. 17), Santos (2007a) argued that no single type of knowledge is able to describe or account for “all possible interventions in the world” so all knowledges are “incomplete in different ways” (p. 17). Santos, Nunes, and Meneses (2007) suggested that one of the moves towards an “emancipatory, non-relativistic, cosmopolitan ecology of knowledges” (p. xiv) requires the transition from a “monoculture of scientific knowledge” to an “ecology of knowledges” that will make possible a replacement of “knowledge-as-regulation” with “knowledge-as-emancipation” (p. li).

Understanding knowledge as *knowledges* (Santos, Nunes, & Meneses, 2007) in this theoretical lens, then, is more than accounting for and enumerating distinct epistemic frameworks; instead, it is understanding the ways in which these work individually and in

dialogue with each other. Part of this understanding is reconsidering the rhetorics of knowledge, including what it means to refer to knowledge in its plural form.

### **Recognizing Injustices: An Epistemology of Blindness and Epistemic Injustice**

Realizing cognitive justice through an ecology of knowledges is contingent on acknowledging the lack of justice that has been perpetuated through the continued understanding of knowledge in the singular (Santos, 2007a, 2007b). It means naming and examining the sites, methods, and structures in which and through which mono-epistemicism has been perpetuated and non-dominant knowledges have been disregarded. The examination of these sites, methods and structures are salient for this study. This cognitive (in)justices lens draws on Santos’ (2007a, 2007b) abyssal thinking, and Fricker’s (2007) epistemic injustice as complementary frameworks for recognizing injustices.

#### **An epistemology of blindness.**

Santos (2007b) formalized the disappearance of other than dominant epistemes as an *epistemology of blindness* which is the failure to see the existence of other than dominant knowledges. He argued that this blindness as well as the systematic repression of these knowledges through colonial practices of knowledge regulation and “policing” is not only a waste of “an immense wealth of cognitive experiences” but epistemicide (Santos, 2007b, p. 16). The “epistemological dominance” (Andreotti, Ahenakew, & Cooper, 2011, p. 41) of Western thinking is characterized by this blindness to alternate epistemologies and results in *abyssal thinking*. Abyssal thinking is a system of visible and invisible distinctions that are established through “radical lines” and by placing social reality into two categories: “this side of the line” and “the other side of the line” (Santos, 2007a, p. 1). Santos (2007a) explained the divisions:

‘the other side of the line’ vanishes as reality becomes nonexistent, and is indeed produced as nonexistent. Nonexistent means not existing in any relevant or comprehensible way of being. Whatever is produced as nonexistent is radically excluded because it lies beyond the realm of what the accepted conception of inclusion considers to be its other. What most fundamentally characterizes abyssal thinking is thus the impossibility of the co–presence of the two sides of the line. (p. 1)

Although the position of the line is not necessarily fixed, Santos (2007a) argued that it is controlled by “this side of the line” (p. 2). Modern abyssal thinking, then, creates hierarchies of binaries and distinctions so that the abyssal line in which they are grounded is invisible (Andreotti, Ahenakew, & Cooper, 2011, p. 41).

One example that Santos (2007a) used to explain these invisible abyssal lines is the “monopoly” given to modern science to make the “universal distinction” between “true and false” (p. 2). He noted that this monopoly had become the basis for “modern epistemological disputes” (Santos, 2007a, p. 2) between these scientific forms of truth and non-scientific forms of truth such as philosophy and theology. While “tensions” between these forms of truth are highly visible, Santos (2007a) contended that these disputes take place on “this side of the line” and are based on “the invisibility of forms of knowledge that cannot be fitted into any of these ways of knowing” such as “popular, lay, plebeian, peasant, or indigenous knowledges” that are on the “other side of the line” (p. 2). Santos's (2007a) assertion was that Western thinking does not just fail to recognize multiple ways of knowing, but it renders them invisible as knowledge.

**Epistemic injustice.**

The frameworks for recognizing injustice described by Santos (2007 a, 2007b) from a decolonial position, underscore the dominance of Western knowledge frameworks and

emphasize the need to uncover and acknowledge knowledge practices that have been suppressed by this dominance. From a philosophical perspective, Fricker (2007) considered what failing to recognize other-than-dominant ways of knowing means for day to day human interactions. She started from the position that there are ethical aspects to be considered in “two of our most basic everyday epistemic practices: conveying knowledge to others by telling them and making sense of our own social practices” (p. 1). She outlined two “distinctly epistemic” forms of injustice—testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice—and theorized them as occurring, fundamentally, “in a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower” (p. 1). While a philosophical conceptualization of *knowledge* is beyond the scope of this theoretical lens and Fricker’s argument is much more detailed than is possible to summarize here, the premise and naming of these two types of epistemic injustice can provide insight for recognizing and understanding sites of injustice in dominant knowledge frameworks and the ways in which epistemic privilege can be characterized. In addition, these types of epistemic injustice are compatible with the concept of the epistemology of blindness outlined by Santos (2007a, 2007b) primarily because they both trace important connections between knowledge, injustice, and power.

For Fricker (2007), testimonial injustice is when “prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker’s word” (p. 1). Fricker named this prejudice *identity prejudice* and suggested that it not only has to do with questioning the credibility<sup>10</sup> of the speaker, but also with tracking the speaker through various “dimensions of social activity” such

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<sup>10</sup> I am using credibility here in the way that it is commonly understood and in the way that Fricker (2007) generally used it as “the quality of being believed or trusted” (*Collins English Dictionary*). Fricker outlined in more detail what the concepts of credibility excess and credibility deficit—a speaker receiving credibility more or less than she normally would based on the prejudice of the hearer (p. 17). For Fricker, a credibility deficit—receiving less credibility due to hearer prejudice—results in testimonial injustice (p. 20).

as “educational, professional, sexual, legal, political, religious” (p. 27). Since these activities are related to social identity, identity prejudice can influence the way a hearer judges the credibility of the speaker. For Fricker (2007), this judgement is influenced by identity power: depending on the “collective conception of the social identities at play” this judgement can prevent the speaker from “conveying knowledge” (p. 28) because the prejudice of the hearer does not acknowledge the speaker’s identity as a *knower*. This injustice can be “persistent and systematic” (p. 29) injustice and when it is, it is the “most severe” form of testimonial injustice and central to considerations of social justice (p. 29).

While testimonial injustice is caused “by prejudice in the economy of credibility” hermeneutical injustice is caused by “structural prejudice in the economy of collective resources” (Fricker, 2007, p. 1). Hermeneutical injustice occurs when a “gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences” (p. 1). From an epistemological viewpoint, this gap means that “social power has an unfair impact on collective forms of social understanding” (p. 148). Fricker further explained that if our “shared understandings” reflect the views of various social groups, and if “relations of unequal power can skew shared hermeneutical resources,” then this means that in order to “make sense of their social experiences” the powerful have “appropriate understandings of their experiences to draw on” (p. 148) while the powerless may find themselves with “ill-fitting meanings to draw on” (p.148) in the effort to make their experiences intelligible.<sup>11</sup> Fricker (2007) argued that since it is socially marginalized groups that suffer this type of “hermeneutical

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<sup>11</sup> Fricker (2007) pointed to early times in the history of the women’s movement as an example of the powerless having few “meanings” through which to make sense of their experiences. She noted that ‘speak outs’ and the “sharing of scantily understood, barely articulate experiences” were a response to the fact that women’s experience was “obscure, even unspeakable” (p. 148), but that through the sharing of these experiences, women were able to develop “resources for social meaning that brought clarity, cognitive confidence and increased communicative facility” (p. 148).

marginalization” it causes structural prejudice that “effects people in virtue of their membership in a socially powerless group, and thus in virtue of an aspect of their social identity” (p. 155). Therefore, hermeneutical injustice is discriminatory in that it consists of “having some significant area of one’s social experience obscured from collective understanding” due to one’s identity in a social group (p. 155). Though Fricker’s theory is much more detailed, it is possible to view Santos’ (2007a, 2007b) concept of abyssal thinking as an example of hermeneutical injustice. That is, that by ignoring knowledges other than the dominant one, the location on “this side of the line” of any exchange in a society dominated by Western, scientific forms of truth constitutes an “unfair disadvantage” (Fricker, 2008, p. 70) to a person whose experiences and knowledges are on what Santos (2007a) calls “the other side of the line” (p. 1). The experience and knowledges of the people on “the other side of the line” (p. 1) are subject to hermeneutical marginalization and therefore “obscured from collective understanding” (Fricker, 2007, p. 155).

The importance of identifying these two types of injustice for this cognitive (in)justices theoretical lens is that the injustices in the “everyday epistemic practices” of conveying knowledge and making sense of our social experiences are a result of “the operation of social power” in these interactions (Fricker, 2007, p. 1). Fricker suggested that revealing these injustices also exposes “a politics of epistemic practice,” one which has implications for how we might consider “epistemic relations” (p. 2). She argued that ideas about epistemic relations, “such as that epistemic trust might have an irrepressible connection with social power, or that social disadvantage can produce unjust epistemic disadvantage” (p. 2) are underrepresented in “Anglo-American epistemology” (p. 2). Though she is not primarily concerned with knowledge in post-colonial contexts, like Santos (2007a, 2007b) is, her reference to Anglo-American epistemology points to the ways in which dominant knowledge frameworks are embedded in

disciplines that are concerned with knowledge and frameworks for studying knowledge, such as philosophy. In considering the complicity of her own discipline in perpetuating mono-epistemicism, Fricker (2007) also provides a model for this examination. In addition, her characterization of these two types of injustices as ones that take place in “every day epistemic practices,” provides a location for the examination of cognitive (in)justices. As I discuss in the next sections in relation to educational contexts, the identification of these sites are important as there are a number of “every day epistemic practices” in educational settings that may be sites of testimonial or hermeneutical injustice.

### **Academic Practices: Locations for Examining Cognitive (In)Justices in Education**

Just as Santos (2007a, 2007b) suggested that there is a need for post-abyssal thinking in the university, Kuokkanen (2008) called for changes in academic practices, including the “normative starting point of academic inquiry” (p. 77), which has been based on the dominant episteme and related assumptions. French (2013) stated that “on entering higher education, students are explicitly inducted into bounded disciplinary-based subjects” (p. 241) through a specific academic discourse. Duff (2010) suggested that academic discourse is “not just an entity” but a “social, cognitive, and rhetorical process and an accomplishment, a form of enculturation, social practice, positioning, representation, and stance-taking” (p. 170). Further, she noted that central to the “production and interpretation” of academic discourse is the negotiation of “institutional and disciplinary ideologies” (p. 170). That this discourse is “therefore a site of internal and interpersonal struggle for many people” (Duff, 2010, p. 170), especially students whose epistemic traditions (and languages, as I will discuss in a later section) have been suppressed is not surprising given the theories of abyssal thinking and epistemic injustice discussed previously.

It is necessary, therefore, to examine the continued use of resources and structures in

higher educational discourse that are “on this side of the line” in Santos’ concept of abyssal thinking. Models and ways of undertaking this examination are emerging. For example, Purdy and Walker (2013) examined composition textbooks to understand how students in introductory composition classes are enculturated into knowledge production through research. Their study revealed that the texts “provide a focus for the institution’s desire to control and direct students’ movement into the established practices of research that academics use to construct students’ knowledge making, their learning spaces, and themselves” (Purdy & Walker, 2013, p. 12).

Although Purdy and Walker do not set out a framework that is overtly rooted in theories of cognitive justice, their assertion here intimates a way in which academic discourse is a site where the examination of assumptions and practices related to knowledge should take place.

### **Academic Writing**

Academic writing is a central part of academic discourse. As French (2013) noted, writing is “the established, authoritative vehicle for autonomous self-expression throughout Western culture” (p. 241). In higher education, writing is “the primary vehicle for the articulation of socially prestigious academic expertise” (p. 241). Writing is a high stakes activity for all students, who are “expected to construct a suitable academic writing identity through conformity to discipline-based academic writing practices” (p. 241). This conformity is an example of how “dominant social practices are often normalized and appear ‘given’” (p. 241), through assumptions about academic writing that, French argued, have gone relatively unexamined (p. 242).

In North American postsecondary contexts, writing is also the main way to communicate research, represent knowledge, and create new knowledge. This knowledge production through writing is accomplished through adherence to a dominant episteme. If the knowledge is not

communicated in a way that is expected by the reader— “in the code that we are expected to share in academic circumstances for communication” (Kuokkanen, 2008, p. 63)—then the knowledge is considered “different” or “other.” This code can be distinguished in (at least) two ways. One is what might be termed *form* or *structure* and includes representation of knowledge through, among other things, paragraph structure, introductions, conclusions, organization of information and ideas for specific purposes for writing such as definition, argumentation, comparison and analysis. Another type of code is linguistic code. This includes, for academic writing in English, conventions of spelling, grammar, and sentence structure but also word choice and vocabulary for academic writing, including discipline specific vocabulary, formality, and tone.

In practical terms, if the linguistic or structural code is not what is “expected” in “academic circumstances for communication,” students may receive lower grades on written assignments, may be singled out by instructors who cannot understand why these students just “don’t get it,” and may (in the case of additional language learners) spend thousands of dollars taking and retaking courses that help them meet the standards of academic discourse. For students, like EAL students, who may bring non-dominant knowledge frameworks to their learning, academic writing can be a potential site of injustice. In Fricker’s (2007) terms, this type of injustice would be testimonial injustice because the writer is being questioned as a knower. It can also be argued that these students are hermeneutically marginalized. Those students who are in the dominant social group and who have epistemic privilege have the knowledge to succeed, but those who are marginalized are not able to make their experiences or knowledges intelligible. In addition, these students’ experiences and knowledges may be on “the other side of the line” and therefore potentially rendered invisible in academic discourse.

### **Feedback on Academic Writing**

If academic writing can be considered a site of formalization of a dominant episteme, then feedback on academic writing can be thought of as a practice that is meant to keep this episteme in check. Basturkmen, East, and Bitchener (2014) described feedback as a means of socialising students into the “discursive practices” of the academic discourse community (p. 243). They suggested that feedback conveys “‘implicit messages’ about the community’s expectations, values and beliefs, the nature of disciplinary knowledge and student roles in the community” (Basturkmen, East, & Bitchener, 2014, p. 433). Therefore, they claimed, it is possible to think of feedback as “messages about community expectations given to help students develop their understanding of what is valued” (p. 434). While it is meant to demonstrate how feedback on academic writing can help ensure student success in an academic community, this description of feedback also highlights the tensions inherent in feedback as a method of gatekeeping for academic disciplines. Feedback, along with other components of pedagogy, is a part of a student’s enculturation into academic discourse. Feedback can play an integral part in the success of the student in future academic pursuits by alerting students to the rules of the discourse. In providing feedback instructors, presumably and based on the amount of research about feedback on academic writing, want to help students understand these rules. One tension arises in the assertion that some of the messages are *implicit* (or, as I discussed in Chapter 2, *hidden*). If students have non-dominant knowledge frameworks it might not be possible for them to interpret these implicit or hidden messages, which are rooted in a dominant episteme. Another tension is that, at the same time as enculturating students into academic discourse practices, a cognitive (in)justices framework suggests that pedagogical practices of disciplinary academic writing, including feedback, also need to work towards modifying these practices to understand

what an ecology of knowledges that includes non-dominant epistemological frameworks might mean in the discipline.

These tensions are present in feedback as an “everyday epistemic practice” (Fricker, 2007, p. 1) in academia. As a means of socializing students into “discursive practices” of the academic discourse community, feedback can be perceived, in the way that Basturkmen, East, and Bitchener (2014) and many other researchers do, as a positive and helpful interaction that provides the discourse enculturation that the students need to succeed. But, if this feedback is grounded in a prejudice that “causes a hearer [or reader] to give a deflated level of credibility to the speaker’s word” (Fricker, 2007, p.1), then this feedback can be understood as testimonial injustice. This deflated level of credibility may be, as Santos (2007a, 2007b) argued, because of abyssal thinking. Practically, if the code—the structure or the language—does not conform to the hearer’s, reader’s – or in the case of feedback, marker’s– concept of academic discourse because it reflects a non-dominant episteme, then the marker may provide feedback that questions the writer as a knower.

This questioning is evident, for example, in a pilot study that was an impetus for this dissertation project. Two of the participants, Lily and Naser, made comments about feedback they had received that seems to suggest that their knowledge is being called into question. For Naser, being questioned as a knower is rooted in his personal experiences, language, and culture. In discussing (unfavourable) comments on an essay that had the assigned topic of metacognition, he stated his confusion with the topic by saying: “In all of my age, I'm thirty-seven years old, I never heard anything about metacognition, yes, and I must write about something that I never...In all my life never one word about metacognition.” At another point, he expressed his frustration with the comment ‘word choice’ on his assignment by saying “she x my word. I tried

hard for this article. English is not my language. In my language I am very good person. I wrote poem in my language.” He reiterated the phrase “in my language” several other times throughout the interview in reference to other feedback. Naser viewed this feedback as undermining who he is—a poet, a multilingual speaker, a mature adult—and therefore the feedback questions him as a knower. Although the ways in which Lily is questioned as a knower in the feedback she received on her writing are not as personal, she also recognizes it as such. At one point, in noting the feedback she had received about a grammatical construct, she said “I don’t see the difference between this and this” (the correction and her original). In the interview, I tried to identify the difference for her, but in reading the transcript later, I noted that I “understand what Lily meant when she said earlier that the professor had made some unnecessary changes to her writing. The way that Lily had originally written it was grammatically correct.” However, the professor misinterpreted it and simply made the grammatical change without an explanation. While Lily did not take this questioning as personally as Naser did, she recognized it as an undermining of her knowledge. Feedback on academic writing, then, is an important location for examining knowledge practices through a cognitive (in)justices lens.

### **Cognitive (In)Justices and Critical Discourse Analysis**

While cognitive (in)justices is the lens through which the research questions for this study were developed and through which I interpret the investigation, critical discourse analysis (CDA) is the methodology I use to actively investigate these questions. I outline the methodology in the next chapter, but it is important to note as a part of the discussion of this theoretical lens that CDA does not lie outside of this lens. On the contrary, connections between CDA and cognitive (in)justices are more than tenuous. Just as cognitive (in)justices questions epistemic privilege and examines the structures and assumptions underlying it, so CDA takes a “particular interest in the relation between language and power” (Wodak, 2001, p. 2) by

questioning what knowledge “consists of,” how knowledge evolves and how it is passed on (Jäger, 2001, p. 32-33). Central to CDA is, of course, the concept of discourse which can be defined as “an institutionally consolidated concept of speech inasmuch as it determines and consolidates action and thus already exercises power” (Link, 1983, quoted in Jäger, 2001, p. 34). A cognitive (in)justices lens calls for this “institutionally consolidated concept of speech” which has been determined by epistemic privilege and that is perpetuated by epistemic ignorance, epistemic injustice and abyssal thinking, to be examined so that non-dominant epistemes do not continue to be suppressed. Similarly, in CDA, “the (dominating) discourses can be criticized and problematized...by analyzing them, by revealing their contradictions and non-expressions” (Jäger, 2001, p. 34). The “simple” question that Jäger (2001) suggested can be asked in CDA— “[w]ho makes the discourses and what status do they have” (p. 37)—could equally be asked of academic discourses, such as academic writing and feedback, through a cognitive (in)justices lens.

The connections between CDA and cognitive (in)justices can be further illuminated in van Dijk’s (2011) explanation of critical epistemic discourse analysis (CEDA) as “the study of the way knowledge is expressed, implied, suppressed, distributed...in text and talk” (p. 35). This type of CDA draws on the idea that “the role of power and power abuse in the discursive management of knowledge in communication” is “at the heart of” this methodology (van Dijk, 2011, p. 33). Like connections between cognitive (in)justices and education, CEDA posits that knowledge is not something that ‘grows’ on people but it is “taught and learned,” “produced and used, sold and consumed” (van Dijk, 2011, p. 33). CEDA, then, addresses questions of “the legitimacy of, and access to knowledge in society” (van Dijk, 2011, p. 34). Although this type of discourse analysis can include attention to cognitive linguistics in which “the underlying mental

representations and processes are examined or when the ways the knowledge representations influence the (trans)formation of mental models and the general knowledge of the recipients are examined” (van Dijk, 2011, p. 35-36), this critical approach can also examine how “general structures of power are related to...knowledge representations” (p. 36). So, critical epistemic discourse analysis may ask what knowledge is emphasized or marginalized within the discourse. In addition, van Dijk (2011) noted that critical epistemic discourse is rooted in a “systematic account of the way that discourse is involved in the reproduction of power abuse” (p. 36) and argued that it has to focus on “how knowledge is abused to control discourse, or how the knowledge of the recipients may be manipulated in the interests of powerful groups” (p. 36). These concerns intersect with those of cognitive (in)justices, specifically the concept of epistemic injustice as outlined by Fricker (2007). Actively questioning the capacity of the knower and therefore devaluing his or her knowledge system because of hearer prejudice is one way that powerful groups can manipulate and control knowledge.

### **Knowledge Practices, Education, and Cognitive (In)Justices**

The cognitive (in)justices lens for this dissertation study draws on concepts rooted in post-colonial thinking and philosophy to both identify injustices in knowledge practices and understand what it means to acknowledge multiple knowledges. These are particularly pertinent because of the role of certain types of formal education in perpetuating one type of knowledge framework based in concepts of “unequivocal fixed knowledge,” “right/wrong answers,” conformity, and “subtle deference to institutional authorities” (Andreotti, 2012, p.26). In higher education in particular, the production and dissemination of knowledge—the formalization of research<sup>12</sup>—are based on “the codification of knowledge” that is “dependent upon the adherence

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<sup>12</sup> The concept of *research* here is a wide one; it is based in the idea that most academic writing is a formalization of research. In this meaning, research is not necessarily a study—whether qualitative or quantitative—that produces

of its creators to a defined set of research rules” (Boden & Epstein, 2006, p. 230). This defined set of rules, described rather deterministically by Appadurai (2000) as “the review of the literature, the strategic citation, the delineation of the appropriate universe...of prior, usually disciplinary, knowledge” (p. 10) is rooted in knowledge practices that fall on what Santos (2007a, 2007b) would call “this side of the line.” That is, they are based on a dominant framework about how knowledge ought to be produced. As is suggested in the theories discussed above, knowing and being able to work within the dominant episteme is related to power in a knowledge framework. Being able to make sense of one’s own experiences and having the collective resources to do so may be a step towards escaping hermeneutical injustice. Utilizing other-than-dominant knowledge frameworks can result in being discredited as a knower and lead to testimonial injustice and subtle violence in the form of epistemicide.

In her discussion of epistemic responsibility in educational systems, Lorraine Code (1987) suggested that one of the “potential evils of education” is “its capacity to misuse power” (p. 248) because those in authority “are in a position to impose their definitions upon a situation so that future action is shaped by these definitions” (p. 248). While her argument that epistemic responsibility in education “must recognize how spheres of influence are established and maintained” (Code, 1987, p. 248) is based on establishing that there are different meanings of “authority” in educational systems, this examination of spheres of influence can be equally understood in relation to different knowledges. It is essential, then, to understand the role that dominant epistemological practices play in this establishment and maintenance of these spheres of influence and to question, as Andreotti (2012) did, “what kind of education could take account

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data, but that ‘research’ is an activity that is central to academic writing. That is, for example, in order to set the writing in the context of the wider disciplinary field, build on previous ideas, and create a research space, it is necessary to search for—research—the existing literature on the topic.

of the complexity, multiplicity, complicity, and inequality inherent in the politics of knowledge production” (p. 23) and “[w]hat kind of education could enable the emergence of ethical relationships between those who have historically marginalized and those who have been marginalized” (p. 23). These questions have informed both of the research questions for this study and this theoretical lens.

### **University to Pluriversity**

This study is specifically concerned with the establishment and maintenance of spheres of influence in university contexts. As such, it is necessary to situate the concepts that inform the cognitive (in)justices lens in these contexts. In “The University in the Twenty-first Century: Towards a Democratic and Emancipatory University Reform,” Santos (2011) set his concept of the ecology of knowledges in relation to higher education. He argued that for the university to break away from its traditional hegemonic role as arbiter of Western ideologies and to counteract the increasing “mercantilization” (p. 3) of the public university, reform must be based on, among other things, access and an ecology of knowledges. Access, he said, must not only confront the “colonial character of the modern university” by ensuring access to groups previously denied it because of class, race, gender, or ethnicity, but also to be critical about the ways in which, in the past, these institutions “theorized about” the inferiority of these groups and “the knowledge produced by” these groups “in the name of the epistemological priority conferred upon science” (p. 8). He suggested that the task of democratizing the university is demanding because it “questions the university as a whole, not just who attends it but what kind of knowledge is transmitted to those who attend it” (p. 8). To that end, his other point—that the reform must also be based on the ecology of knowledges—suggests an epistemological change in the “ways in which research and training have been conventionally carried out at the

university” (p. 9). Santos argued that this change must be undertaken through a dialogic approach to knowledge production with “scientific and humanistic knowledge produced by the university” and “lay or popular knowledges that circulate in society produced by common people, both in urban and rural settings, originating in Western and non-Western cultures” (p. 9) as part of the discussion. In this way, he suggested, there is a possibility for a move from university knowledge to pluriversity knowledge.

Similarly, Mignolo (2003) discussed the move from a university to a pluriversity in “Globalization and the Geopolitics of Knowledge: The Role of Humanities in the Corporate University.” He noted that the history of the university in the West is such that it has had a role in providing a “kind of education that was rooted in European history since the Middle Ages” (Mignolo, 2003, p. 99). However, to make his point about the ways in which it is possible for a university to come to terms “with the fact that there are other forms of knowledge (beyond the Western tradition) that are equally valid” (p. 105), he provided the example of the Universidad Intercultural in Ecuador that was “conceived from the perspective of indigenous knowledge but not for indigenous people only” as a “reversal...of and to the history of the university in the Western world and its colonies” (p.111). He suggested that this conceptualization of knowledges is “the next step in the transformation toward a better world, where knowledge will no longer be controlled by corporations and imperial states and the *university* will become a *pluriversity*” (p. 116, emphasis in original) and has to take place in these types of conceptualizations, and outside of “Western modernity” (p. 116).

### **Moving Forward with a Cognitive (In)Justices Lens**

The Cognitive (In)justices theoretical lens questions epistemological dominance and its role in educational contexts. This study employs the lens to examine feedback on academic writing as a location of injustices as well as a potential location of justice. As I discussed in the

literature review, this is part of the research space for this study given that the link between cognitive (in)justice and feedback has not been previously explored. The nature of a lens is that it frames what is focused on so, like any lens, there are limitations to this one. Andreotti, Ahenakew, and Cooper (2011) point out some of these limitations in their study that draws on Santos’s theory of abyssal thinking to demonstrate how epistemic privilege is evident in what they see as the necessity for “controversy” in academic writing in North American university settings. They acknowledged that translations “across the abyss” are “problematic” because of the use of Western terminology, categorizations, and technologies “to address issues related to indigenous ways of knowing” (p. 43). They pointed out that “if the need for an ecology of knowledges in academia is recognized, more attention needs to be paid” to these translations (p. 44).

In considering the representation of knowledge in academic writing and the feedback on this writing, I bear similar limitations in mind. If the way in which I am identifying non-dominant knowledges is through a dominant academic discourse in English, then this concept of translation is equally important. Since my concepts of knowledge and ways of knowing, learned through years of education in a Western educational system, may have reinforced epistemic privilege and abyssal thinking, I consider how to “interrupt” my assumptions so that I can “engage with other epistemologies on their own terms” (Andreotti, 2011, p. 394) and “ethically, responsibly and critically without homogenising, essentialising or romanticising them” (Andreotti, 2011, p. 394). These are concerns that I discuss further in the next chapter, as I outline the research methods for the study, in relation to the ethical considerations of the study.

### **Research Methods**

#### **Enacting Critical Discourse Analysis with Feedback on Academic Writing**

The primary objectives of this dissertation study were twofold. First, I wanted to investigate assumptions about academic writing in English that are implicit in feedback on the writing of English as an Additional Language (EAL) students in a Canadian university. Second, I wanted to investigate how the academic construct of feedback on written assignments is accessible (or inaccessible) to students whose first language is not English. To these ends, this study was developed to investigate both assumptions about academic writing that are present in feedback on the writing of undergraduate EAL students in a university context and the relative accessibility of this feedback for these writers. As such, the research questions sought to uncover the extent to which this feedback obscures and reproduces injustice, specifically cognitive (in)justices. Using a critical discourse analysis (CDA) research methodology, this study traced the connections among instructor language, student perceptions, and theories of cognitive (in)justices in that feedback. As this chapter indicates, this study is consistent with CDA principles in that it attempts to demystify and uncover power structures in feedback and questions the social structures in which feedback is embedded through a contextualization of the discourse—feedback on academic writing—at hand. The research method is outlined in this chapter in detail, as a means of producing a study that is what Haswell (2005) called “replicable, aggregable, and data-supported” (RAD) (p. 201). RAD research may or may not use numbers to support findings; it is not purely empirical. RAD research can be “feminist, empirical, ethnomethodological, contextual, action, liberatory, or critical” (p. 202), but it is research that strives for “comparability, replicability, and accruability” (p. 202). In outlining the research method in detail, I hope to demonstrate that this research was systematically undertaken in an

attempt to inquire into the “actualities of a situation” (Haswell, 2005, p. 201) and could be extended, replicated, and verified.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis as a Methodology**

As a research methodology, critical discourse analysis is not a singular series of practices and processes that, if followed, result in an infallible research design. Instead, Wodak (2011) described CDA as a “problem-oriented interdisciplinary research programme, subsuming a variety of approaches, each with different theoretical models, research methods and agendas” (p. 38). She stated that “what unites them is a shared interest in the semiotic dimensions of power identity politics and political-economic or cultural change in society” (p. 38). This dissertation study is concerned with *feedback as text* that is constructed and situated; such text formalizes an exchange that, because of its relationship to evaluation of students’ knowledge in a discipline, involves a power imbalance. Examining authentic feedback text using principles of critical discourse analysis questions the language involved in this exchange.

The analysis of feedback in this dissertation study aligns with Wodak’s (2011) characterization of critical discourse analysis in that it employs methods of analysis that are situated in existing models, while simultaneously extrapolating those models in consideration of the specific ways in which feedback is both produced and consumed. I used Fairclough’s (1995) dimensions of discourse analysis as a framework to respond to these questions. For analysis of the feedback itself, I drew primarily on approaches that classify the types, purposes, and focuses of feedback (e.g., Taylor, 2011; Hyatt, 2005). This chapter explains the approach to critical discourse analysis used in this study and outlines the research design of this project. It begins by defining and describing the terms involved in critical discourse analysis—specifically, the terms “discourse” and “critical.” To connect this research method to the theoretical framework and literature reviews of the previous chapters, I briefly discuss these terms as they ground the

study’s methods of analysis.

### **Discourse**

Describing a reality of defining “discourse,” Hyland and Paltridge (2011) stated that it is an “over-loaded term, converging a range of meanings” (p. 1). Rogers (2004) traced this range from its definition as “language above the sentence or above the clause” (Stubbs, quoted in Rogers 2004, p. 4) to its role as a functional approach to language in which “language responds to the functions of language use and has different work (or functions) to perform” (Rogers, 2004, p. 5). Fairclough (1995) characterized discourse or discursive practice as simultaneously a text, discourse practice, and social practice (p. 97).

The characterization of discourse as a social practice is a constant in the critical discourse analysis conceptualization of discourse. For analysts, discourse is a “social activity of making meaning” (Forchtner, 2013, p. 1440) that is embedded in social contexts (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2009; Hyland & Paltridge, 2011; Rogers, 2004; Wodak, 2011). Wodak (2011) argued that because of the social contexts in which it is embedded, discourse is “socially shaped” (p. 39) and constitutive because it “helps sustain and reproduce the social status quo” as well as contributing to “transforming it” (pp. 39-40). As a social activity, discourse includes the “vast array of meaning-making resources available to everybody” (p. 39). Concrete conceptions of discourse are varied; it includes texts, institutional practices, and social structures (Hyland & Paltridge, 2011a p. 1). Discourse can be spoken or written linguistic “texts” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 97), or it can encompass other forms of semiosis such as “pictures, symbols, design, colour [or] gesture” (Wodak, 2011, p. 39).

#### **Academic discourse.**

In university settings, academic discourse is a dominant method of making meaning. As a

social activity in academic settings, this discourse “simultaneously constructs the social roles and relationships which create academics and students and which sustain the universities, the disciplines, and the creation of knowledge itself” (Hyland, 2011, p. 171). According to Hyland (2011), through academic discourse, individuals in the academy “collaborate and compete with others” (p. 171). Hyland pointed to genres of academic discourse—the research article, a conference presentation, or a student essay, for example—as “more-or-less conventionalized forms” through which individuals in the academy “develop relationships, establish communities and get things done using language” (p. 175). He posited that genres are a type of “contract between writers and readers” that influence not only “the behavior of text producers” but also “the expectations of receivers” (p. 175). Although I point out in other parts of this dissertation that Hyland’s research about academic discourse, and feedback on academic writing particularly, took a less critical approach than I think is warranted for the findings that he reported, his characterization of academic discourse as a consistent and conventional method of making meaning and representing knowledge is, I think, accurate.

### **Feedback as academic discourse.**

Academic discourse, then, can be represented in a variety of ways. In this study, feedback on academic writing is the academic discourse under examination. Although in discussions of discourse analysis, feedback is rarely singled out as a type of discourse for analysis,<sup>13</sup> and it is not necessarily a genre as Hyland classified it,<sup>14</sup> feedback fits the description of discourse as outlined above. As discussed in Chapter 2, feedback is a social activity that is negotiated through

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<sup>13</sup> Although feedback was not specifically mentioned, van Dijk (2011) considered “classroom dialogues” as a genre for critical epistemic analysis (p. 40).

<sup>14</sup> As noted in previous chapters, although there are theories about the best ways to provide feedback, there is no one way for doing so. Corpus studies of feedback, such as those by Mirador (2000) and Yelland (2011), have suggested some common moves in summative feedback discourse.

interactions between instructor and student. It is a “meaning-making resource” for communicating with students in academic contexts; yet, it is constitutive because it “helps sustain and reproduce the social status quo” of academic writing (Amara, 2015, p. 36). That is, a purpose of feedback is to “inform a learner of the accuracy of a learning task” (Amara, 2015, p. 36) and, therefore, feedback on academic writing can “socialize students into the community’s discursive practices” (Basturkmen, East, & Bitchener, 2014, p. 433) by pointing out where the student writer deviates from expectations for the writing.

### **Critical Analysis of Discourse**

As Forchtner (2013) iterated, while the discourse under analysis is the focus of critical discourse analysis, proponents of the research method are not “interested in discourses for their own sake” but as a method of challenging “linguistic/semiotic relations through which injustice is obscured and (re)produced” (p. 1440). Critical discourse analysis is therefore concerned with the ways in which the “relation between language and power” is manifested in texts (Wodak, 2001, p. 2). Huckin, Andrus, and Clary-Lemon (2012) defined critical discourse analysis as an interdisciplinary approach to textual study that “aims to explicate abuses of power promoted by those texts, by analyzing linguistic/semiotic details in light of the larger social and political contexts in which those texts circulate” (p. 107). As such, critical discourse analysis generally works to uncover “opaque aspects of discourse as social practice” (Wodak, 2011, p. 40) such as the production and reproduction of unequal power relations between social classes, ethnic groups, and women and men to “demystify the role language plays” in this inequality (Forchtner, 2013, p. 1439). A goal of uncovering inequality is not only to bring it to light but also to question the larger context of the inequality, including the “social conditions in which these discourses are embedded” (p. 1439). For some critical discourse analysis practitioners, the uncovering of inequality includes working toward a change in the practice and discourse (van Dijk, 2011). van

Dijk's (2011) argument that “the discursive management of knowledge” (p. 33) is at the heart of critical discourse studies is also the concern of this study. He questioned who produces knowledge, who consumes that knowledge, and how knowledge is “discursively distributed in what is called the ‘knowledge society’” (p. 33). These questions are the same ones that are asked of discourse through a cognitive (in)justices lens. They address legitimacy of and access to knowledges produced through discourse, which are essential questions for this study of feedback.

### **Critical analysis of feedback on additional language academic writing**

Using CDA to investigate feedback for EAL students necessitated considering both the nature of power and of social structures because CDA is inherently concerned with the role of language in creating and perpetuating inequality in social settings, such as educational institutions.

#### **Feedback and power.**

To uncover power structures in feedback, I work from Toh's (2013) perspective that aspects of education can be interpreted as being “born of ideologies that result in inequitable practices, power differentials among people of different race, culture, gender, class, and socioeconomic differentiation” (p. 1408). As a regular activity in educational settings, feedback involves a power differential. Instructors “assume a perceived position of authority within a power relationship based on their experience and the institutional context” (Higgins, Hartley, & Skelton, 2001, p. 272). This power differential is most obviously represented in links between feedback and assessment. A common role of the instructor feedback relationship is to assist students in learning as well as to evaluate that learning (Higgins, Hartley, & Skelton, 2001, p. 273). For English as an additional language learners this evaluation is also related to linguistic structures that may be tied to different forms of knowledge. Guilherme (2014) argued that the

power differential in the assistance and evaluative roles of feedback regarding language learning serves to perpetuate the epistemic privilege of the dominant language and suppress non-dominant “knowledge-producing frameworks” (p. 55). In feedback, power is tied to evaluation of knowledge. Instructors who provide the feedback not only have the power to determine what is *right* and what is *wrong* (although it may not be phrased in that exact way) in how the student has represented their knowledge, they also have the power to attribute a value to that representation (and by extension, to student knowledge). Though feedback and assessment are not the same thing, they are often tied together in educational contexts and the assessment that can accompany feedback is also a measure of the instructor’s power.

Consistent with critical pedagogical research, this study posited that feedback is an “important site for critical analysis of power-laden discourses and power-born cultural practices” (Toh, 2013, p.1408). The research questions for this study, like other critical analyses of discourse in education, work on the assumption that knowledge is a “sociodiscursive construct” (Toh, 2013, p. 1408). They questioned how the representation of knowledge is understood in the feedback relationship and examine how the reaction to this representation of knowledge – feedback – is based in a system where there are “power differentiations between those who have access to legitimized forms of it and those who do not” (Toh, 2013, p. 1408).

### **Feedback and social structures.**

Connected to these power structures are the social structures involved in feedback. Feedback can be understood as a way of introducing students into the discourse community of the academic discipline, but it can also be perceived as having a type of “gate-keeping” role in academic writing. Hyland’s (2011) disconcerting assertion that academic discourse is the “carrier of expertise and prestige—the badge of those who possess knowledge and of those who wish to”

(p. 172)<sup>15</sup> drew a clear connection between knowledge related to academic discourse and the social structures in the academic community (and provides evidence for the need for a study such as this one that investigated epistemic privilege in a university setting). The nature of academic discourse is such that it “constructs the social roles and relationships which create academics and students and which sustain the universities, the disciplines, and the creation of knowledge itself” (Hyland, 2011, p. 171). Whether as a way of aiding students in their socialization into a discourse community, or as a method of controlling academic discourse through social processes, feedback discourse as a site for analysis is consistent with critical discourse analysis practices.

### **Research Design in Critical Discourse Analysis**

There are a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches that can be used in critical discourse analysis.<sup>16</sup> Wodak (2011) pointed out that “the choice of appropriate methods...depends on what one is investigating,” suggesting that critical discourse analysis research draws on “various linguistic analytic techniques and different social theories” (p. 40). As a general concept for research design, critical discourse analysis begins with a “research topic that is a social problem” and the chosen method is a process “informed through theory” in which the topic is “further refined so as to construct the objects of research” (Wodak, 2011, p. 40). However, in CDA, the conceptualization of discourse as a social event and the “foundational principle” of addressing social problems (Rogers, 2004, p. 2) means that, despite differences in theoretical approaches, there are some commonalities among CDA methods. One of these commonalities is that analysis must not only involve “some form of close textual...analysis”

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<sup>15</sup> Hyland’s (2011) language warrants a closer analysis than is possible here. His characterization of academic discourse as a “carrier of expertise and prestige” and as an enviable attainment perpetuates the epistemic privilege connected to academic discourse. It is not clear in his description—here in the *Continuum Companion to Discourse Analysis*—whether he makes this assertion as fact or whether he questions this characterization of academic discourse.

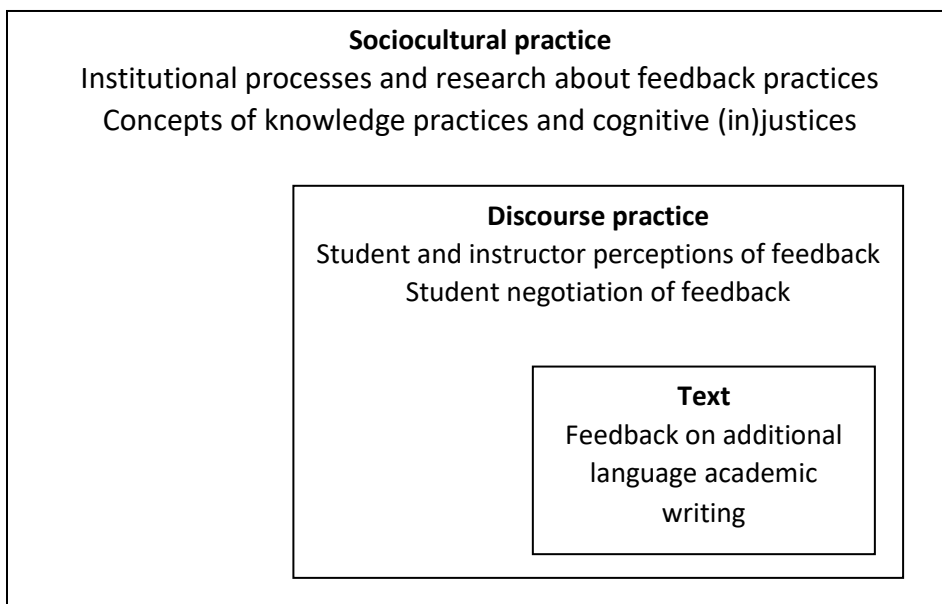
<sup>16</sup> Forchtner (2013) identified Fairclough’s dialectical-relational approach, van Dijk’s sociocognitive approach, and Wodak’s discourse-historical approach as three main approaches to critical discourse analysis.

(Wodak, 2011, p. 40) but also “a theorization and description of both the social processes and structures which give rise to the production of a text, and of the social structures and processes within which individuals or groups as social historical subjects create meanings in their interaction with texts” (Wodak, 2001, p. 3). This requirement means that within a CDA framework, analysis “starts with the assumption that language use is always social and that analyses of language occur above the unit of a sentence or clause” (Rogers, 2004, p. 5). Within critical discourse analysis this “theorization and description” of the social contexts for the discourse under analysis has been formalized in subtly different ways by CDA theorists. For this study, I used Fairclough’s (1995) framework to shape the analysis and discussion.

### **Fairclough’s three-dimensional framework for critical discourse analysis**

Fairclough’s (1995) three-dimensional framework for CDA was influenced by the description of “context of situation” in systemic-functional linguistics (Locke, 2004, p. 18). Fairclough (1995) characterized discourse as “simultaneously (i) a language text, spoken or written, (ii) discourse practice (text production and text interpretation), (iii) sociocultural practice” (p. 97). In Fairclough’s framework, the analyst first focuses on a “social problem which has a semiotic element” and then identifies the “obstacles” to overcoming the problem by analyzing the discourse within a series of narrowing contexts: the “network of practices” within which the problem is located, the relationship of the discourse to other elements within the particular discourse practice, and the discourse itself (Fairclough, 2001, p. 125). This analysis included “linguistic *description* of the language text, *interpretation* of the relationship between the (productive and interpretive) discourse practices and the text, and *explanation* of the relationship between the discursive processes and the social processes” (p. 97, emphasis in original). For this dissertation study, the text was feedback on writing produced by EAL writers,

and the discourse practice was student perceptions of feedback, instructor explanations about their feedback practices, and research about feedback practices in university and post-secondary settings. The sociocultural practice was research about academic writing and discourse and concepts of knowledge practices, including cognitive (in)justices. *Figure 1* is a representation of this framework for analysis.



*Figure 1.* Fairclough's dimensions of discourse analysis (adapted from Fairclough, 1995, p. 98)

## Research Design and Method

### Feedback on the Writing of EAL Writers

The “social problem” (Fairclough, 2001; Wodak, 2011) raised by this study’s research questions was the accessibility (or inaccessibility) of feedback on writing to the EAL writers themselves and the relationships among this (in)accessibility, feedback language, and theories of cognitive (in)justices. By accessibility, I mean whether the feedback was comprehensible to the EAL writers in that they understood it sufficiently to know how to change their writing to meet the outcomes or standards set for them. The “semiotic element” (Fairclough, 2001), then, was the

feedback itself. The investigation of this social problem was refined by the identification of an overarching research question and a series of sub-questions. The “objects of research” (Wodak, 2011, p. 40) for this study were the written feedback on the writing of post-secondary EAL students. Instructor assumptions and student perceptions of the feedback they received were part of the research questions.

### **Research Questions**

This study used both a primary research question and three sub-questions that broke down the primary question to analyzable parts:

**Primary Research Question:** What are the relationships among instructor language, student perceptions, and considerations of justice in the feedback on academic writing of undergraduate EAL students in a Canadian university?

#### **Research sub-questions:**

1. **Feedback types:** What kinds of feedback do EAL students receive when writing papers for their non-EAL disciplinary courses? On what areas of discourse do these kinds of feedback focus? What language is used in this feedback?
2. **Production and reception of feedback:** How do disciplinary instructors perceive their process of providing feedback on academic writing? How do EAL students perceive and negotiate feedback about their academic writing in non-EAL disciplinary courses?

To gather and analyze the data necessary to respond to these questions, I used two simultaneous, and complementary methods.

### **Research Design Overview**

I individually interviewed five undergraduate EAL students two or three times each over the course of one term about the feedback that they received on their academic writing in a variety of disciplines, and I collected their assignments with the instructor’s feedback on them. In addition, I interviewed five professors/instructors/markers who had provided some of the feedback and who agreed to participate in an interview. From the onset of this project, and in line with one of the criteria of critical discourse analysis as “solidarity with those who need it most” (van Dijk, 1993, p. 252), my intention was to foreground EAL student perceptions of feedback and maintain the concerns of those students as guides to the analytical method. Doing so meant that the student participants needed to be assured that their participation in the study would have no impact on their interactions with their instructors or on their course grades, and the feedback to be examined had to be as authentic as possible. In addition, it was necessary to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the instructor participants, whose feedback was under examination. The research design, therefore, included overlapping and recursive process layers comprised of obtaining ethics approval for the study, recruiting participants, gathering data, and engaging in data organization and analysis. Throughout this process, parts of the research design were necessarily emergent, as I had based my original design on some of my own assumptions about academic writing and feedback. Primarily, I had to adjust my ideas about the types and amount of feedback the students received on their writing. My own practices have been to provide students with lengthy and sometimes detailed feedback on their writing. The amount and types of feedback that the students in this study received were different than what I had expected so the categorization and analysis portions of the process became more complex elements of the design. As is explained in the following section, it was important for me that the feedback

included in the study was authentic; that it was the feedback that students received on their writing without the instructor having any prior knowledge that the feedback was going to be analyzed or without any experimental intervention. It will be evident in the discussion about the classification of the feedback that authentic feedback is messy, not uniform, and varied. That the feedback is authentic is what makes the study unique, but it is what also required some emergent design.

### **Ethics considerations and participant consent.**

The primary sources of data were interviews with instructors and EAL student participants and the feedback EAL students received on academic writing. While it is usually relatively straightforward to obtain the consent of students to participate in a study, the use of the feedback itself is more complex. The copyright of the assignment is owned by the student, but the copyright of the feedback is owned by the instructor (Juliette Nadeau, Copyright Officer at the University of Manitoba, email correspondence, August 8, 2016). This means that the instructor's consent was necessary to examine the feedback. However, obtaining this consent was problematic in three ways. The first is related to the integrity of the feedback data. If the instructor was made aware of the study and its purpose he or she might, perhaps inadvertently, provide feedback for the researcher as the audience. This feedback would not be as authentic as it would be without prior knowledge of the study's purposes. The second issue is related to student confidentiality. If the instructor was aware that there were students in the class participating in the study and that the study participants were EAL students, the instructor might have been able to determine the identity of the students, which would breach the confidentiality of the study. Finally, obtaining instructor consent can also potentially compromise the research method. As a method, CDA seeks to uncover opaque or hidden aspects of power and dominance

in discourse. The purposes of using CDA as a method of this study were to highlight student voices in response to feedback and to understand the relationship between these responses and the agency or lack thereof that these students might have in understanding the feedback. When student voices are included in such research, it is in comparison to instructor voices (Lee, 2009; Leong & Lee, 2018), responses to general questions about feedback through questionnaires or interviews (Chang, 2014; Mahfoodh, 2017; Radecki & Swailes, 1988) or in response to feedback that is not necessarily provided regarding their own writing (Kang & Dykema, 2017). In this study, my focus is on students, and it was crucial that the student consent and interviews preceded those of the instructors.

Since this process of obtaining participant consent is different from the usual consent process outlined by the Tri-Council policies, a modified consent process was needed. Article 3.7 *A of the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (2014) allows for the use of modified consent under the following conditions:

- a. the research involves no more than minimal risk to the participants;
- b. the alteration to consent requirements is unlikely to adversely affect the welfare of participants;
- c. it is impossible or impracticable to carry out the research and to address the research question properly, given the research design, if the prior consent of participants is required;
- d. in the case of a proposed alteration, the precise nature and extent of any proposed alteration is defined; and

- e. the plan to provide a debriefing (if any) which may also offer participants the possibility of refusing consent and/or withdrawing data and/or human biological materials, shall be in accordance with Article 3.7B. (p. 35-36)

As the study design fulfilled conditions (a), (b), and (c), I included a request for modified consent in the ethics application and with it fulfilled conditions (d) and (e). The application was accepted by both ethics review boards involved—the one at the university where I am a student and the one at the university where the study was taking place.

Thus, the following steps were taken for participant recruitment and consent. In the first stage of the study, I recruited student participants based on the criteria explained in the section about participants, below. At the first interview, I reviewed the informed consent form (see *Appendix A: Student Recruitment Documents*) with the student participant, and in signing the form, the student consented to the interview and the use of his or her writing assignments and the feedback he or she had obtained on them. Once students had agreed to participate in the study and we together determined the classes and assignments that would be part of the study, I sent an email explaining the study to the chairs of the departments in which these classes were taking place (see *Appendix B: Instructor Recruitment Documents*). In this correspondence, I asked the chair to inform all members of the department that a study was underway in the department by forwarding a letter from me about it (see *Appendix B: Instructor Recruitment Documents*). Through this letter instructors learned that the study was about feedback on undergraduate writing assignments; they were not made aware that the study was about EAL learners specifically or whether a student in their class is participating in the study as this information could compromise the anonymity of the student participants and influence the feedback that instructors provided.

In the second stage of the study, after interviews with student participants were completed, I sought to obtain written consent for use of the feedback from all instructors whose feedback was involved in the study. To do this, I sent a letter and consent form to the instructors (see *Appendix B: Instructor Recruitment Documents* for both of these documents) to request their participation in the study. Instructors consented to the use of the feedback, information from the course outline, and assignment information from the course in which the student participant received the feedback. All of the instructors contacted agreed to participate in the study.

Finally, I also asked those instructors whether they would be willing to be interviewed about their approaches to feedback on academic writing. These interviews were sought after the interviews with participants were completed and after courses had ended. A copy of the interview consent form can be found in *Appendix B: Instructor Recruitment Documents*.

### **Participants.**

The social problem identified in this study’s research questions is not specific to the feedback practices of any particular instructor, program, or institution. Instead, its focus is to investigate feedback on writing by EAL students within the defined research objectives. Flick (2007a) noted that in selecting sites for qualitative research where specific practices are the basis for the research it is necessary to “find and sample settings in which you can expect these practices to happen” (p. 30). In this project, where feedback on second-language writing in a university setting was investigated, the site for research was a university with a population of EAL writers. The research was conducted at a primarily undergraduate university in an urban setting. The university has a student population of between 9,000 and 15,000 students, with an international student population of between 500 and 900 students. Although the statistics about immigrant and refugee students are not included in information about the student population, the

fact that the university provides supports for these learners indicates that there is a significant population in the university.

Ritchie, Lewis, and Elam (2003) noted that in qualitative research, selection of participants, settings, or other research criteria is “not intended to be statistically representative” (p. 78). Instead, “the characteristics of the population are used as the basis of selection” and therefore is suited to small-scale and in-depth studies (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003, p. 78). As such, for this study, I recruited five undergraduate students in their second or subsequent years of studies<sup>17</sup> who self-identified as EAL learners. These participants, who will be further described in the following chapter, were recruited through signs posted throughout campus, emails to cultural and language-based student groups, communications with the university’s International Student Services department, postings on professional association websites, and communications with known professionals and students in the field (see *Appendix A: Student Recruitment Documents* for examples of recruitment documents).

The criteria for participation in the study were set prior to the start of recruiting participants. For this study, participants are self-identified EAL learners. Additionally, the participants were registered in at least one course in the Winter 2017 term for which academic writing was required. To determine whether potential participants met the criteria for participation, I asked them questions including: Do you consider English your first language? What is your current program of study? What year are you in your program? What courses will you be taking in the upcoming term?

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<sup>17</sup> The decision to include other than first-year students in the study is based on my experience as an academic writing instructor for primarily EAL first-year students. In their first year, these students are getting their bearings in a university setting and may not feel comfortable speaking about their academic work with their instructors or in their classes, let alone with a researcher asking them to participate in a study. EAL students in their second or subsequent years may not have the same misgivings.

Overall, ten students responded to the study recruiting information. One respondent did not identify as an EAL student. Four respondents contacted me after the study had started and I had participants in place. Initially, I intended to recruit only participants in their second or higher year of studies. However, through an initial discussion and correspondence with one of the first respondents, I learned that she had come to Canada as an international student in high school and, before entering into her degree studies, had attended six months of high school and the English Language program at the university where the study took place. After consulting with my advisor, we agreed that because of her experience in this Canadian university, she would be able to speak to feedback in these systems.

Also initially I had intended to recruit four participants. However, one of the first respondents who met all of the criteria to participate in the study found out after the study had started that he was not going to receive written feedback on the writing assignment he was required to complete (I will discuss this further in the findings and discussion chapter). Because there would be no feedback discourse to analyze for that participant, again in consultation with my advisor I decided to include one more participant in the study. Thus, there are five student participants in the study.

Although not part of the criteria for selection, it was my hope that participants would add “maximal variation” (Flick, 2007a, p. 28) to the study, which was the case. That is, all participants were EAL student writers in university, but varied by their home country (and the language they consider their first language), when they learned English (e.g., as a child, as a teenager, or when they started university), how long they have been in Canada (e.g., arrived as a child or recently arrived), their experiences with North American educational practices, and the disciplines in which they received the feedback on the academic writing examined in this study.

All of the eight<sup>18</sup> instructors involved in providing feedback for the assignments in the study agreed that their feedback could be used in the study. Five of the instructors agreed to be interviewed for the study. Of these, two were markers for the Chemistry lab report that is included in the study. Two of the instructors were professors in the Departments of Classics and Linguistics. The final instructor was a professor in a social sciences department. Although he agreed to participate in the study, he asked that references to the specific department or course remain confidential. All of the participant profiles will be included in the next chapter.

**Data sources and collection.**

In critical discourse analysis, there is no prescribed way for collecting data (Meyer, 2001, p. 23). For this dissertation study, data sources and collection are related to both the discourse under study (feedback) and the contextualization of this discourse. As Table 1 shows, the two primary sources of data were written feedback on student assignments and interviews with student and instructor participants. Interviews with instructor participants provided context for the feedback discourse and contributed to responding to the research sub-question about whether the suggested beliefs about feedback in the feedback itself aligned with or differed from what instructors said about feedback in academic writing.

**Table 1**  
***Data Sources***

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Data Source 1</b>	<b>Data Source 2</b>
What kinds of feedback do EAL students receive when writing papers for their non-	Instructor feedback on writing	Interviews with student participants

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<sup>18</sup> One assignment, the chemistry lab report, included feedback from two markers. Although markers and instructors have different responsibilities in university settings, I have chosen to continue to use the term *instructor* to refer to all the participants in this study who provided feedback to the students. Primarily I have chosen to do so for sake of ease; it is less wordy than saying *feedback-provider* each time I refer to these participants. However, the choice is also based on my belief that an instructor (or teacher) does not always have to be the person standing at the front of the class providing information about a topic. Instead, instruction and teaching can come in many forms from a variety of people and, as will be seen in the findings of this study, the two markers in the chemistry lab provide a significant form of instruction in their feedback on the lab assignment.

EAL disciplinary courses? On what areas of discourse do these kinds of feedback focus? What language is used in this feedback?	assignments	
How do disciplinary instructors perceive their process of providing feedback on academic writing? How do EAL students perceive and negotiate feedback about their academic writing in non-EAL disciplinary courses?	Interviews with participants	Interviews with instructor participants

***Interviews with participants.***

The final research sub-question in this study asked about student perceptions and negotiations of feedback on academic writing. To respond to this question, I interviewed participants two or three times,<sup>19</sup> for about an hour each time. The first interview at the beginning of the term focused on the student’s current educational context as well as his or her past experiences with academic writing and feedback on academic writing. The interviews in the middle and at the end of the term focused on participant reactions to the feedback he or she received on academic writing assignments throughout the term (see *Appendix C: Interview Guides* for the guides). I transcribed all the interviews and sent transcripts to participants for member checking (Flick, 2007a, p. 66).

***Feedback on academic writing.***

The feedback on the EAL participants’ academic writing was the main source of data for the first and second research sub-questions. For the purposes of this study, I used the definition of academic writing suggested by Thaiss and Zawicki (2006), which is that academic writing is any writing that “fulfills a purpose of education” in a university course (p. 4). This means that it

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<sup>19</sup> The two participants that I interviewed only two times were the participants who did not receive any feedback on their writing assignments over the term, so there was no feedback to discuss throughout the term. I interviewed those students at the beginning of the term and at the end of the term.

is “student writing in response to an academic assignment” that has been returned to the student with feedback, either in the form of notations throughout or in formative and summative comments (p. 4).

Once students agreed to participate in the study, we discussed the courses that they were taking and looked at the course outlines to identify which ones might require written assignments. In the initial research plan, I intended to discuss feedback from only one course with the participants. As I discussed the academic writing required of students in their courses, however, it became apparent that there were few written assignments. Therefore, in consultation with my advisor and after discussing the possibility with the participants, we included in the study feedback that they received in any class in the term in which they received feedback on academic writing, meaning that more feedback discourse could be included in the analysis. At the interviews, once we discussed the feedback, student participants gave me their writing assignments with the feedback on them. I photocopied the documents and returned the originals to the student.

### **Data organization and analysis.**

Following Wodak’s (2011) assertion that choosing a research method for critical discourse analysis is a process “informed through theory,” (p. 40) the investigation of these questions drew on concepts of knowledge and knowledge practices as outlined in the previous chapter regarding the cognitive (in)justices theoretical lens. This theoretical lens, as well as the literature review, acknowledges that feedback is situated within larger concepts of academic writing, academic discourse, and knowledge practices in post-secondary institutions. This “theorization and description” of the social contexts for feedback contribute to the contextualization of feedback that is necessary for a critical analysis of discourse (Wodak, 2001,

p. 3). The situation of feedback within the theoretical lens also fits van Dijk’s (2011) description of epistemic discourse analysis as the “study of the way knowledge is expressed, implied, suppressed, distributed...in text and talk” (p. 35). Using Fairclough’s (1995, 2001) three dimensions of discourse analysis requires first a close analysis of the text and then widening out of the analysis to the situation of the text within the discourse practice, and then widening again to the situation of the text and discourse practice within the sociocultural practice. Therefore, analysis of the two main data sources—feedback and interviews with participants—required two related approaches, both of which utilized some form of categorization or coding of themes, which is consistent with qualitative research approaches (Flick, 2007a; Ritchie, Spencer, & O’Connor, 2003).

#### ***Interview data organization.***

The main method of analysis for interviews with participants is categorizing and coding for ways in which students negotiated and perceived feedback. To categorize the interview data, first I identified parts of the interviews during which students discussed *specific* feedback that they received on assignments that are included in the study. I labeled these (S). Any comments that students made about feedback in *general*, I labeled (G). One of the research sub-questions asked how students perceive and negotiate feedback on academic writing, therefore these two actions of perception and negotiation became the categories for the feedback. Within the *specific* and *general* categories of feedback, if a participant spoke about how he or she understood the feedback, or how he or she felt about the feedback, I categorized it as (P) for *perception*. If a participant spoke about action that he or she took as a result of the feedback or if he or she spoke about grappling with the feedback, then I labeled that as (N) for *negotiation*. Table 2 shows examples of interview data coded in each of the categories.

**Table 2**  
*Categories for Student Interview Analysis*

Category	Explanation	Example
Specific (S)	Comments about feedback on assignments included in the study	<p><i>Joanne (J):</i> Right because she says it's 'quite short'</p> <p><i>Participant (P):</i> it's too short</p> <p><i>J:</i> and too vague but what ...how again...</p> <p><i>P:</i> I don't...</p> <p><i>J:</i> how do you know what too short is?</p> <p><i>P:</i> yah exactly and too vague but I did answer every question she asked.</p>
General (G)	Comments about feedback as a general concept, including how students generally understand and react to feedback	<p><i>J:</i> Like, what do you do...there is a mark and then there is feedback, what is your first sort of reaction?</p> <p><i>P:</i> I just take a look at it then I see my mark and I close it ...</p> <p>[laughter]</p> <p><i>P:</i> ...and I do not tell anybody. When somebody ask me how did you do? I always say I did o.k.</p> <p><i>J:</i> O.k.</p> <p><i>P:</i> Yah, I just...</p> <p><i>J:</i> So you look at the mark first?</p> <p><i>P:</i> Yes first I look at the mark.</p>
Perceive (P)	Comments about how students feel about, or understand the feedback	<p><i>J:</i> Yah. O.k. So the instructor has written 'good summary. Minor format errors'.</p> <p><i>P:</i> Yah.</p> <p><i>J:</i> And you got 10 out of 10. So you saw...you peeked at the 10 out of 10 and then you ...</p> <p><i>P:</i> and that was o.k.</p> <p><i>J:</i> Yah, yah and so um you...you didn't have any like you understood this, what she was saying then, in these, yah.</p> <p><i>P:</i> Uh huh and then in here um in here I was sup...I should not put quotations and then on the e-mail she...she kinda like remind us that like when you are emphasizing something put it in italics.</p>
Negotiate (N)	Comments about how the student grappled with the feedback or action the student took as a result of the feedback	<p><i>J:</i> mmm. And this...what does this mean "environment is dynamic?" question mark. Do you know what that means?</p> <p><i>P:</i> 'cause I said like uh they have the special learning o.k. which is like this is a learned trait from like turtles that are in the experiment...in the experiment environment but in the normal environment they don't need it.</p>

		<p><i>J</i>: mmm  <i>P</i>: so... but he said... his argument now is the environment is dynamic  <i>J</i>: o.k.  <i>P</i>: so their normal environment could...could change and they would need a...the special learning.  <i>J</i>: oh o.k. so they would need to be able to learn something because the environment isn't a static thing?  <i>P</i>: yah.</p>
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The analysis of the interview data provided some context required for the discourse practice dimension of Fairclough’s (1995, 2001) framework. This dimension sets the text within the processes of its production and interpretation.

Aside from these codes related to the perception and negotiation of feedback, other categories and codes emerged that are not directly related to feedback, but that provide additional context for the feedback discourse. These are: understanding of and experience with feedback in another language or academic tradition, comments about language and language learning, discussions about academic writing including the process of academic writing and perceptions of academic writing. Using these codes helped me to contextualize the feedback, and although they are not reported in the data analysis, they provided me with an understanding of the participants’ experiences as students and writers.

***Feedback data analysis.***

At the centre of Fairclough’s (1995, 2001) framework for CDA is the text or texts under analysis. Janks (2005) emphasized that the benefit to this approach is that it focuses first on the text—“the signifiers that make up the text, the specific linguistic and visual selections, their juxtapositioning, their sequencing, their layout” (p. 100). Since the feedback discourse is the

focus of this study, I needed to determine how to examine it. To do this, I undertook the organization of the feedback text in a number of stages.

First, I identified the feedback for analysis in situ on the academic writing that student participants shared with me. That is, I circled or marked on each piece of writing the feedback to be considered in the analysis. As will become evident in the next chapter, *Findings and Discussion*, cumulatively there were a high number of individual feedback units on all of the assignments. As also will become evident in the findings and discussion chapter, there is little pattern or structure to this feedback. Instead, there are very many different ways in which this feedback is provided: there are words, phrases, abbreviations, notes, corrections, numbers, and other symbols.

To respond to the research sub-question about the types, focus, and language of the feedback that these students receive on their academic writing, I needed a way to identify the feedback to examine. In their studies of feedback on academic writing, Lee (2008), Hyland (2003), and Hyland and Hyland (2001) identified *feedback points* in the writing, which they further examine through their respective methods. A feedback point “refers to any comment, underlining, or correction made on the student text, such as, a written intervention by the teacher” (Lee, 2008, p. 76). In order to further examine the feedback in this study, I identified feedback points, which I am calling *feedback units*, a term that Lee (2008) used when describing feedback points. The word *unit* more closely approximates the notion that the feedback might be comprised of only a single item but that it also could be a larger or more complex whole comprised of multiple items—in this case, hand-written text, hand-drawn images, typed text, imported images, or any combination of these. Importantly, while Lee (2008) considered feedback points to constitute a “meaningful unit,” (p. 76) in this study the question of exactly

what is “meaningful” to the student participants essentially is what is under examination. As the researcher, I tried to look at the feedback without making assumptions about what the instructor meant or what the student would understand; that is, I did not assume that the student would find meaning in any particular feedback unit, such as in the following example:

: decision making c

As a writing instructor, a student, and someone who has epistemic privilege related to academic writing, I have some interpretive resources to make meaning of these marks. For example, I view the circle and the dash in this feedback as a unit. The circle draws attention to this point in the writing. The added dash between the words *decision* and *making* suggests that this should be a compound word. However, as a researcher—and not a teacher, student, or person with epistemic privilege—I did not assume that the student whose writing received this feedback would make the same meaning of it. Therefore, while I did label the example above a feedback unit because the circle and the dash seem to work together, my understanding of *feedback unit* differs from Lee’s. Most importantly, I did not assume that there is meaning for the student in this unit or any other feedback unit. While I identified a number of feedback units in the feedback in this study, I did not assume any were meaningful units to the student participants.

Feedback units in the assignments were by no means uniform. Some feedback units resemble the example above. Others used abbreviations as in this example:

sp.?  
destruction.

Some included words such as in this example:

*; halizye*  
Oxford Classical Dictionary C

And other feedback units were comprised of phrases such as this one:

HE IN ORDER TO FIND HIS FATHER SOMEWHERE OVER SE  
*(write specific passage)*  
 et (Homer). Bernhole gave two examples of

In identifying the feedback units, I accounted for every marking on all of the writing provided to me by the student participants.

Once I identified all of the feedback units in each piece of student writing, I transcribed each point into an Excel spreadsheet, using one spreadsheet file for each student participant. Each spreadsheet included the participant’s pseudonym, the course in which the feedback was received, the assignment for which the feedback was received, information about the writer’s original text, and the feedback on that text (see *Appendix D* for an example of the spreadsheet). In the feedback spreadsheet, I also included portions of the interview data in which the participant discussed specific feedback in order to be able to easily contextualize the feedback for further analysis.

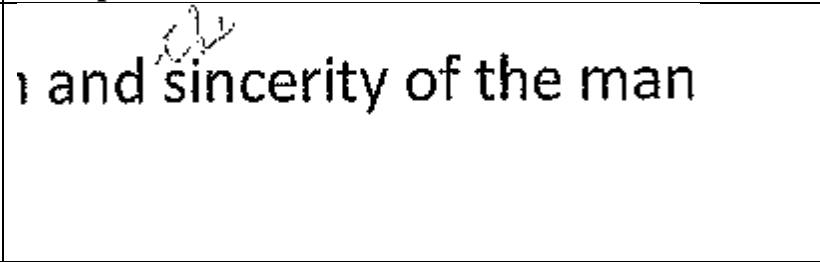
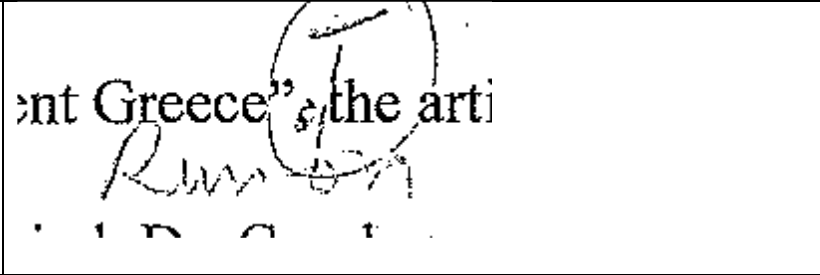
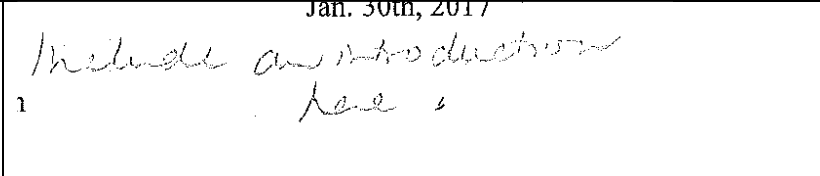

*Feedback Types.*

My purpose in this study was to examine 100% of the feedback on the EAL student participants’ writing, which included written corrective feedback, written commentary, and any overarching formative or summative feedback written on or appended to the texts. Although there are many models within feedback research to examine each type of feedback separately, there are fewer models that examine all these types of feedback in the same study. Therefore, I adapted and combined some of the models to group the feedback units according to type. Each feedback unit is classified as one of the following: in-line change, in-line change with

explanation, mark-only, written commentary, summative. These final two classifications—written commentary and summative feedback—align almost directly with two of the streams of feedback research mentioned above. For this study, written commentary includes words, phrases, partial phrases, or abbreviations that explain, question, respond to, or note something about the student writing. Summative feedback—also called the “end comment” (Batt, 2005; Smith, 1997)—was comprised of any feedback that provides “overall” or holistic comments about the writing, and often included some assessment of the writing. This is overarching feedback that provides a holistic assessment of the writing. *Summative* has also been used to describe the reporting function of classroom assessment “to report student learning to one or more audiences outside the classroom” (Bonner, 2013, p. 90), or to provide a grade to the student. Summative feedback has a type of finality and it is often set in contrast to *formative* feedback “whose primary purpose is to guide and improve student learning and/or teacher instructional practice” (Bonner, 2013, p. 90). I have called the feedback that “sums up” the instructor’s ideas about the writing *summative* feedback, independent of the use of the terms *summative* and *formative* as described above. In the case of this study, it happens that all of the feedback is also summative in quite a final way; none of the students in the study were able to revise their writing. I will discuss the significance of this further in the next chapter about findings and discussion. The summative feedback in this study was often included at the end of the student writing or as a separate, typewritten sheet appended to the assignment. The other classifications—in-line change, in-line change with explanation, and mark-only—are based on some of the classifications used by WCF researchers but with modifications that reflect the theoretical framework of this study and my experience as an EAL instructor and writing instructor. *Mark only* is a classification that Taylor (2011) used for feedback that included “no words but only one or more marks, such as a check,

an X, a circle, a line (strikethrough or underline), an arrow, or a question mark” (p. 145). I have used Taylor’s (2011) definition and categorization in my coding of this category. Examples of all of the types of feedback can be found in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
*Examples of Types of Feedback*

Description	Example
<p><b>In-line change:</b> this is a change to the writing with no explanation. This can be an addition, as in the example, or a variety of other types of changes, which are described below.</p>	
<p><b>In-line change with explanation:</b> a change is made to the writing, and some explanation is provided for that change.</p>	
<p><b>Written Commentary:</b> these are phrases or parts of phrases that respond to the writing in some way.</p>	<p>Jan. 30th, 2017</p> 
<p><b>Mark-only:</b> these are marks that are not connected to the in-line changes or the written commentary. They are “stand-alone” markings.</p>	
<p><b>Summative:</b> these are the holistic comments about the writing that are provided by the instructor.</p>	<p>[name], You use a lot of very good details here. I would like to see a clear intro &amp; conclusion guiding me to your overall conclusions. Proofread for grammar and ensure your formatting is correct (eg. Margins). I was pleased to see that you contacted Dr. Carr. Great initiative!</p>

The term *in-line change* is a modification of Taylor’s (2011) *in-line edit*, which she described as “revisions of the student’s writing without additional explanation” (p. 145).

Although the meaning of the term is similar in this study, I changed the term *edit* to *change* because editing is defined in particular ways that are not necessarily congruent with the feedback in this study. *Edit* means “To prepare (something, such as literary material) for publication or public presentation” and “to alter, adapt, or refine especially to bring about conformity to a standard or to suit a particular purpose” (edit, m-w.com). While instructors may be editing their students’ work in order for them to conform to academic standards, I am not sure that, in handing in assignments, students expect that instructors will necessarily be editing their work. In addition, as I will discuss further in the *Findings and Discussion* chapter, a mutual understanding between instructor and student about the parameters and expectations of the feedback and the eventual writing may lead to editing of student work. However, in the case of the students in this study, they are not able to revise their writing, so using the term *edit* to describe the instructors’ changes to the student writing is not accurate; the editing will not lead to any changes that eventually prepare the writing for further public presentation.

In the same vein, *in-line change* is similar to the *direct feedback* of WCF research which denotes that the instructor has made a correction to the student writing. *In-line change with explanation* is my term for instances where the instructor has made a change to the student writing and has provided some information to the student about why that change was made. This could also be considered a type of direct feedback. Research on written corrective feedback in EAL settings focuses on the effectiveness of error correction. Methods of classifying feedback in this research, such as (among many others) those by Ellis (2009), Ferris (2006), Chandler (2003), and Lee (2008), use common terminology of *direct feedback* and *indirect feedback*. This research primarily examines the feedback about perceived errors in the writing and focuses on those perceived errors and how they are corrected—whether the instructor corrects the error in-

line (direct feedback) or provides an explanation of the error so the student can make the correction (indirect feedback), or a combination of these. I have chosen to use “in-line change” instead of the terminology of WCF—like *direct* and *indirect* feedback—because this terminology identifies these instances where feedback is provided as “errors.” In this model of categorization, the feedback locates or locates and corrects errors in the writing. I have chosen to use the term *in-line change*, because it does not highlight or focus on these instances as errors, but as writing that can be refined and worked on. What the instructors are doing in making these changes without any explanation or context for the writer, is really proofreading, or copyediting.

I have also chosen to use the phrase *in-line change* rather than *direct* or *indirect* feedback because it is consistent with recent research, specifically translanguaging, that questions what constitutes an *error* in EAL writing (Canagarajah, 2006a; Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011; Marshall & Moore, 2013), when academic writing in English is taking place in a globalized, post-colonial world in which the number of people for whom English is not their first language is “substantially larger” than the number of people who claim English as their first language (House, 2003, p.557). *In-line change* takes the focus off of the negativity of the writing being *incorrect* and moves towards the idea that student writing (whether or not they have the chance to rewrite/rework that particular piece of writing) is a work in progress. The phrase *in-line change* also acknowledges that some of these instances are choices that the instructor/marker is making about the writing, but that these might not be the student’s choices about the writing. The term *direct feedback*, although it means that instructors change student writing, masks these changes in language that suggests these students have some choice about the change that is enacted by the instructor on their writing and can choose not to accept the change (even though it

has already been made and setting aside any rewriting that the student might do). *In-line change* acknowledges the feedback for what it is: a modification of the student’s writing.

***Classification Challenges.***

While the feedback classifications can have relatively clear parameters on paper, the actuality of classifying some of it on the assignments in this study was, at times, murky. Among the choices that I made throughout the classification, there are two that require additional explanation here. The first was the identification of some of the *mark-only* feedback. There were some instances where it was possible that the mark was an in-line change and not solely a mark.

One example is the following feedback:

audience is college students the level of information and accuracy might not be appropriated  
for higher education.

In this student sentence the “d” on “appropriated” is crossed out, presumably because, grammatically, the word might read more accurately as “appropriate.” The cross-out fits the qualifications of *mark-only* feedback, but it could also be classified as an in-line change if I assumed that the interpretation of the writing as inaccurate was what the instructor meant. While I tried not to assume what the instructor meant or what the student would understand about the feedback, in the end, I had to make a judgement about these types of feedback and I included these types of cross-outs as *in-line changes*, not as *mark-only* feedback.

The second classification choice that requires explanation is in connection with one assignment for which the feedback was provided electronically; the feedback was recorded as text in comments in the markup area on the right-hand side of the page through the Review feature of Microsoft Word. Although these comments were much easier to read than the handwritten comments, they were somewhat challenging to code within the categories

established for handwritten text directly on students’ papers because the feedback was not written over top of the original, and nothing was crossed out on the original; in short, there were no in-line edits of the same format that were found in the other assignment feedback. If the marker wanted to make a comment about the form of a word or a sentence, she included it as a comment in the margin shown in this example:

The reaction 1 **observes** Zaitsev’s rule and **has** major product of 2-pentene with greater quantity of *E* over *Z* isomerism, and a minor product of 1-pentene. Reaction 2 **has** a major product of 1-pentene and minor products of 2-pentene with more *E* over *Z*. Reaction 3 has a

Commented [LM16]: shows/illustrates  
 Commented [LM17]: \*had – past tense (-0.25) [SL3]  
 Commented [LM18]: \*had

Although this example shows a different type of feedback than the handwritten text and markings on the other writing in this study, I chose not to create a separate category for it. I categorized it in the same way as the feedback that was handwritten: for instance, I coded all of the comments like the first one [LM16] as *in-line change* and the second instance [LM17] as *in-line change with explanation*. At the same time, I was cognizant of the different medium with which this feedback was provided and I discuss it as a factor and this difference will figure, in part, in my discussions about the study’s findings in the next two chapters.

**Feedback categorization.**

Identifying the types of feedback the EAL students received on their writing is a research task for this study. Another concern is the areas of discourse on which the feedback focused. To respond to this concern, I needed to determine the focus of every feedback unit and some of its characteristics. One way of categorizing the focus of the feedback that is consistent in published studies about feedback is to determine whether the feedback is about the content of the writing or about the way the content has been represented. Therefore, *content* is a term I borrow from Hyatt (2005) and Taylor (2011) to name the feedback that focuses on what the writing is about.

Terminology about how the content is represented varies in the literature; *stylistic comments*

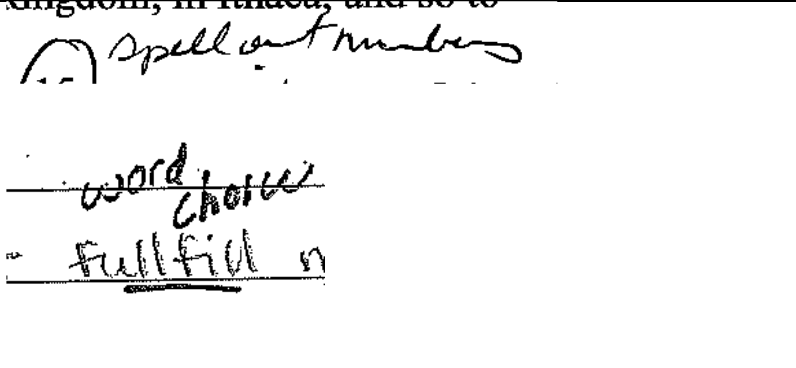
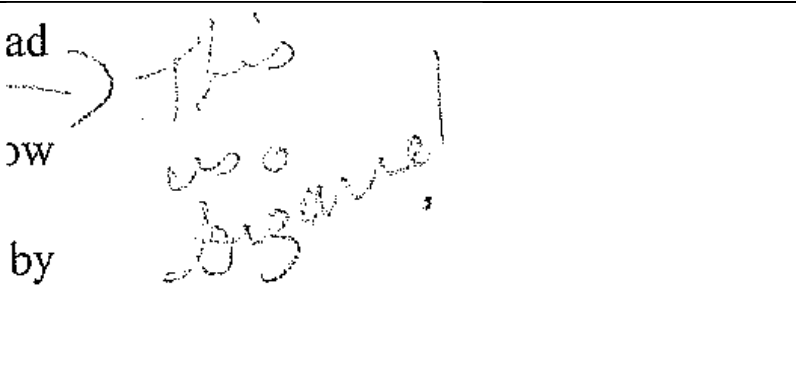
(Hyatt, 2005), *form* (Taylor, 2011), and *skills* (Brown & Glover, 2014) are examples of this terminology. The feedback that is classified under these terms is fairly consistent, however. It includes, among other things, grammatical constructs, word forms and choice, punctuation and sentence structure, source citation styles (Hyatt, 2005), and the way the writing looks on the page (Brown & Glover, 2014; Hyatt, 2005; Taylor, 2011). To categorize the focus of the feedback for this study, I used Hyatt’s (2005) categories of *stylistic comments*, *content-related comments*, and *phatic comments*. I have added *grade* as one of the focuses of the feedback because I view a numeric or alphabetic assessment as a focus of feedback. Grades were included on all of the assignments in the study and therefore the addition was warranted. Had some of the assignments been part of a pass/fail program, where grades are not assigned, this focus would need to be reconsidered. Feedback categorized as *grade* is an indication of the evaluation of the writing. This could be the overall grade for the writing, or a grade for a portion of the writing. Feedback categorized as *stylistic* addressed the “use and presentation of academic language within the assignment” (Hyatt, 2005, p. 345), which included the sentence level (such as grammar and word choice) and the format of the writing (such as margins and headings). *Content-related* feedback regards what is included in the writing in terms of subject, detail, reasoning, and organization. *Phatic* feedback has the purpose of establishing and maintaining a “good social and academic relationship” between the instructor and the student (Hyatt, 2005, p. 344).<sup>20</sup> In this category I

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<sup>20</sup> Hyatt (2005) included more categories of feedback in his study that I elected not to use. Some of Hyatt’s categories do not apply to the writing represented in this study. For example, Hyatt (2005) included *methodological comments* as one of the categories because the writing he examined was scientific writing and method is a common focus of the feedback; in this study, the writing addressed a variety of disciplines, and there were no comments about research method. Other of Hyatt’s categories, such as *administrative comments*, were not a focus of the feedback in this study, meaning there were no such comments in that category. Finally, some of Hyatt’s categories, such as *developmental comments* were not consistent with my concept of the feedback focus. Hyatt’s categories of developmental comments—*alternatives*, *future*, *reflective question*, *informational comment*—read more like types of comments than focus of comments.

also included comments where the instructor reacted to the text as a reader. Examples of feedback that was categorized within each focus can be seen in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
*Examples of Feedback Focus*

Description	Example
<p><b>Style:</b> Feedback that has to do with the “use and presentation of academic language within the assignment” (Hyatt, 2005, p. 345). This includes at the sentence level - such as grammar and word choice—as well as the format of the writing—such as margins and headings.</p>	
<p><b>Content:</b> Feedback that has to do with the content of the writing. This is feedback about what is included in the writing.</p>	<p>•There should be an explanation about how sterics contribute to preferential formation of trans (E) over cis (Z) elimination products (-0.5) [IN4]</p> <p>(the markings at the end of this unit—(-0.5) and [IN4] were each categorized individual feedback units)</p>
<p><b>Phatic:</b> This feedback has the purpose of establishing and maintaining a “good social and academic relationship” between the instructor and the marker” (Hyatt, 2005, p. 344). I have also included comments, like the example, where the instructor has reacted to the text as a reader.</p>	
<p><b>Grade:</b> This is an indication of the evaluation of the writing. This could be the overall grade for the writing, or a grade for a portion of the writing.</p>	<p><b>Grade</b></p> <p><b>Introduction: 8.5/10</b></p> <p><b>Experimental: 3/4</b></p> <p><b>Data and Results: 5/5</b></p> <p><b>Discussion: 8/10</b></p> <p><b>Conclusion: 2.5/3</b></p> <p><b>Scientific Language Conventions: 0.75/1</b></p> <p><b>Writing Mechanics: -0.25</b></p> <p><b>Total: 27.5/33</b></p>

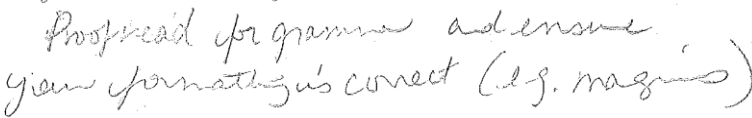

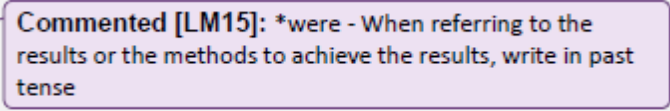
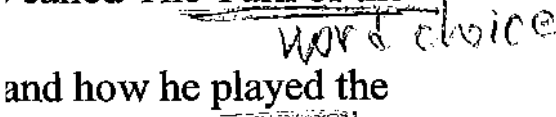
Once each feedback unit was assigned a type and a focus, I further coded each feedback unit with subcategories that identify a more specific focus or type of feedback. These

subcategories were specific to the type of feedback and some emerged iteratively as I identified the type of each feedback unit.

***Written commentary, in-line changes with explanation, and summative feedback.***

I used the same subcategories for written commentary, in-line changes with explanation, and summative feedback. Summative feedback is generally (but not always) longer blocks of text, with many possible focuses. In order to understand these focuses, I identified feedback units within the longer text and coded each of those using the same categories as the written commentary and in-line changes with explanation. For the feedback that I coded as *stylistic comments* within these types, I used many of the subcategories that Hyatt (2005) used in his classification: *punctuation, proofreading, spelling, referencing, and grammar*. To these, I added *word choice* and *sentence structure* because they occurred frequently in the feedback in this dissertation study. Examples of all of these subcategories can be seen in Table 5.

**Table 5**  
***Examples of Style Subcategories***

Description	Example
<b>Proofreading:</b> This is feedback about checking the writing over before submitting it.	
<b>Referencing:</b> This is feedback about how sources are formatted in the writing, and the use of specific referencing styles.	<p>Muse. vol. 35, n. 4. 2008. pp. 97 - 109.</p> 
<b>Grammar:</b> This is feedback about grammatical structures, mostly related to verb form or tense.	
<b>Word Choice:</b> This feedback about the writer's choice of word in the sentence.	

<p><b>Spelling:</b> This is feedback about the spelling of a word.</p>	<p>SP. and cleaver man,</p>
<p><b>Presentation:</b> This is feedback about how the writing looks on the page.</p>	<p>adu Too wide Use standard Hick. magins wh is t tha por Ne</p>
<p><b>Sentence Structure:</b> This is feedback about the structure of the writing on a sentence level.</p>	<p>Commented [LM3]: *when using a colon, the sentence before it should be an independent clause (a full sentence that can stand on its own)</p>

Hyatt’s (2005) subcategories for feedback that is content-related (i.e., *positive evaluation*, *negative evaluation*, and *non-evaluative summary*) (p. 347) were fairly broad and not as descriptive as I needed for this analysis. In comparison, Taylor’s (2011) subcategories for comments classified as having a focus on content provided in-depth explanation about the feedback: *development of ideas*, *validity*, *completeness*, *coherence*, and *organization*. Therefore, I used these subcategories for written commentary and summative feedback coded as *content*. Examples of these subcategories can be seen in Table 6.

**Table 6**  
*Examples of Content Subcategories*

Description	Example
<p><b>Completeness:</b> This is feedback about the presence or absence of required assignment/academic writing/disciplinary features or information.</p>	<p>Missing the specific observed major/minor products for reactions 1, 2, and 4, as well as the major SN2 product of reaction 3. You need to name the major and minor products of each reaction. (-2) [DS4]</p>

<p><b>Development:</b> This is feedback about whether enough information is provided or how information or ideas are developed in the writing.</p>	<p>Odysseus decided to travel around i justify his absence he blamed Zeus Nevertheless, Herodotus and</p> <p><i>What about Pocidus</i></p>
<p><b>Referencing:</b> This is feedback about the use of sources in the writing as it relates to the content of the writing, not the presentation.</p>	<p>during 15 years. <i>spell out numbers</i> ate a passage he to support this ated the reason for the Trojan War</p>
<p><b>Organization:</b> This is feedback about the location and order of ideas, information, and sections.</p>	<p>periment. The ene. Reaction 2- Reaction 1- y, reaction 1-</p> <p>Commented [LM20]: Good use of figures. Ideally, this should be included in the introduction.</p>
<p><b>Coherence:</b> This is feedback about the unity of the ideas represented in the text and the connections between these ideas. It also is about how the overall purpose of the writing is brought together in the text.</p>	<p>plain the use of unspoken subjects. To conclude, the essay touches on tion of the ghost story built by James. <i>clarify overall thesis</i></p>
<p><b>Validity:</b> This is feedback about the truth, the logic, or the soundness of the information</p>	<p>Did it really happen? The Trojan War, which happened around the 12<sup>th</sup> century BCE, as a historical moment?</p>

For phatic feedback within these types, I used Hyatt’s (2005) subcategories of *comment* and *encouragement*, examples of which can be seen in Table 7. Comment refers to feedback that is generally about the writing indicating, among other things, interest, or surprise (Hyatt, 2005, p. 344). Feedback categorized as *encouragement* were meant to positively propel students forward in future work (Hyatt, 2005, p. 344).

**Table 7**  
*Examples of Phatic Subcategories*


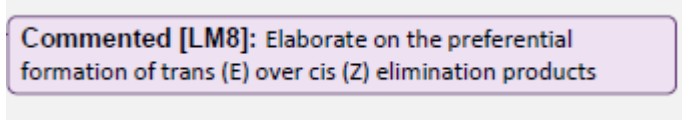
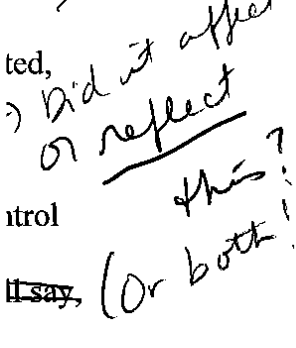
Description	Example
<p><b>Encouragement:</b> This is feedback that are meant to</p>	<p><i>I was pleased to see that you concluded Dr. Can. Great initiative!</i></p>

encourage the student in future writing.	
<b>Comment:</b> This is a comment that generally indicates something about the writing, but that is not specific to any part of the writing.	[Name], Thank you for this story.

***Language.***

For the categorization and analysis of the language of the feedback, I had anticipated using Janks’s (2005) model for analysis of linguistic features in a text. However, the feedback that the students in the study received did not take the form I had anticipated. I was surprised by how few written comments (with more than 2 or 3 words in a phrase) there were in the study and how many individual words or letters, symbols, and non-linguistic markings were included in the feedback. Since Janks’s (2005) model is best used with substantial chunks of text, it was necessary to adapt my original plan for the analysis of the language. While Janks’s analysis of language informed my categorization and analysis of the linguistic features of the feedback text, I needed to incorporate other ways of making sense of the language of the feedback. One of the linguistic features of the feedback that I identified was the type of speech/writing act that comprised the feedback. For written commentary, in-line changes with explanation, and summative feedback, I identified each feedback unit as *statement*, *command*, or *question*, examples of which can be seen in Table 8. These are categories which Janks (2005) herself uses as part of the analysis, although her categories are more extensive as she works with longer texts.

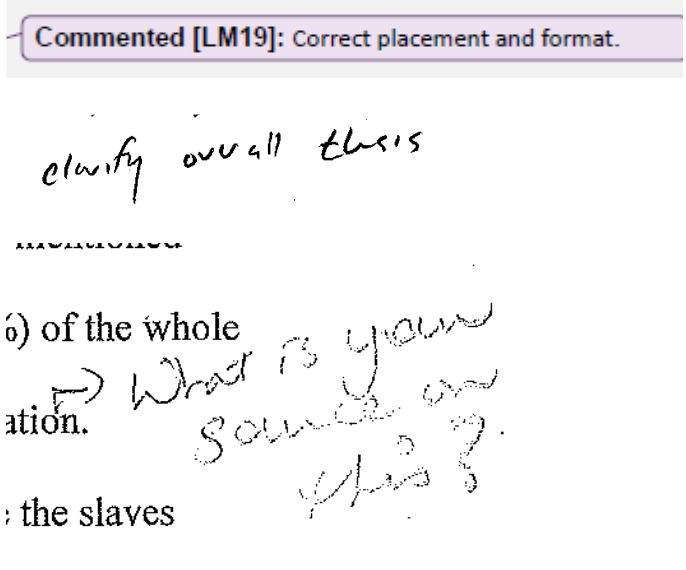
**Table 8**  
*Examples of Statement, Command, and Question*

Description	Example
<p><b>Statement:</b> These comments give information or make an observation.</p>	
<p><b>Command:</b> These comments, usually in an imperative form, tell the student to take some action.</p>	
<p><b>Question:</b> This asks the writer something about the writing.</p>	

Two final categories that I included for each feedback unit regarded linguistic direction (i.e., *direct*) and indirection (i.e., *indirect*). These categories are different from the WCF concepts of *direct feedback* and *indirect feedback*. Instead, they refer to direct speech and indirect speech within the feedback itself. For these categories, I used Hewett’s (2010) explanations. In linguistically direct feedback, “form and function match” (p. 183); such feedback can inform by making a statement, direct by giving a command, or elicit information by asking a question that does not use conditional language. In linguistically indirect feedback, “linguistic form and function do not match” (p. 184), and the disconnect can potentially cause a misunderstanding between the feedback writer (instructor) and the feedback reader (student) (p. 184). Although Hewett’s (2010) explanations for linguistic direction are clearly articulated, the categorization of

the feedback in this study as linguistically direct or indirect proved challenging because the feedback was often not written in complete sentences. I had to make choices about what to code as *direct* and what as *indirect* and these decisions, I think, reflect my own biases about what the function of feedback is. For example, within the feedback in the study some instructors wrote “italics” beside a word or phrase which I assume they thought should be italicized. Other instructors wrote “italicize” in a similar instance. In cases like these, I coded these two feedback points differently. I coded “italics” as *indirect* because it is a statement and it is possibly not clear what the instructor means by the statement. I coded “italicize” as *direct* because it is a type of implied command that suggests that the student should take some action. The concept of linguistic function can be problematic because it is possible to ask for whom the linguistic construct has to be functional and how the functionality can be interpreted by different people with various concepts of what function of the language is. Examples of *direct* and *indirect* feedback can be seen in Table 9.

**Table 9**  
*Examples of Linguistic Direction*

Description	Example
<p><b>Direct:</b> this is feedback in which “form and function match” (Hewett, 2010, p. 183). It can inform (first example), direct (second example), or elicit (third example).</p>	 <p>The example shows a screenshot of a comment box with the text: "Commented [LM19]: Correct placement and format." Below this, there are handwritten notes in black ink: "clarify overall thesis", "of the whole", "What is your source on this?", and "the slaves".</p>

<p><b>Indirect:</b> this is feedback in which “linguistic form and function do not match” (Hewett, 2010, p. 184) and the disconnect can potentially cause a misunderstanding between the writer and reader.</p>	<p>on to ed. to agree what?</p>
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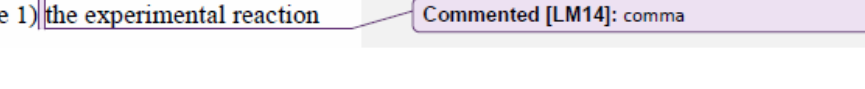
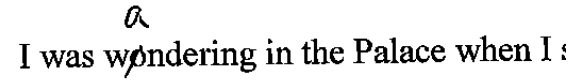
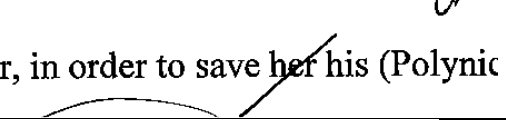

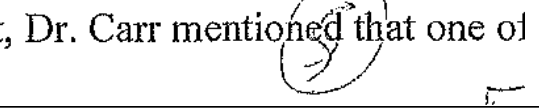
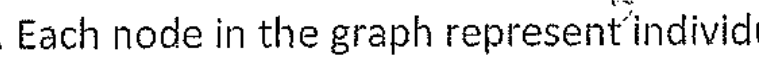
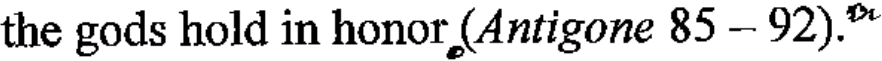
In summary, all feedback units that are written commentary, in-line changes with explanations, or summative feedback were categorized in four ways: the focus of the feedback, the subcategory within the focus, the type of speech/writing act, and linguistic direction.

***In-line changes.***

Since in-line changes are similar to WCF’s *direct feedback* in research about written corrective feedback, I used similar categorization language to identify the focus of the in-line changes. Ferris’s (2006) list of error types in a study about WCF formed a basis for the categorizations of feedback units coded as *stylistic* comments (p. 95). However, in order to represent the feedback in this study, I modified Ferris’s categories slightly. Ferris’s (2006) list was extensive because her examination regarded a larger body of feedback and because her study was designed specifically to examine WCF provided as part of her study design (not as the authentic feedback I sought). I used the following categories from Ferris’s study: *word choice*, *word form*, *articles*, *singular-plural* (agreement in context), *pronouns*, *punctuation*, *spelling*, and *subject-verb agreement*. I collapsed Ferris’s two categories—*verb tense* and *verb form*—into one category: *verb tense/form*. I also collapsed her three categories about sentence structure—*sentence structure*, *run-ons*, and *fragments*—into one category called *sentence structure*. I did not use the categories *informal* and *idiom* as they were not represented in the feedback in this study. However, I did include the categories *referencing* (specifically as it relates to the format of

references in the text), *capitalization*, *possessive*, and *typo* because these were represented in the feedback I examined. Examples of all of these categories can be found in Table 10. I have included a final category, *meaning enhancement*, that indicates that something about the writing (that does not fall in one of the other categories) should be changed in order for the reader to fully understand the writing.

**Table 10**  
*Examples of Style Subcategories for In-line Changes*

Description	Example
<b>Word choice:</b> This feedback about the writer’s choice of word in the sentence.	
<b>Punctuation:</b> This is feedback about punctuation.	
<b>Spelling:</b> This feedback is about the spelling of a word.	
<b>Pronoun:</b> This feedback is about the use of pronouns in the writing.	
<b>Word form:</b> This feedback is about the form of the word the writer has chosen.	
<b>Verb form/tense:</b> This is feedback about the form or tense of the verb.	
<b>Subject-verb agreement:</b> This is feedback that points out subject-verb agreement.	
<b>Referencing:</b> This is feedback about how sources are formatted in the writing, and the use of specific referencing style.	

<p><b>Sentence structure:</b> This is feedback about the structure of the sentence.</p>	<p>le persuasive speech, however, he a</p>
<p><b>Capitalization:</b> This is feedback about the capitalization of words.</p>	<p>, an ex</p>
<p><b>Article:</b> This is feedback that indicates a need, or lack of need, for an article.</p>	<p>al history and study of slavery</p>
<p><b>Possessive:</b> This feedback indicates the need for a possessive form.</p>	<p>such as Homers</p>
<p><b>Singular/plural:</b> This feedback indicates that a word should be plural or singular.</p>	<p>, individual participant w</p>
<p><b>Typo:</b> This feedback indicates a typo.</p>	<p>Anna Pearso</p>
<p><b>Meaning Enhancement:</b> This feedback indicates that something about the writing should be changed in order for the reader to fully understand the writing.</p>	<p>was composed and passed u even after generations who</p>

Most of the in-line changes in this study were coded as *stylistic comments*. For the few in-line changes that were coded as *content* feedback, I used the categories in Table 11.

**Table 11**  
*Examples of Content Subcategories for In-line Changes*

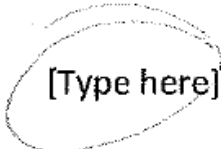


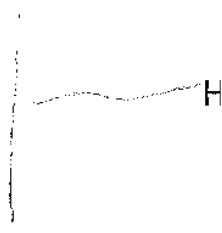
Description	Example
<p><b>Accuracy:</b> These are in-line changes that indicate that the information provided should be more accurate.</p>	<p>(to the Romans also known as Ulysses. Works such as</p>
<p><b>Completeness:</b> These are in-line changes that reflect the presence or absence of required assignment/academic</p>	<p>dotus is the first Greek author to consider t using the Persians' point of view, but conclu</p>


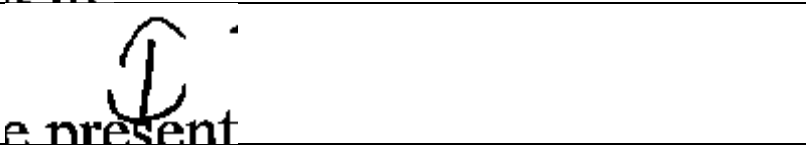
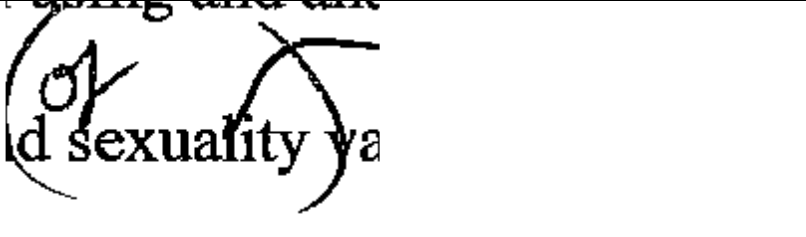
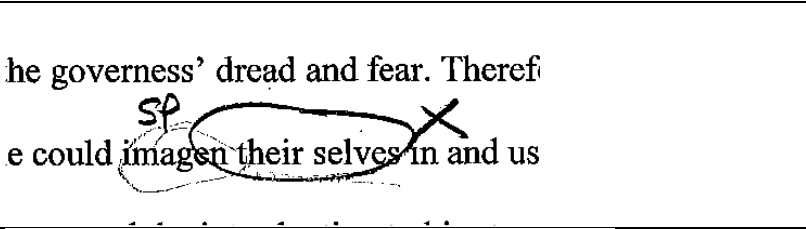
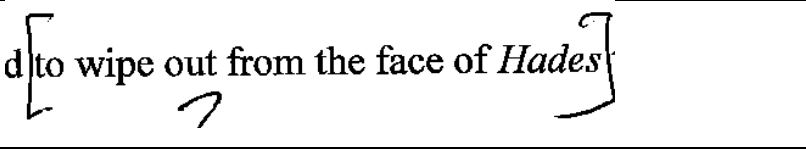
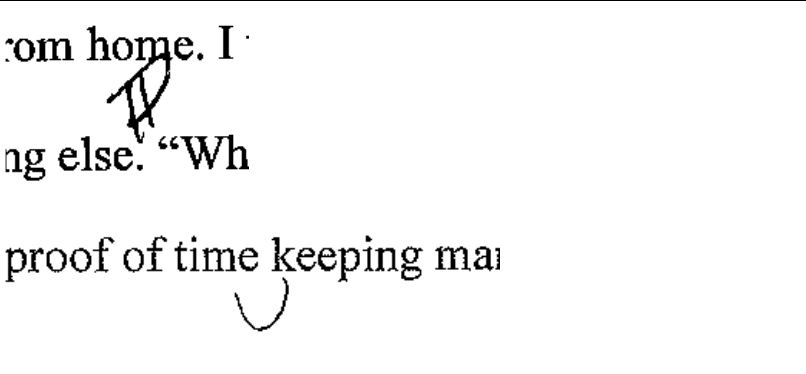

writing/disciplinary features or information.	
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**Mark-only.**

There is no standard categorization language of this type of feedback within the research I consulted, aside from Taylor’s (2011) one sentence about the type of feedback she categorized in this way. For this feedback, I used terms that identified what the mark looked like, such as *circle* and *check mark*. Examples of all of the mark-only feedback can be seen in Table 12.

**Table 12.**  
**Examples of Mark-only Feedback**

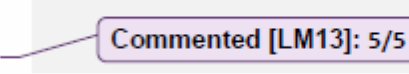

Description	Example
<b>Check Mark</b>	Researchers hypothesised that spiritual practices ca rhythm of the brain to a relaxation state. The experiment w subjects, between age 20 and 29, while performing Dhuha p
<b>Circle</b>	
<b>Strike through:</b> These are instances where something is crossed out, but not in an in-line change.	
<b>Line</b>	
<b>Squiggle</b>	
<b>Underline:</b> This is an underline not related to written comment.	want to be a slave in Ancient Greece! By Fiona Macdonald and others, S <u>Greece by Yvon Garlan, and finally Greek and Roman Slavery by Thom:</u>

<p><b>Question Mark:</b> This is a question mark that is not related to a written comment.</p>	
<p><b>Arrow:</b> this is an arrow that is not indicating an in-line change nor linked to a written comment</p>	
<p><b>Parentheses:</b> these are parentheses not connected to an in-line change.</p>	
<p><b>X:</b> This is an X that is beside another marking, but not crossing out another marking, as in the second example here.</p>	
<p><b>Square brackets:</b> These are square brackets that are not included with any written commentary</p>	
<p><b>Editing Mark:</b> These are marks that might be classified as “standard” editing marks, like the paragraph symbol here (although here it is backwards).</p>	
<p><b>Other:</b> These are markings that do not resemble the categories above. They are primarily of the example shown here; a type of code in square brackets at the end of a comment in Sunshine’s chemistry lab report.</p>	

**Grade.**

Finally, in this feedback there were three ways in which a grade was indicated. Examples of each of these can be seen in Table 13 but, briefly, they are: section grade, deduction of marks, and final grade.

**Table 13**  
*Examples of Grade Subcategories*

Description	Example
<b>Section Grade:</b> this is a grade that is or a portion or section of the writing.	
<b>Deduction of marks:</b> this is an indication that a mark has been taken off of the overall grade. It is usually related to an in-line change or written comment.	
<b>Final Grade:</b> this is the overall grade for the assignment.	<p><b>Grade</b></p> <p><b>Introduction: 8.5/10</b></p> <p><b>Experimental: 3/4</b></p> <p><b>Data and Results: 5/5</b></p> <p><b>Discussion: 8/10</b></p> <p><b>Conclusion: 2.5/3</b></p> <p><b>Scientific Language Conventions: 0.75/1</b></p> <p><b>Writing Mechanics: -0.25</b></p> <p><b>Total: 27.5/33</b></p>

Each feedback unit, except for those that are *mark-only*, is classified in at least three (in the case of in-line changes) and at most five (in the case of written commentary and summative feedback) ways. Collectively, these categorizations provide a basis for characterizing and analyzing the feedback discourse in this study.

**Analyzing relationships among data.**

The text is at the heart of Fairclough’s (1995, 2001) three-dimensional framework for CDA, but the model also requires the researcher to “recognise the historical determination of these selections and to understand that these choices are tied to the conditions of possibility of

that text” (Janks, 2005, p. 100). The method for data organization and analysis described here is the first step in the framework. As I analyzed the text, I interpreted the relationship between the discourse practice (the reading and writing of the text) and the text of the feedback by positioning the interviews with the participants about the feedback with the feedback itself. Where it was possible for an instructor’s interview to inform the text, I included that in the interpretation as well. Course outlines, assignment descriptions, and research about feedback practices in North American settings also contributed to this interpretive context for the feedback. Fairclough’s (1995, 2001) third dimension is the sociocultural practice. I interpreted the societal practice as the processes involved in academic discourse, including the purpose of maintaining the status quo, research about academic writing and discourse, as well as concepts of knowledge practices and cognitive (in)justices. Research about academic writing and discourse as well as the cognitive (in)justices framework inform the sociocultural practice analysis.

### **Methodological Dilemmas**

As I noted earlier in this chapter, some of the design of the research methods for this project were necessarily emergent. One of the main methodological dilemmas was that the feedback that students received during the study was not what I had anticipated it would be and therefore it was not entirely possible to analyze the language in the feedback in the way I had originally planned. Some of the methodological dilemmas cannot be modified through the research design, though, because they are inherent in it. For example, although all instructors consented to participate in the study by allowing their feedback to be analyzed, not all instructors who provided feedback to the students in the study participated in interviews. This means that it was possible to include instructor perceptions of their feedback processes in the study, but not all instructor feedback could be contextualized.

The research design also included a few limitations about the student participants and the disciplines in which they were studying. The students who responded to the study recruitment materials came from a variety of backgrounds and were studying in a variety of disciplines; there were not two students who spoke the same first language and no two students were studying in the same discipline. This meant that it was possible to get a broad view of the types and focuses of feedback in a number of disciplines at the university in the study. It also meant, though, that there was no possibility for comparison among the feedback that instructors in one discipline provide students, how feedback is provided to different students in the same discipline, or how students who speak the same first language interpret feedback on their writing. Additionally, the student participants in the study are from a variety of countries – Brazil, Colombia, Saudi Arabia, Niger, Philippines – but none of them is from China, Japan, or Korea, which are populations that make up much of the international student body at the university where the study took place. Initially, I had hoped to be able to include at least one student participant from China, Japan, or Korea in the study but the study captured experiences of students from backgrounds that are underrepresented in applied linguistics research.

Another methodological dilemma is about what traditionally is called the trustworthiness of the study (Flick, 2007b). Qualitative researchers describe a number of measures used to ensure that qualitative research is trustworthy, including reformulating the traditional criteria of validity and reliability (Flick, 2007b, p. 16), triangulating data, peer debriefing, or “establishing referential adequacy” (Guba, 1981, p. 85-86) and methods of ensuring dependability such as overlap methods or an audit trail (Guba, 1981, p. 86-87). In this approach, validity can be viewed as a “transactional process” that “consists of techniques or methods by which misunderstandings can be adjusted and thus fixed” (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 322). A dilemma, in a study that

questions the processes and systems through which knowledge is judged, validated, or suppressed, is that concepts of trustworthiness are based in a dominant framework about how knowledge ought to be produced. It is necessary to question methods of determining trustworthiness that are based in a system that formalized research as the “the codification of knowledge” that is “dependent upon the adherence of its creators to a defined set of research rules” (Boden & Epstein, 2006, p. 230).

Some CDA researchers address this dilemma by taking approaches that are more akin to what Cho and Trent (2006) call transformational validity. This transformational validity converges with “the way the researcher self-reflects” on the “multiple dimensions of the inquiry” and so is not “something that can be achieved solely by way of certain techniques” (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 324). Rogers et al. (2005) discuss reflexivity as “an important agenda for CDA research” (p. 381). They eschew the notion that “if we triangulate our data, member-check with participants, engage in peer review, establish and maintain a paper trail of our theorizing and analytic moves” a critical discourse analysis can be claimed as valid, or “an accurate representation of reality” (Rogers et al, 2005, p. 382). This concept of an accurate representation of reality is a problematic view in CDA and also through a cognitive (in)justices lens. An essential concern of CDA is that “the fundamental nature of language hinders empirical research that is aimed at establishing the ‘truth’” (Rogers et al., 2005, p. 382). Reflexivity, instead, posits that “researchers are part of the language practices they study” and depends on “the claims to knowledge and reality of the researcher” as well as “the extent to which the researchers turn these frameworks on themselves, either methodologically or theoretically” (Rogers et al., 2005, p. 382). Throughout this study, I have attempted to remain aware of my biases as a researcher – recorded throughout this dissertation also as assumptions – and my privilege as a person who

understands the codification of knowledge in a North American university educational context. It is also likely that I have biases of which I may not be aware; discussions with my supervisor and critical peers and colleagues have assisted me in thinking through some of those, although they may not all be recorded here.

Though I may not have always been successful in putting aside my biases in this project, I have attempted to problematize them throughout, as a way of providing reflexivity in the project. Through a cognitive (in)justices lens, though, this reflexivity does not go far enough to uncover the mono-epistemicism involved with hegemonic knowledge practices of research structures in the West. I think there may be a type of abyssal thinking involved with any discussion about the validity of research. From “this side of the line,” it may not even be possible to understand what knowledges are excluded from this discussion and what alternate epistemologies might inform the research process.

### **Summary**

The research methodology for this study is critical discourse analysis, following Fairclough’s (1995, 2001) three-dimensional framework for textual analysis. The method consists of gathering the feedback that five undergraduate EAL students received on their writing assignments over one university term in different disciplinary courses. Interviews with students and instructors contributed to formulating a complete picture of the context for the feedback. Analysis of the feedback and interview findings employed a process that included categorizing and completing a linguistic analysis of the feedback markings on the writing assignments. The following chapter provides descriptions of the study participants.

## Participants

This study investigated beliefs about academic writing that can be inferred from feedback on EAL students’ writing, as well as to what extent the academic construct of such feedback on written assignments may be accessible to those students. In the previous chapter, I explained the research methods used for examining this question. In this chapter, I present the participants in the study by first giving an overview of the participants and then by presenting profiles of each student participant that includes his or her experiences with writing and information about the assignments included in the study.

### Participant Overview

Using the methods outlined in the previous chapter, I recruited five student participants for the study. These students were first, second, and fourth year students, and they identified as EAL learners. They were from Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Niger, Philippines, and Colombia. They had varied experiences of learning English; one started learning English only when he arrived in Canada to begin university studies while the other four had been learning English since they were children and studied it extensively in school at various levels.

During the Winter 2017 term when the study took place, these students were taking a combined total of seven classes in the following subject areas in which they had written assignments and for which they could expect some instructor feedback: social sciences<sup>21</sup>, classics, English literature, psychology, chemistry, linguistics, and academic writing. The feedback analyzed in this study was provided in 12 assignments from these classes. The assignments included long-answer responses, short essays, lab assignments, research papers, and article summaries. Most of the feedback was handwritten, with the exception of the feedback on

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<sup>21</sup> The instructor for this course consented for information in his course outline and assignment information to be included in the study and to be interviewed but asked that his specific department not be named.

the chemistry lab assignment on which the feedback was provided electronically through the “review” feature on the Microsoft Word document. In addition, though the comments throughout the three essays in the English literature course were handwritten, summative comments on these essays were typed, printed out, and attached to the student’s assignment. Table 14 includes snapshot information about the student participants including the year of degree study at the time of participation, the departments in which they were taking courses, their country of birth, their first language, the number of interviews conducted with them, the number of assignments included in the study, and the interviewed instructor’s discipline. All students’, instructors’, and markers’ names are pseudonyms.

**Table 14**  
*Overview of Participants*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Year of study</b>	<b>Departments included in the study</b>	<b>Country/ Language</b>	<b>Number of Interviews</b>	<b>Number of assignments</b>	<b>Instructors interviewed</b>
Marice	1	English Literature, Classics	Brazil/ Portuguese	3	5	Classics
Omar	2	Psychology	Saudi Arabia/ Arabic	3	3	None
Bashir	2	Social Sciences	Niger/French	2	0	Social Sciences
Sunshine	2	Rhetoric, Chemistry	Philippines/ Tagalog	3	4	Chemistry (2 lab markers)
Sofia	4	Linguistics	Colombia/ Spanish	2	0	Linguistics

There were two types of instructor participants in this study and both types participated because their students were in the study. In other words, the student participants led me to the instructor participants; I did not recruit the instructor participants directly, they did not (and still

do not) know which of their students was participating in the study, and they were asked to participate only after their classes with the student participants had ended. The first type of instructor participant only agreed that the feedback on their student’s academic writing could be examined, rejecting the interview opportunity and limiting my information about them. Three instructors fell into this category from the departments of English Literature, Rhetoric and Communications, and Psychology. The other type of instructor participant both agreed for the feedback to be used in the study and to be interviewed. There were five instructors in this category from classics, linguistics, social sciences, and chemistry (2 markers). Because these instructors and markers agreed to be interviewed, I was able to obtain more information about them, although that was not the focus of the interviews. The classics, linguistics, and social sciences instructors were professors who had been teaching at the university for a range of years, one of the chemistry lab markers was a recent graduate of the university, and the other was a current student at the university.

I asked the instructor participants about their approaches to feedback and ideas about academic writing, and their responses are addressed in each student’s section below. I also asked them whether they spoke languages other than English. Because the student participants in the study were EAL learners and the focus of the study was second language writing, I thought it was important to understand these instructors’ experiences with languages. The social sciences instructor was the only participant who spoke only English. Although they all stated that English was the most dominant language for them at the moment, the other instructor participants had varying levels of fluency in languages other than English. The linguistics professor spoke ten languages. Aside from Ancient Greek and Latin, the classics professor had varying levels of fluency in German, Italian, French, and Japanese because they are needed for her discipline. The

two chemistry markers were most comfortable in English, but one spoke French and the other could understand Ilokano, the traditional language of her parents, who were from Philippines.

### **Student Participant Profiles**

Here I will introduce each student participant individually.

#### **Marice**

A female student from Brazil, Marice has been in Canada since 2015. At the time of the study, Marice was in her first year of university leaning toward a Criminal Justice major. Before starting her degree studies, she took two terms in the English language program at the university where she is currently studying; these terms were in English for Academic Purposes classes and were meant to prepare her for degree studies. Her experiences in this program were varied. Although she liked the first term, she explained that afterward she felt ready to go to university and that the second term was unnecessary. She indicated that she thought after the first term, “I can pretty much go to university now. I can speak, I can read, I can write, I can listen ...you know like everything is going well.” Before the English language program, she studied in a Canadian high school for six months. Of this experience, she indicated that she found high school more flexible in Canada than in Brazil; in Canada “you are open to pick your own classes. [While] In Brazil it is mandatory; you don’t get to pick your schedule.” She expressed that she liked high school in Canada because it was not as competitive as in Brazil where “everything is just one big test that we had to do.”

Marice had studied English in Brazil as part of her high school curriculum and through private classes. Although her first language is Portuguese, she said that she felt more comfortable speaking in English now because she has been immersed in an English-speaking setting. She also noted that because she was “so away from everybody that speaks that language” she finds that

she sometimes would “get very confused...if someone is speaking Portuguese with [her she] might answer them in English.”

### ***Writing.***

The experiences that she has had in Canadian educational settings have provided her with opportunities to think about academic writing and the feedback that she has received on that writing. She noted that academic writing in English in Canada is different from her experiences with writing in Portuguese in Brazil. From her perspective, the essays that she wrote in Portuguese, especially in high school, were part of the competitiveness of the system. She said that they were “very important to get inside of a good university.” Marice did not speak in great detail about her writing process. However, like other participants, she indicated that throughout her writing process she consults with, and receives feedback from, a variety of people including her boyfriend, her host mother, or other student roommates.

### ***Assignments in the study.***

For this study, Marice shared feedback that she received on assignments in her classics and English literature courses. The classics assignments included a website review and a research paper; the English assignments included a research paper, an in-class essay, and a creative paper. In the English literature course, she also completed a reading response assignment that was part of the evaluation for the course, but it was not returned to her.

### **Sunshine**

Sunshine had been in Canada with her family for six years—since Grade 8—and attended high school here. In comparing school in the Philippines and Canada, Sunshine said that although there have been fewer subjects per term for her in Canada, she is “more stressed having the exam here than back home.” She speculated that this might be because of the influence of her

peers. Of the exam period in Canada, she said, “The people surrounding me like they talk... they are like telling that oh my gosh midterms like exams like there is stress and then the stress became so ragent [sic] that, like it kinda like affects me.” She admitted that her peers in the Philippines were also stressed about exams, but “the stress is tolerable, like it’s an o.k. stress.” At the time of the study, Sunshine was in her second year of studies in a pre-dentistry program. She said that from a young age she had dreamed of becoming a dentist.

Although the Filipino language Tagalog is her first language, Sunshine began learning English from a young age. She started learning English in kindergarten, and most of her schooling in the Philippines was in English. She explained that even in those early years her teachers ensured that she spoke in English. She said: “When I talk with my teachers there, I have to speak English; they will not talk to me if I talk to them in Tagalog.” She expressed that now she is more comfortable writing in English than in Tagalog.

### ***Writing.***

Throughout the interviews, Sunshine returned frequently to her early anxiety about writing. She said that when she was young, she developed a writing anxiety that made her “super stressed,” so much so that even just writing a sentence in English made her anxious. This anxiety resurfaced during her first year of studies when she had to write a sociology paper. However, the positive feedback she received on that paper made a big impression on her and “reinforced [her] writing skills.” Despite this positive feedback, she said that she only writes “when she has to” because sometimes writing “immobilizes” her. She perceives academic writing as having “too much instructions and steps and stuff,” but she admitted: “I usually just don’t think about this stuff. I usually just write what I want, but I have to explain things.”

***Assignments in the study.***

The assignments included in this study were from Sunshine’s academic writing and organic chemistry classes. The academic writing assignments were three papers, each based on a different citation and writing style: Modern Language Association (MLA), American Psychological Association (APA), and Chicago. The final research paper from this class is not included in this study as Sunshine did not receive it back from her instructor. The organic chemistry assignment was a lab report.

**Omar**

Originally from Saudi Arabia, Omar had been in Canada since December 2012. He spoke Arabic as his first language and, in addition to English, was learning Japanese. Although he reported having studied some English in school in Saudi Arabia (and knew some less formal language, like profanities), he said that when he arrived in Canada, he started at “level 0.” Before beginning his degree studies, he attended two language schools in a different Canadian province. When I asked him what language he felt most comfortable communicating in, he said “English right now because...even when I speak Arabic, I include some English words in my Arabic speaking.” The only person in Canada that he said he spoke Arabic with was his sister because he spoke in English with his girlfriend and friends, even though they also speak Arabic. Omar was a kinesiology major in his second year who was planning to stay and work in Canada. He had researched the job market and found it favourable for athletic therapy and massage therapy, so he was hoping to work in one of those fields.

***Writing.***

Omar said that he did not recall receiving any formal instruction in writing in either Arabic or English before he came to Canada. He did recall taking a course in Saudi Arabia that

was called “Writing” but said that in the class “we don’t really write...you just read something” and write “one paragraph which is maximum 50 words or 100 words.” He said that in high school in Saudi Arabia, grades were mostly determined by exams and participation. So, when he started studying English in Canada, he found writing difficult at first and relied on instructional videos on the Internet to supplement the instruction he received in class. Since that time, his writing skills have developed, and during our first interview, he spoke about his strengths and weaknesses in essay writing. These perceived strengths and weaknesses are based on a pattern he has noticed over time in grades that he has received on various parts of his writing. He said that his strength is the introduction and discussion because, in his words, “I know how to get the attention of the audience with the introduction and then I just...cut to the chase as you guys say, and then my discussion, my explanation of my points and stuff are pretty good.” On these sections of his writing, he said he usually gets “full mark or just one mark short.” He perceives his weakness is with the conclusion (he calls it the summary here, but in discussing the terminology further we agreed that he means the conclusion): “I don’t really write a lot of summary which is like reduce my marks a lot but the more...I tried to learn how to write summary but I still I still lose words when it comes to summary like I just get the loss of words I can’t write anything so I just like write one sentence or two sentence of summary then I just hand it in.” He observed that he usually lost points in the conclusion. He said, “Let’s say out of 10, I get 3, 4, 5, something...maximum 5.”

When I asked Omar what an instructor might do to help him improve his conclusions, he took full responsibility for this perceived deficiency in his writing. He said, “I don’t think it is the responsibility of the instructor to tell me how to improve my conclusion. That is my responsibility. I am a student...I came here to learn, so I guess learning how to write a

conclusion is not a big deal.” He said that he has been working on his conclusions over time by using the “funnel strategy”<sup>22</sup> for writing conclusions. He indicated that he knew the strategy was working because on one assignment (in a class in the term before this study took place), “the grade just went up.” He had used the strategy but not, as he said, “better words” in the conclusion. He noted that the instructor had not commented on his conclusion, but he knew from the grade that his conclusion had improved.

*Assignments in the study.*

For this study, Omar contributed feedback on three lab assignments from his Physiological Psychology course. One lab assignment was a series of responses to questions about a video that the students watched in the class. The two other lab assignments were summaries of articles; each of these two lab assignments included two summaries, for a total of four summaries.

**Sofia**

Sofia came to Canada with her father, a professor, from Colombia in 2010 when she was 15 years old. She studied grades 11 and 12 in a Canadian high school and, at the time of this study, was in her fourth and final year of an Arts degree with a major in linguistics. In fact, she had already graduated when we met for the final interview for this study. Sofia spoke Spanish as her first language and began studying French in Canada; she participated in an intensive French summer language program and had been writing a diary in French to keep up with the language. She expressed that she had been learning about the South American indigenous community that to which her father belonged, the Muisca, but that the language of that group is no longer spoken. Sofia lived in California for six months when she was of early school age (four, five, or six years

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<sup>22</sup> I am familiar with the funnel strategy, but during the interview, I did not ask Omar to explain the strategy and we did not talk about where he learned it.

old; she could not remember the exact age) and learned some English during that time. She continued to study English throughout her schooling in Colombia. Her mother was an English teacher in Colombia, and Sofia stated that she would “help her marking the exams for her students.” Sofia indicated that she was the “best in [her] English class” and was confident in her language skills, but when she came to Canada, her confidence was shaken. She said, “I thought to myself, like, I have been told a lie all my life. I thought I knew English and I got here and I really don’t know anything.”

***Writing.***

Sofia reported that she never really needed to do what she would consider academic writing in Spanish (or English) throughout her schooling in Colombia; it was when she entered Canadian high school that she started thinking about academic writing in English. When I asked her about her relationship with writing, Sofia expressed that her relationship varied depending on the type of writing she was doing. She called her journal writing “a friendly kind of relationship because there is no pressure and I am just writing about how I feel and what I think, um and it doesn’t have to be perfect.” But she described her relationship with academic writing as “painful”—she used to cry when she heard the word “essay” in her Canadian high school classes—and she reflected on her relationship with writing quite a bit throughout her university studies. Her notion that her writing should be perfect played a large role in her relationship with writing. She told me that starting to write was the hardest part of her writing process because she did not like to revise her writing and feels pressure to write a “perfect paper.” She explained that over time she had learned that she should “write everything down that comes to mind and then work on that,” but for a long time, she would not let herself do that because she knew “it wouldn’t be a perfect paper...it would just be a draft.” The notion of perfection seemed to emerge from what Sofia felt was expected of her. She said: “I would never start because your

expectation is to have an A+ so that you pass. I think that’s the other problem and that’s why it creates so much anxiety because you’re not allowed to fail.” For Sofia, this pressure to succeed on the first attempt seems to be systemic. She said that in her university courses she had felt that “we’re not allowed to fail so when we write a paper that is worth 40% and you have to hand it in at the end of your semester and there’s no way of working on that. So, you have to get an A+ in order not to fail and when you are not allowed to fail, how are you going to learn? So you have to be allowed to fail.” She explained that she would be more relaxed if she felt that within this system it was “o.k. to make mistakes.” Despite her self-reflection and growth throughout her undergraduate studies, she did not necessarily feel that her relationship with writing had improved. She said: “I wish I could say o.k., I finished university and at least I mastered this. But really, writing for me...academic writing is not my thing.”

*Assignments in the study.*

One of Sofia’s final assignments for her university studies, a research paper for a linguistics course, was the writing that she agreed could be included in this study. Unfortunately, even after much follow-up on her part, Sofia was not able to get the paper with the feedback on it back from her instructor. For Sofia, this was a surprise. She had hoped to receive back the final (and only) paper that she submitted for her linguistics class, but she did not despite emailing the instructor twice to ask about it and speaking with him about it when she saw him at a departmental function. Sofia suggested that she had not received the feedback because her instructor was out of the country: “I’m sure that if he was here he would...be more prompt to meet up with me and let me know. Because that’s what he said, but he’s gone.” This lack of feedback is an emergent finding in this study, which I will discuss in the next chapter of the study.

**Bashir**

Bashir came to Canada as a university student in December of 2015. At the time of this study, he was in his second year of a business major and planned to apply for permanent residency and then undertake a Master’s degree. Bashir was originally from Niger although he has lived in many countries in Africa, including Kenya, because his father worked for the United Nations. In addition to his first language, French, he spoke several African languages. He started to learn English when he was around 14 years old when he moved from a French-language school to an English-language school. When he started at the English-language school, he said he “couldn’t even...spell one [word]” in English, but “really improved [his] English and then after the finals passed then [he] applied for university.”

***Writing.***

When he spoke about his experiences with writing, especially in a school setting, Bashir compared the writing he had done in English and French. He said, “I feel like writing essays in English is kind of...it is easier for me than in French even though it is my first language.” He explained that the use of accents in French, as well as “the way you write” is different than in English. He said: “For French, if you miss like one accent the phrase or the sentence wouldn’t make any sense.” For these reasons, he “is ashamed to say” he prefers to write in English rather than in French.

Unlike Omar, Sunshine, and Marice who could not recall having written much (if any) in their early schooling, Bashir said that he had to do a lot of writing, especially when he moved to Kenya and started studying English. He even had a tutor who worked with him on his writing. Academic writing in English was difficult for him at first because he would “mix everything together, like introduction, body, and conclusion.” Bashir recalled receiving help with the

structure of his writing from one of the instructors at his school—not the instructor for the class he was taking at the time. This instructor spent time with him to show him how to structure his writing. Bashir recalled this as pivotal moment for him in his writing in English because the instructor took the time with him, even though he was not in the instructor’s class.

Bashir expressed that the essays he wrote in high school helped him with his first essays in university because he “was about to just get a good picture of what we need to write about and the way they need to be formulated.” In addition, he suggested that learning APA and MLA format in high school was a “big help” because many of his classmates in his first-year university classes did not know how to format an essay in that way. He said that for one of his first assignments in university he received a good grade and he credited his “instructor from back home” for helping him with learning how to write an essay.

One theme that arose through Bashir’s discussions about his writing and his university studies in general was self-reliance. He stated that he realized soon after he arrived in Canada that, for an international student,

it is up to you, you have to look out for yourself cause there is no one here to just tell you go do this and also the moment you reach 20 so you are already an adult so you have to just consider yourself an adult just read and, you know, after university if you didn’t do anything with your life...so you just have to concentrate on improving any skills you need to improve.

Bashir’s concept of self-reliance extended to what he viewed as his responsibility in his studies and in his interactions with his instructors. He had observed some of his peers blame the instructor for a bad mark they received; some peers also suggested that he not take a specific class because “the instructor is bad.” Bashir stated that these students did not understand the

instructor and that it would be his own responsibility to understand the instructor by talking to him or her. He said that he “loves” to speak with his instructors and makes a point of going to see them for clarification.

*Assignments in the study.*

During the term of this study, Bashir was taking a social sciences course in which he had to write an article analysis, which was the assignment included in this study. However, he did not receive any formal feedback on the assignment. Unlike for Sofia, it was not a surprise that Bashir would not receive assignments back. The instructor for his course included information about this reality on the course outline.

Bashir’s assignment for this class was an article review, which he submitted. He obtained his grade on the assignment through the learning management system used in the course, but, as the professor had promised, there was no feedback provided with the grade. Bashir understood the process for obtaining feedback on his assignment, as explained in the course outline; Bashir did manage to speak with the instructor briefly after class, because he wanted to explain to the instructor why he thought he “deserved more than 15” (out of 20) on the assignment. The instructor’s response was in the form of general comments about the assignments to the students who had gathered to speak to him after class, not specific comments about individual student papers. Bashir recounted that the instructor said, “a lot of people like in the class focused mostly on trying to...how we say...trying to make the article analysis look more business-like instead of focusing on the words like on how to analyze the article the steps.” The instructor suggested that Bashir book an appointment to speak about his assignment specifically, but Bashir was not able to find an appointment time in the booking system when both he and the instructor were free. He said, “I made an appointment, but I didn’t know that that day I had to work so then I had to

cancel the appointment, and then by that time, all the days that he’s available that I’m available he’s booked.”

### **Instructor Participant Information**

Because I only interviewed each instructor once, I have less information about the instructor participants than I do about the students. In the instructor interviews, the focus was on the instructor’s feedback practices, and concepts of academic writing. Here I present information about each instructor participant, which includes information about the instructor’s teaching background as well as his or her concepts of academic writing. Before introducing the participants, I would like to provide a note of explanation about the pseudonyms. In feedback on this study, it was suggested that perhaps I should be consistent with the use of titles: some of the instructors have the title “Dr.”, but two of the instructors are markers and do not have that title as part of their pseudonym and this might deemphasize their contributions in the eyes of the reader. After some consideration, I have decided to leave the titles and names of the feedback providers as I had originally included them. The titles and the “lack of titles” represent these participants accurately. It also represents part of the systemic structures in our universities that create conditions for varied feedback and potential injustices. If the difference in titles deemphasizes some of the participants’ contributions from the reader’s perspective, I think that is important and the reader might then consider why this is the case. As will be seen in the findings and analysis, throughout this dissertation study, Leyla and Judy provide the feedback in the study that is the least confusing to their student (Sunshine) primarily because they provide explanations for the feedback they give but also because, as indicated in the section that describes their processes, they have given considerable thought to how they provide feedback. This despite the fact that they are not the instructors of the course and also do not have the title of “Dr.” The types of

feedback provided by the various instructors in the university hierarchy can disrupt our ideas of what constitutes a knower and who has the power and legitimacy to provide feedback in university settings.

**Dr. Iris.**

Marice’s classics instructor, Dr. Iris, started her professional teaching career at another university in Canada where she taught for five years before working at the university where the study took place. She had been at the university for a year at the time of the study and found that she had been marking more papers than at her previous university. She speculated that this change was because she had moved from teaching Greek and Latin language classes that are typically smaller in size to a lecturer role, where the classes are larger. She indicated that this affected her “approach to things like feedback and the amount of time [she has] to devote to reading a paper.”

**Leyla and Judy.**

Sunshine’s academic writing instructor was not willing to participate in an interview for the study, but the markers for her chemistry lab were. One of them, Leyla, was a recent graduate of the university who worked as a tutor in the writing centre during her studies in psychology. She began working as a marker for the chemistry lab when she graduated in 2014, so she had been a marker for about three years when I interviewed her for the study. During that time, she has been involved with a study that was jointly undertaken by the chemistry and writing departments. The study aimed to improve academic writing in the chemistry lab by supporting students and instructors in learning a writing process for the lab. Part of the study included finding ways to improve feedback on chemistry lab reports. Leyla had developed rubrics for the lab report, had created a system for marking the reports, and was writing a training manual for

future markers in the course. She also had been keeping track of student grades for comparison to marks in years prior to that study. She described in detail the methods that she used to provide feedback and trained the other marker in these methods so, as they both told me separately, there would be consistency in the feedback for the students. The other marker, Judy, was a fourth-year biochemistry student who was taking a pre-pharmacy program and planning to graduate after that year of studies. She was also a writing tutor at the university and was recruited to be a marker through the course that she took to become a tutor. She had taken the organic chemistry course in her second year of studies.

The organic chemistry course had two parts. In the first part, which ran in the fall term, there were two assignments for one experiment. Leyla explained that the first assignment was two sections of a lab report—the experimental section and the data and results section. After she had provided feedback to the students on those two sections, they wrote a final lab report that included all of the required parts: introduction, experimental, data and results, discussion, and conclusion. Leyla said the students were to “take the feedback from the first assignment and try to apply it to their final.” She then marked the final lab report. The idea was to support student writing to enable them to produce a lab report that met the disciplinary standards. Therefore, in the second part of the organic chemistry course, which ran in the winter term and was the course that Sunshine was taking at the time of this study, students already had the experience of writing a lab report and getting feedback on portions of it, so they were potentially better prepared to write the lab report in this class.

Leyla had been the only marker for the chemistry lab until Judy started as a marker. Leyla explained that instead of each of them marking half of the total number of lab reports, they both marked half of each lab report. Leyla explained: “For example, she [Judy] would mark the

discussion and the conclusion, and I would mark...the experimental and data and results. And we would both mark scientific language and writing mechanics in our own sections so that we tried to make it consistent for the marking.” They would both used the same rubric and the same coding for the marking for consistency. They were the only markers for all 10 sections of the chemistry lab to ensure consistency in the marking.

Leyla and Judy were in a different situation than the other instructors who provided feedback in this study because they were markers and not instructors. They did not have input into the content of the course or the assignments, nor did they have any interaction with the students to whom they are providing feedback; they both told me that they did not think the students knew who they were and that communication with students—for example if a student had a question about the feedback—was through the instructor who coordinated the lab. They were both either current or recent students of the university, so they were closer to being peers of the students whose writing they were marking than the other instructors in the study. In addition, they did not have the same level of education as the other instructors in the study and, of course, because they are markers, they did not have the same authority as the other instructors and did not receive the same level of payment for their work.

**Dr. Lexico.**

Sofia’s linguistics instructor, Dr. Lexico, agreed to participate in an interview for the study. He had been teaching at the university for over 15 years, first as an academic writing instructor and now as the only professor at the university “who teaches 100 percent linguistics courses” in an interdisciplinary linguistics program. When I asked about his views on academic writing, he said that he saw it as important both inside and outside of academia. He said, “academic writing is important in academic life...so, if you are going to stay in academia, you

have to develop...that kind of knowledge...Academia does not function without academic writing, right?” So, for his students who want to go on to grad school, he expressed that this knowledge was important. But he also indicated that academic writing was important for students who do not plan to go to grad school. He said that academic writing was important so “you know how to express yourself properly, to stay on the topic, to arrange your thoughts so that you know, other readers, or whoever is on the other side will understand.”

**Dr. Bond.**

Bashir’s social sciences instructor, Dr. Bond, had taught for a total of 17 years; he has been at the university where the study took place for 8 years. This instructor’s definition of academic writing was broad. He said that it is “any kind of exercise where a student would...submit as part of an assessment something in writing that is assessed either formally or informally for the purposes or perhaps even not of...of awarding a grade that would count towards uh their final grade in a course.” For him, this definition seemed to mean that academic writing could range from a short opinion piece to a major research paper. He described his definition as “intentionally broad” because it “necessarily has to encompass a variety of different approaches to writing” so that the student can “articulate and demonstrate... mastery of knowledge and be able to disseminate that in as efficient a manner as possible.”

**Summary**

This chapter provided descriptions of the participants in the study. These descriptions contextualize both student and instructor experiences with academic writing and providing or receiving feedback on that writing. The following chapter will present and discuss the findings of the study.

**Findings and Discussion**  
**A Critical Analysis of Relationships between Instructor Language, Student Perceptions  
and Cognitive (In)justices in Feedback**

The main question of this study is *What are the relationships among instructor language, student perceptions, and considerations of justice in the feedback on academic writing of undergraduate EAL students in a Canadian university?* The sub-questions for the study are:

1. **Feedback types:** What kinds of feedback do EAL students receive when writing papers for their non-EAL disciplinary courses? On what areas of discourse do these kinds of feedback focus? What language is used in this feedback?
2. **Production and reception of feedback:** How do disciplinary instructors perceive their process of providing feedback on academic writing? How do EAL students perceive and negotiate feedback about their academic writing in non-EAL disciplinary courses?

In this chapter, I present and discuss the findings of the study as they relate to each of these sub-questions. Fairclough’s (1995, 2001) three-dimensional framework of discourse analysis provides structure for the discussion of the sub-questions; each set of research sub-questions examines the feedback discourse in this study through one dimension of Fairclough’s framework. *Figure 2* shows the three-dimensional framework with this study’s corresponding research questions.

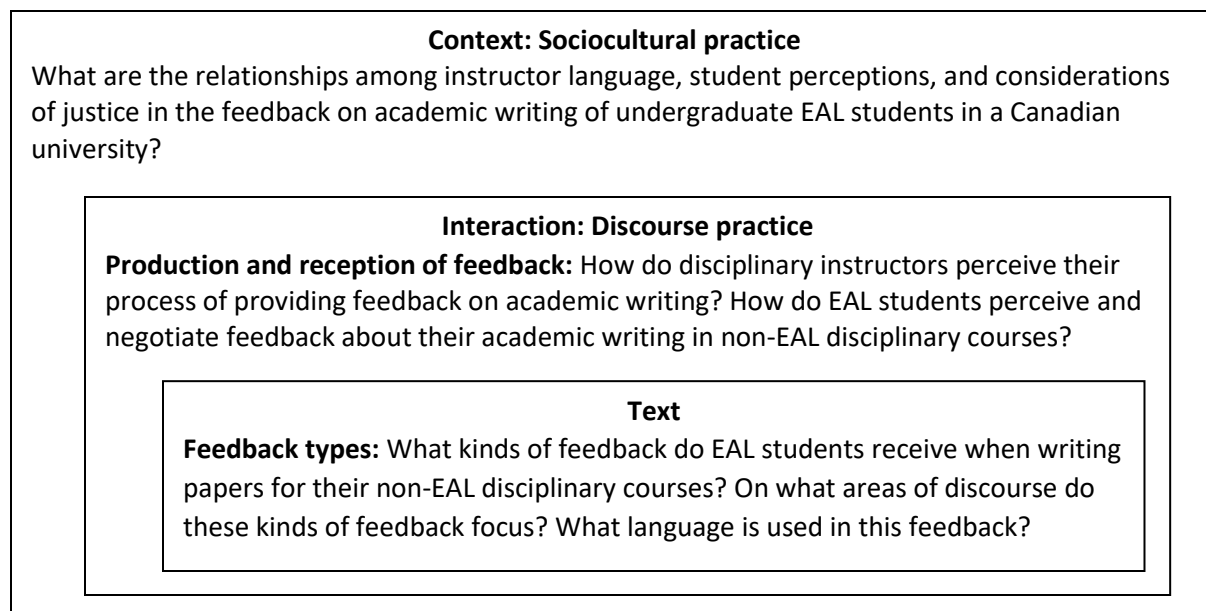


Figure 2. Fairclough’s dimensions of discourse analysis with the corresponding research questions (adapted from Fairclough, 1995, p. 98 and Fairclough, 2001, p. 21)

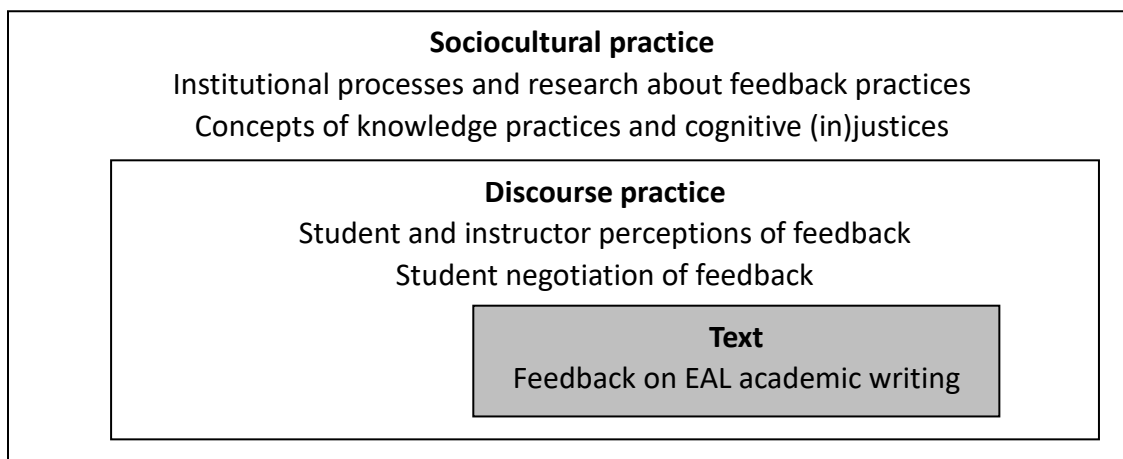
Part one of this chapter presents and discusses the research findings about the first set of sub-questions about types, language, and focus of the feedback discourse in this study. This is Fairclough’s first dimension of discourse analysis, which focuses on the “formal properties of the text” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 21). Part two of the chapter discusses the *discourse practice* of the feedback. *Discourse practice* concerns the processes of production and interpretation of the text (Fairclough, 2001, p. 21), essentially these are the interactions with the text. Therefore, in part two, I present the findings of student and instructor interviews and discuss the second set of sub-questions which ask how instructors perceive their process of providing feedback on academic writing and how EAL students perceive and negotiate feedback about their academic writing in non-EAL disciplinary courses. Fairclough’s (2001) third dimension of discourse analysis is *sociocultural practice* which is about the social context for the text: the social conditions of production and consumption. Fairclough (2001) calls this part of the discourse analysis explanation because it is concerned with the “relationship between interaction and social

context” (p. 22): how processes of production and interpretation are determined by this social context. This third dimension will be taken up in the dissertation’s conclusion.

As a whole, this three-part analysis problematizes feedback on the disciplinary academic writing of EAL students. There are dissonances between the feedback text, student interpretations of the text, and reported instructor purposes for the text that raise further questions about the role of feedback in perpetuating power structures in educational settings and about the perceived and actual purposes of feedback in university educational practice. As will be discussed in this chapter, the findings of this study substantiate and extend previous work (for example Chang, 2014; Green, 2019; Lee, 2009; Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, & Parker, 2016) that suggests that feedback on academic writing, while a purported means for student socialization into academic discourse, perpetuates structures and language that inhibit (or at least slow down) this socialization because of their opacity.

**Part 1: Description and Discussion of the Feedback Text**

The first set of sub-questions in this study asks what types of feedback EAL students receive when writing papers for their non-EAL disciplinary courses, on what areas of discourse this feedback focuses, and what type of language is used in this feedback. The characterization of this feedback is important because its textual nature grounds this study’s approaches to discourse practices. In Fairclough’s (1995&2001) dimensions of discourse analysis the first dimension, pictured in *Figure 3*, is a description of the text under examination including vocabulary, grammar, and textual structures. The method for analyzing the feedback text in this study is described in detail in the research methods chapter. This feedback is characterized by the type of feedback (in-line change, written commentary, mark-only, summative comments), the focus of the feedback (style, content, phatic, grade), and the language (statement, command, question, linguistic direction).



*Figure 3.* Fairclough’s dimensions of discourse analysis with the focus on text (adapted from Fairclough, 1995, p. 98 and Fairclough, 2001, p. 21).

For this study, the feedback on participants’ academic writing assignments over a term was in the form of words, letters, numbers, and other markings. As described in the methods chapter, I analyzed the feedback on all writing, and I categorized it by feedback units. A

feedback unit is any feedback on a student text that can be comprised of only a single item (like a word or mark) but it can also be a larger or more complex whole comprised of multiple items (like a phrase). In total, there were 655 feedback units on the twelve assignments of the three student participants who received their assignments back; in this section I also discuss the absence of feedback for two of the students.

**Types of Feedback**

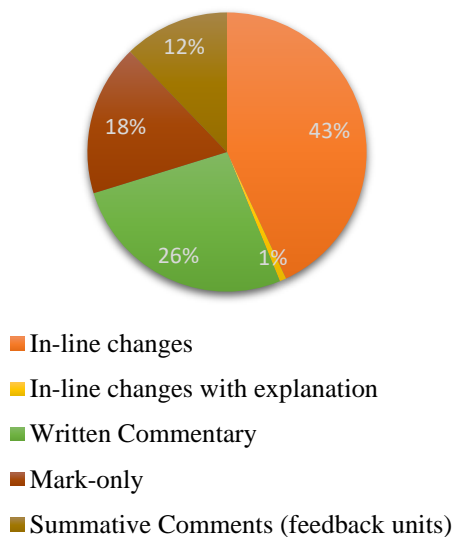
As Table 15 shows, of the 655 feedback units, the majority was feedback that provided only changes to the student’s writing (i.e., in-line changes with 282 feedback units or 43% of the feedback) or that was only a mark on the writing (i.e., mark-only with 115 feedback units or 18% of the feedback); none of this feedback provided any explanation for the change or marking. In total, this type of feedback comprised over half the total feedback (397 feedback units or 61% of the feedback). There were only five feedback units (less than 1% of the feedback) that were changes to the student writing with some explanation. Written commentary—words or phrases that provide feedback on the writing—comprised 26% of the feedback (173 units). Finally, there were 80 feedback units within the summative comments on all of the 14 assignments, which represented 12% of the total feedback units.

**Table 15**  
*Summary of Feedback Type*

Participant	Number of assignments	Total number of feedback units	In-line changes	In-line changes with explanation	Written commentary	Mark-only	Summative comments (feedback units)
Marice	5	449	194	1	101	87	66
Sunshine	4	169	87	4	48	19	11
Omar	3	37	1	0	24	9	3

<b>Sofia</b>	1 <sup>23</sup>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Bashir</b>	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>655</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>80</b>

Within each type of feedback, there were specific ways in which it was provided to students. In the in-line change feedback, for example, the most prevalent change (with 83 instances) was achieved by crossing out the student’s writing; this type of change was followed by adding to the student writing (73 instances), crossing out and suggesting a specific change (58 instances), and writing over the student’s original text (32 instances). The mark-only feedback was mainly comprised of circles (28 instances), check marks (21 instances), underlining (15 instances), editing marks (12 instances), and other markings (11 instances). *Figure 4* illustrates this distribution of feedback by type.



*Figure 4.* Feedback distribution by type

<sup>23</sup> This number and the one below it indicate the number of written assignments that Sofia and Bashir submitted during the study, and for which they might have received feedback. These assignments were not returned; therefore, they did not receive any feedback.

**Feedback Focus**

Table 16 provides an overview of the feedback focus for the in-line change, written commentary, and summative feedback. Of the total 655 feedback units, 358 (55%) regarded local, style-related issues and 128 (20%) regarded global, content-focused issues. The remaining 169 feedback units were mark-only feedback (115 units, 18%), feedback about grades (35 units, 5%), or phatic comments (18 units, 2%). The local, style-related feedback had a variety of focuses. The most prevalent in in-line change feedback was word usage in the writing with 111 instances total among three categories: word choice (65 instances), word form (28 instances), and verb form (18 instances). What I have termed *meaning enhancement* constituted 49 instances in the feedback, and punctuation constituted 40 instances. In the written commentary and summative feedback, the most prevalent style-related feedback was about referencing (29 instances), followed by word choice (18 instances). Feedback about presentation (12 instances), sentence structure (9 instances), spelling (9 instances), grammar (4 instances), and proofreading (4 instances) were other focuses of style-related feedback in the written commentary and summative feedback.

**Table 16**  
*Overview of Feedback Focus*

Participant	In-line changes (including ones with explanations)			Written commentary				Summative			
	Style	Content	Grade	Style	Content	Phatic	Grade	Style	Content	Phatic	Grade
Marice	193	2	0	52	48	1	0	15	37	9	5
Sunshine	82	5	4	10	19	7	12	2	3	2	4
Omar	1	0	0	3	14	0	7	0	0	0	3
Sofia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bashir	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>

The global, content-focused feedback was primarily found in the written commentary and summative feedback; there were only 7 instances of content-related feedback in the in-line changes, all focused on accuracy and completeness. In the written commentary and summative feedback, following were the focuses of the feedback: development of ideas (46 instances), completeness (24 instances), coherence (21 instances), validity (18 instances), organization (7 instances), and referencing (6 instances). *Figure 5* illustrates the distribution of feedback focus across the types of feedback: in-line changes, written commentary, and summative feedback – and by student.

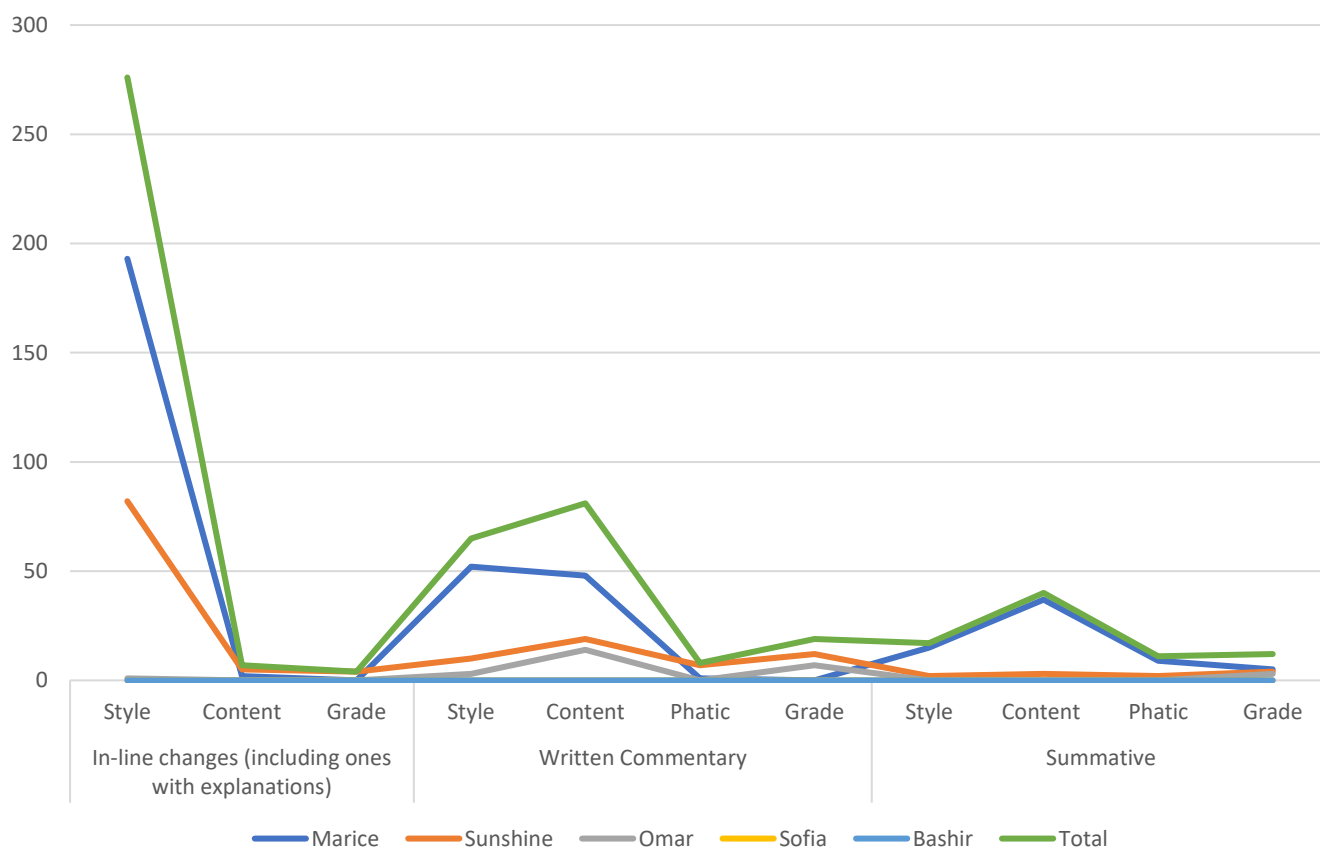
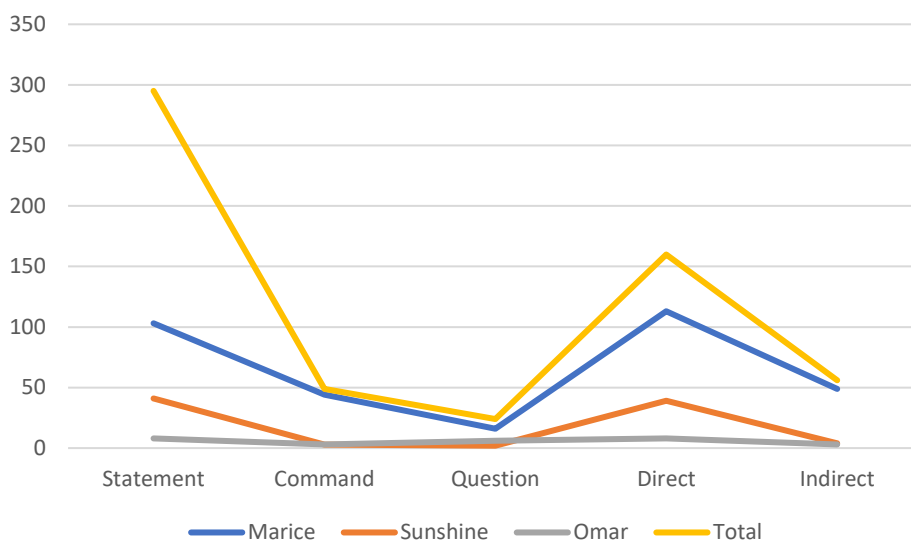


Figure 5. Distribution of feedback focus

### Feedback Language

In this study, predominant language used in the feedback was statements (295 instances); there were fewer instances of commands (49 instances) and questions (24 instances). Essentially,

the language that instructors used in this feedback *told* much more than *asked*. The feedback was predominantly linguistically direct (160 instances) with only 56 instances of linguistic indirection. *Figure 6* provides an illustration of the language focus of the feedback in this study. Because Bashir and Sofia did not receive any written feedback on their writing, they are not represented in this figure.



*Figure 6.* Distribution of language focus

In addition, the language of the feedback in this study pointed out the deficit in the writing more than the positive aspects of the writing or what the student had done well. Table 17 shows language used in the feedback; there were only 31 instances of what might be considered positive language in all 655 instances of feedback. The feedback that I have considered positive is feedback that uses language that could be interpreted as encouragement about the writing.

**Table 17**  
*Specific Language in Written Commentary, In-line Changes with Explanation, and Summative Feedback*

Statement		Command		Positive statement
Should (9)	Supposed to be (1)	Cite (7)	Clarify (1)	Good (7)
Awkward (7)	Underdeveloped (1)	Include (5)	Spell out (1)	Thank you (3)
Fragment (4)	Too vague (1)	Expand (4)	Underline (1)	Correct (3)
Errors (3)	Quite short (1)	Italicize (4)	Quote (1)	Great (3)
No need (2)	Isn't fully right (1)	Use (3)		

Unclear (2) Too wide (2) Missing (2) Not reliable (1) Tangled (1) Rushed (1) Could be (1) Does not give (1) Too quickly (1) More specific (1) Don't worry (1) It gets away from you (1) While I understand (1) Out of place (1) Do not require (1)	Not required (1) Repetitive (1) Not fully correct (1) Limited (1) Forgot (1) Italics (1) Little explanation (1) Little context (1) Need to (1) Needs further (1) Not reliable (1) A little short (1) I want you to (2) I would like to see (2) Please be aware (1) Needs work (1)	Focus (3) Be sure (3) Explain (2) Make sure (2) Give (2) Focus (1) Name (1) Describe (1) Elaborate (1) Bring this forward (1) Ensure (1)	Offer (1) Avoid (1) Combine (1) Think about (1) Work on (1) Support (1) Move (1) Remember (1) Provide (1) Be ready to explain (1) Maintain focus (1) Narrow (1)	Cover a lot (1) Well done (1) Pleased (1) Complete (1) Concise (1) Impressed (1) This is a better way (1) Good details (1) Good job (1) Please (1) I look forward (1) Interesting ideas (1) Cover a lot (1) Interesting insight (1) Important issues (1)
<b>41 unique statements</b>		<b>32 unique commands</b>		<b>20 unique positive statements</b>

**Discussion of the Feedback Text**

The feedback in this study was comprised primarily of unexplained changes to the student writing or (non-word) markings on the writing. The prevalence of these types of feedback are correlated with the focus of the feedback on the style of the writing, rather than the content. The prevalence of feedback concerned with local, stylistic concerns is not dissimilar to other research that has sought to understand feedback on the academic writing of both EAL (Lee, 2008) and non-EAL (Basturkmen, East, & Bitchener, 2014) students, which also found a focus

on stylistic concerns over content concerns.<sup>24</sup> There are a number of ways of interpreting the prevalence of local style-related feedback on this writing. One interpretation is that “it is easier to identify and correct errors than it is to give advice on how to avoid them in the future” (Van Heerden et al., 2016, p. 4). This might especially be the case if the instructor perceives that there is so much to address in the writing and they are not able to determine what to focus on in their feedback. One of the instructor participants in the study, Dr. Iris, addressed this dilemma when she explained her process for providing feedback to Marice. She said that the feedback she provides depends on the quality of the essay and explained that “sometimes it’s very hard to extract the content, unfortunately, and other times it’s all content, you don’t have to worry about the grammar.” I will address instructor feedback processes and focuses in detail in the next part of this chapter, but Dr. Iris’s explanation suggests that it is possible that instructors are sometimes not able to see past perceived errors in the style of the writing to consider the content of the student writing.

Another interpretation of the prevalence of style-related changes to student writing is that instructors think that students want feedback that shows them the “right” way of composing academic writing. That is, potentially instructors think that feedback should demonstrate the “right” way to use language and academic conventions and that feedback should correct the perceived errors in the writing. Lee, Vahabi, and Bikowski (2018) suggest that this instructor perception may be a reason for a focus on style in instructor feedback in EAL classes. Course learning objectives in EAL classes, they say, are often “using academic grammar and vocabulary

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<sup>24</sup> In their study of instructor comments on (not specifically EAL) doctoral writing Basturkmen, East, and Bitchener (2014) found that 62% of the feedback was about linguistic accuracy and appropriateness and only 25% was about the content of the writing. It is interesting that in their study Basturkmen, East, and Bitchener (2014) have a similar number of writing samples as in this study – fourteen. Of note, but not perhaps for extended discussion here, is also that the focus of the feedback on this doctoral writing is similar to the focus of the feedback on the undergraduate writing in this study. This suggests that instructors respond in similar ways to graduate and undergraduate writing.

appropriately” (p. 53). Therefore, instructors focus on style in order to meet the objectives of the course. This explanation, specific to EAL classes, may not appropriately explain the focus on style in the disciplinary writing that is the focus of this study. However, disciplinary writing, especially in first and second year undergraduate courses, can be viewed as a method of understanding academic discourse (Hyland, 2013b) and feedback on that writing as a method of socializing students into the discourse by providing information about appropriate style and language use (Séror, 2008). Instructor focus on style in the feedback they provide can potentially give students information about the disciplinary conventions and constructs for academic writing, as Hyland (2013b) and Basturkmen, East, and Bitchener (2014) have found in their research. However, in this study, much of the feedback that focuses on style communicates this information to students by making changes to the student writing (in-line changes) or by providing other markings on the writing. There are only five instances where instructors provide explanations to accompany the in-line change to the writing. So it is not clear how this feedback is helping students to understand academic discourse. The in-line changes and other non-word markings do provide some information to student writers about academic discourse, but if the students are not able to interpret this information, their understanding of academic discourse practices may be further clouded, rather than more clear. The messages, then, might be truly hidden or implicit, in the way that Hyland (2013b) and Basturkmen, East, and Bitchener (2014) have found in their research. In the second part of this chapter which focuses on the production and reception of the feedback I will discuss why feedback like in-line changes, that hint at academic discourse conventions, can be problematic for students and why it can be equally considered a method of gatekeeping for academic discourse (Austen, 2016) as a method of academic discourse socialization.

Another viable explanation for the focus on style in feedback is the assignment processes in classes. Lee, Vihabi, and Bikowski (2018) posit that instructors might adjust their feedback to account for the product-oriented nature of the writing assignments in their classes. When there is no process built in to the student’s writing, instructors may take a “product-oriented approach” (Lee, 2009, p. 18) to feedback. This approach may be to focus on the style-related concerns in the writing because those may be perceived by the instructors as more important to the student – as something the student could possibly adjust in future writing – than the content-related concerns that the student may or may not encounter in future writing assignments. Although Lee, Vihabi, and Bikowski (2018) are focused on feedback on EAL writing in their study, their suggestion is applicable to this study of disciplinary feedback because none of the students in this study were able to revise or rewrite the assignments. All of the feedback was, in a way, terminal.

#### **Problematizing feedback language.**

In the context of other feedback research, if only the numbers of the prevalent types and language of the feedback text in this study are considered, this feedback is within a range of what might be considered by some researchers as *comprehensible feedback*. The language is primarily linguistically direct, which can inform, command or ask a question. In this study, the feedback primarily made a statement or gave a command. Linguistically direct feedback could be considered to be clearer feedback because in this feedback, “form and function match” (Hewett, 2010, p. 183). Therefore, unlike indirect feedback that can cause a misunderstanding between the writer and the reader because there is a disconnect between the form and the function, linguistically direct feedback could be considered explicit in that it conveys a presumably direct message. However, as I will discuss in the part two of this chapter, although the function of linguistically direct language may be explicit in the seeming alignment of form and function, the

student participants in the study still expressed confusion or lack of understanding of the feedback. It is possible that these students could not access the language that is considered direct because the determination about what types of language are *direct* and what are *indirect* are influenced by socio-cultural constructs. Perceiving this determination through a cognitive (in)justices lens, the question is: who decides what is direct language and what is indirect language? If (as is likely) the decision is made by those with epistemic privilege then from an epistemic injustice perspective, they have the interpretive resources (Fricker, 2007) to be able to read and understand the language of the feedback that is considered *direct*. However the EAL students in this study – and potentially other EAL learners – do not necessarily have the resources to interpret the feedback, whether it is direct or indirect, because these are constructs to which they have not previously had access.

The language in the feedback in this study is further problematized because of the words and phrases used in the feedback. The number of unique statements and commands shown in Table 17 (above) demonstrates the diversity of language used in this feedback and by extension the number of phrases, words, and statements the student participants needed to understand and interpret in order to put it into action in their future writing. For EAL students some of the individual words might not be familiar and phrases like “it gets away from you” may seem even more coded. In addition, there are a number of phrases that have similar meanings but are expressed slightly differently; *ensure*, *make sure*, and *be sure*, for example, are phrases that I take to have a similar message (although it is not clear from the feedback *how* the ‘ensuring’ can take place) but since they are expressed differently an EAL student may read them as different phrases and therefore need to understand and interpret the phrase each time he or she encounters a version of it. Similarly, *offer*, *give*, *elaborate*, *be ready to explain*, *describe*, and *provide* all ask

the student to do something to add information to their writing in a variety of different ways. Again, a student will need to interpret each of these individually and attempt to make sense of them. The number of unique phrases means little consistency for these students as they interpret the feedback they have received.

Lillis and Turner (2001) have used the term “discourse of transparency” to describe wordings, such as those in feedback discourse, that “denote conventions as if they were transparently meaningful” (p. 58), but which use “the metaphor of language as ideally transparent” (p. 58) to the writer and those who have access to resources to interpret the discourse. Lillis and Turner (2001) use an example similar to one already mentioned – the phrases “state clearly, spell it out, be explicit, express your ideas clearly, say exactly what you mean” (p. 58) – to explain their assertion that although these phrases that might be provided as feedback may be “ideally transparent” to the writer, they “are anything but transparent and...mean different things across a range of contexts” (p. 58). They trace this notion of ideally transparent language back to early Western (seventeenth century) rationalist and empiricist notions of scientific rigour which had implications for science and also language usage (Lillis & Turner, 2001). Conceptualizations of language use based in these notions, they argue, “fuel the discourse of transparency” and lie “behind expectations of student writing and informs the assumptions of staff about the easy accessibility of their own metalanguage on that writing” (Lillis & Turner, 2001, p. 63). Therefore, students who are not familiar with the “rhetorical conventions” of academic discourse (who do not have the interpretive resources to understand the feedback) are “held ransom by the discourse of transparency” (Lillis & Turner, 2001, p. 63-64) because they cannot understand the discourse and their own writing may not match the

instructors’ expectations, so it is “the student-writers’ language use that becomes the ‘problem’” (Lillis & Turner, 2001, p. 65).

### **Feedback Explicitness.**

Related to a discourse of transparency is the degree of explicitness of the feedback and how that explicitness is determined. The most prevalent type of feedback received by the students in this study is in-line change feedback with 282 instances. This feedback crosses out, replaces, adds to, writes over, circles, and underlines student writing. Essentially it uses markings, not explanations, to provide information to the students about their writing, how it might be modified, and what the modification might be. Mahboob (2015) considers this explicit feedback because it shows students what they need to do to correct their writing and provides a single option for fixing the mistake. The explicitness of the feedback is high when it corrects student work therefore “remediating their errors explicitly” (Mahboob, 2015, p. 408), and low when the error is identified but no correction is provided (Mahboob, 2015, p. 408). Mahboob (2015) also uses the concept of rationale to categorize feedback. When a detailed explanation about the problem is given, the rationale is high. Conversely, when little or no explanation is provided, the rationale is low. Mahboob (2015) names the highest level of support of feedback – when there is high explicitness and high rationale – *handholding*. When there is high explicitness and low rationale, Mahboob (2015) calls the feedback *carrying*. This high explicitness and low rationale feedback is the dominant feedback in this study.

However, Mahboob’s (2015) explanation of what constitutes explicit feedback is problematic in the context of this study. The in-line changes modify the student writing so that it will be ‘correct’ according to the instructor, so the feedback might be considered explicit – it shows the student what should be changed. However, using this definition of explicit – “stated

clearly and in detail, leaving no room for confusion or doubt” (m-w.com) – I think this feedback cannot be considered explicit because there *is* room for confusion or doubt in the interpretation of the feedback, especially from the perspective of the students. I will explain this confusion or doubt more in the next section which discusses students’ perceptions of feedback but speaking generally about the students in this study, when asked, they indicated that they could not understand much of the feedback that they received. In some cases, the confusion or doubt arose because the instructor’s writing was not legible; in other cases it arose because it was not clear to the student what the in-line change meant. If the number of instances of mark-only feedback (115 units) is added to the in-line change feedback, there are 397 instances of feedback in this writing that uses markings of some sort to provide information to students about their writing. That is 64% of all of the feedback in this study. This means that in over half of the feedback instances in this study, the feedback provided little explicit explanation about what the feedback meant. That is why I would consider this feedback implied – “suggested but not directly expressed” (m-w.com). The term *carrying* that Mahboob (2015) uses to describe the type of feedback that corrects student writing is perhaps a misnomer for the students in this study.

### **Instructor-Constructed Conventions.**

The dominant amount of implicit feedback in this study suggests that students understand the instructor-constructed conventions of this feedback and will know what action to take in response to the feedback. I term this feedback *instructor-constructed conventions* for a number of reasons. First, some markings and commentary in the feedback that might be considered *conventional* in disciplinary writing or editing, or even in North American writing and editing. One example is the paragraph symbol used by Marice’s English literature instructor, which can be seen in this example:

and then it quickly took over my head, my arms, my spine, my legs, my feet  
of my body and my vision wasn't clear anymore. “Helen!! Helen, are you okay? Stay with me!”

However, when the instructors use some of these conventional markings in the feedback in this study, they do not necessarily use them consistently throughout the feedback in an assignment and they do not necessarily explain what these markings mean to the students who will need to interpret them. Secondly, even if these markings might be considered conventional in North American writing instruction that does not mean that the EAL student, who has done much of their writing in another language or in another pedagogical tradition, will know these markings or understand how to interpret them as ways in which to modify their writing. Finally, possible conventional markings aside, much of the feedback on the writing in this study is each instructor's own method of providing feedback. As will be explained in the examples below, the instructor may or may not be consistent with these methods throughout one assignment or over a number of assignments in a course.

Throughout the feedback in this study, these constructed conventions of feedback are manifested in a series of different ways in mark-only feedback, in-line change feedback, and some of the written commentary feedback. Mark-only feedback is comprised of a variety of markings including circles, lines, underlines, question marks, and even editing marks like the paragraph mark used in Marice's writing shown above.

The use of this paragraph mark speaks to what this instructor assumes about student knowledge about feedback: that the student will be familiar with this mark. A closer examination of the paragraph mark shows that it is actually a reverse of the conventional paragraph mark (§). Although it is likely that the paragraph mark could still be interpreted by someone who knows the *conventional* markings, it still assumes that the student knows of the existence of these

markings and is able to interpret them, however they are written. However, without any context for these marks such as previous knowledge of editing or diacritical marks or a type of legend<sup>25</sup> that explains the markings, it is unlikely that the student will be able to understand and interpret the marks. In fact, when I asked Marice about what she thought this mark meant, she said “I have no idea.” While editing marks such as these may not be familiar to first or second year university students in general, they may be even less familiar to EAL students who may have no context for interpreting the marks.

Other mark-only feedback can be equally difficult to interpret because of its imprecision. Marks like circles and underlining, and even check marks and question marks, draw attention to an element of the student’s writing, as shown in this example from one of Omar’s lab assignments:

Researchers hypothesised that spiritual practices can change the frequency rhythm of the brain to a relaxation state. The experiment was conducted on Muslim subjects, between age 20 and 29, while performing Dhuha prayer, and their brain

The check mark draws attention to something in the writing that the instructor is affirming, but it is not clear what that is in the sentence. Is it the content of the writing? The way Omar has written the sentence? Is it a way for the instructor to keep track of what he has read? This is implicit feedback because it, in this case, validates Omar’s writing. However, it does not indicate to Omar what he has done that is positive, and so he won’t necessarily know what part of this writing to continue doing in the same way in future assignments.

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<sup>25</sup> I realize that editing marks like the paragraph symbol can often be found explained in lists in writing handbooks and also that sometimes instructors hand out a type of legend for these marks or even explain them in class. In the case of this study, there was no indication that students were familiar with and used writing handbooks or that instructors explained the marks in class. It is possible that one or both of these scenarios took place, but I did not ask student or instructor participants about this directly.

In in-line change feedback in this study, changes are not necessarily made in consistent ways. The in-line change feedback is somewhat ad hoc, almost reflecting the instructor’s reading process rather than providing some consistency so the writer is able to interpret the feedback. For example, here are two feedback instances in Marice’s writing from the same instructor on two different papers:

so distinguishing<sup>ed</sup> because

it, Dr. Carr mentioned that or

The type of change is similar – the instructor has written over the end of the word in both instances. Neither one provides an explanation for the change. However, in one case the instructor has also circled the end of the word. From an interpretive point of view it is not clear if the circle is drawing attention to something else in the writing or emphasizing the change at the end of the word. Because this is feedback from the same instructor but on different assignments Marice may think that these feedback instances are drawing attention to two different aspects of her writing. In this case, perhaps the instructor assumes that Marice will understand the markings, even though they are not consistent from one assignment to the next and no explanation about the meanings of the markings has been provided by the instructor.

Some types of written commentary are also inconsistent. For example, a comment like “word choice” or even its abbreviation “WC” which are found 65 times in the feedback in this study, may have a certain meaning to the instructor but may be unknown or confusing to the student for whom it is intended. The implication of this feedback may be that the word is not appropriate in a disciplinary context, or it may imply that it is not clear to the reader what the writer means. By using “word choice” as feedback, the instructor assumes that the student will understand which of these (or other possible) implications he or she means and revise the writing

accordingly. Instructors seem to be making the same assumption – that students will understand these constructed conventions – about other feedback as well, especially abbreviations such as *awk*, *pg#*, *incl.*, *sg-space*, *frag.*, or *sp.*, all of which are used in the feedback in this study.

Finally, written commentary feedback is also not consistent in this study, especially when it is paired with some markings. Circles, underlines and other mark-only feedback are sometimes located near written commentary on the students’ writing in this study. As I mentioned earlier, these markings draw the student’s attention to something in the writing, but it is not always clear what the student should be attending to in the feedback. This example, from Marice’s final essay in her English literature class, demonstrates a potential misunderstanding between the instructor and the student:

In this example, there are three instances of underlining that are potentially associated with the written commentary *word choice*, *italics*, and *awk*. Aside from the use of the commentary *word choice* and *awk*, which may not be understandable to the students, the positioning of the written commentary can make it unclear to the student what the feedback refers to. The position of “word choice”, for example, between the lines which have both been underlined by the instructor can be interpreted as being associated with the underline above it, or the one below it. I would interpret it as being associated with the underlined word ‘played’ below it but it is possible that Marice would not necessarily understand how to interpret this feedback.

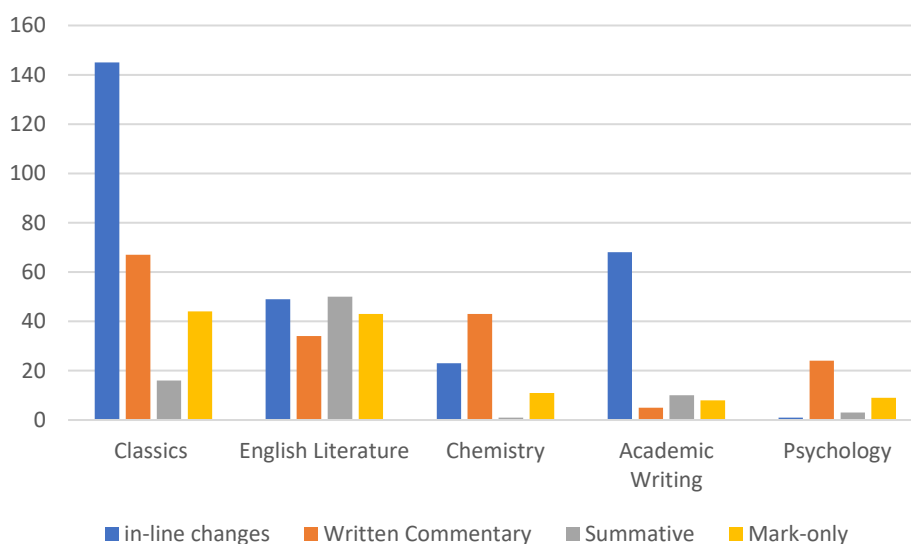
In short, there are many instructor-constructed feedback practices in the feedback in this study that students need to interpret in order to understand what the instructor is indicating with the feedback. The variety and inconsistency may impede communication between the student

and instructor because they do not have a common understanding of the feedback constructs. Higgins, Hartley, and Skelton (2001) explained that “our everyday communication usually ‘works’ because it is based on shared understandings. Both parties have access to appropriate discourses which enable them to construct and reconstruct meaning from implicit messages” (p. 273). When there is not a shared understanding of the discourses, then communication is inhibited. The multiple types of feedback constructs in this study may cause student understanding of the feedback to be inhibited because they do not have the appropriate discourses to find meaning in the implicit feedback messages. This lack of resources for interpreting the feedback further solidifies this feedback as providing implicit messages to the students.

#### **Disciplinary writing and instructors.**

The feedback focus on style rather than content may be appropriate/justifiable for EAL classes that promote language development, or composition classes where the subject is writing. In disciplinary courses, though, it might be predicted that the focus for instructors would be on the content, rather than the style, of the writing. Studies about feedback on both EAL and non-EAL disciplinary writing have shown a focus by disciplinary instructors on content, rather than style. For example, in a study of writing by engineering students where feedback was provided by both engineering instructors and writing instructors Taylor (2011) found that the engineering instructors focused on content over form and the writing instructors focused on form over content. In his study of feedback in the disciplinary writing of EAL students, although he found that science and engineering papers “contained half of the comments” and “more of the ticks and other symbols” (Hyland, 2013a p. 249) than other papers in the study, Hyland (2013a) dismisses the idea that language is a primary concern with disciplinary instructors; he asserts that for

instructors in the disciplines content is more important than form. In this study, five disciplines are represented among the three students who received feedback on their writing. *Figure 7* shows the distribution of feedback type by discipline. When taken together, the dominant amount of feedback is in-line changes. However, when separated by discipline, there are fewer in-line changes than written commentary on Sunshine’s chemistry and the number of in-line changes on Marice’s English literature assignments are almost comparable to the number of summative and mark-only feedback instances.



*Figure 7.* Feedback type by discipline

When it comes to the focus of feedback within the disciplines, this dissertation study has some congruence with both Taylor’s (2011) and Hyland’s (2013a) findings. As has already been noted, overall the feedback in this study focuses on style over content. However, looking at feedback in specific disciplinary areas, there are some nuances to the focus of the feedback. As can be seen in Table 18, the feedback in English, classics, and academic writing are more focused on style overall. However, in both classics and English the written commentary and summative feedback have more of a focus on style. Intuitively, this seems logical. The in-line changes would deal more with local, style-related concerns while the written commentary and

the summative feedback provide more opportunity for attention to content. This still does not account for the fact that the in-line changes in both English and classics outnumber the written commentary and summative feedback. Like in Taylor’s (2011) study, the academic writing instructor focused her feedback almost exclusively on style, with very little attention to content even in written commentary and summative feedback. This may be because, as suggested previously, the objectives of that course focus on writing and the instructor interprets her role as being to ensure that the mechanics of the writing produced in the class conform to academic standards.

**Table 18**  
*Overview of Feedback by Disciplinary Area*

Discipline	Total feedback units	In-line changes			Written commentary				Summative				Mark-only
		Style	Content	Grade	Style	Content	Phatic	Grade	Style	Content	Phatic	Grade	
Classics	273	143	2	0	22	44	1	0	4	7	3	2	44
English Literature	176	49	0	0	30	4	0	0	11	30	6	3	43
Chemistry	78	14	5	4	6	18	7	12	0	0	0	1	11
Academic Writing	91	68	0	0	4	1	0	0	2	3	2	3	8
Psychology	37	1	0	0	3	14	0	7	0	0	0	3	9

The feedback on Omar’s psychology assignments and Sunshine’s chemistry assignments provide an interesting divergence in focus from the feedback in the other three disciplinary areas. Omar’s psychology writing has the least feedback, in the study with a total of only 37 feedback units on three assignments. This feedback has only one instance of an in-line change and he received the most feedback on the first lab assignment which was responses to questions about a

video. In that assignment, all of the written commentary feedback that Omar received was about the content of his responses. Perhaps because it was not an essay structure, the instructor did not feel like he/she had to focus on style, and could focus more on content. This focus on content aligns with the assertions of both Hyland (2013a) and Taylor (2011) that disciplinary instructors are less concerned with style as with content. However, part of the focus on content over form in that assignment could also be because, rather than a full-length academic essay, the assignment was responses to questions that was not necessarily required to be in a specific format other than the instructor being able to discern which response was for which question. Essentially, the focus of the writing was on content without format constraints, so it is possible that the instructor felt freer to comment on the content of the writing more than the form. Even though there were some errors in the style – Omar even points one out in our interview as he is commenting on the feedback – the instructor does not provide any feedback on those in this assignment. The difference in focus in Omar’s psychology assignment may have to do with the fact that it is feedback by a disciplinary instructor but it may also have to do with the type of writing that is required for the assignment.

In Sunshine’s case there is also a difference from the overall numbers in the feedback she received on her chemistry lab report. Sunshine received 169 feedback units on all of her assignments in the study. Most of these feedback units (94 instances, 56%) were local, style-specific feedback, of which 74 instances were on her academic writing assignments. The global, content-related feedback that Sunshine received was mostly on her chemistry lab report (23 of 27 instances). In addition, Sunshine received most of her written commentary on the chemistry lab report (43 of 48 instances). Thus, on Sunshine’s three other assignments in this study (all academic writing assignments), she received only five feedback units of written commentary.

The focus of the written commentary and in-line change feedback on Sunshine’s assignments was almost evenly distributed between style (20 instances) and content (23 instances). I will discuss this feedback on Sunshine’s chemistry lab assignments as a type of outlier in a later section but, briefly, this feedback was unusual in a few ways that might account for the differences in the focus: this feedback was provided electronically and the course (along with the instructor and markers) was part of a study with the aim of improving support for students in writing in chemistry.

### **Summative Feedback.**

The comments at the end of the writing that I have called summative feedback are sometimes also called end comments (Batt, 2006; Smith, 1997). This feedback often pulls together the feedback throughout the paper to make a holistic statement about the writing and can take a specific format. Smith (1997) argued that these comments are a genre and categorizes them into three groups of genres: judging genres, reader response genres, and coaching genres. Based on her study, she concluded that these comments are generic because they often “contain very little to connect” them to a “particular paper, student, or teacher” (Smith, 1997, p. 265). In some ways the summative feedback in this study can also be characterized as generic. Sunshine’s summative feedback was comprised of either only a grade<sup>26</sup> or simply a short phrase at the end of the paper such on her academic writing MLA format paper, which read: “Minor errors.” This phrase has no particular connection to Sunshine or to her paper as a whole; it could be feedback on any student’s assignment. This type of shorter phrase was on each of her academic writing

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<sup>26</sup> In the study I considered grades, which were included at the end of most of the assignments in the study, as a type of summative feedback. In many ways, grades are the ultimate summative feedback because they provide a finality to the feedback. Many of the studies about feedback that I consulted in this research did not include grades as part of the feedback. As I will discuss in the second part of this chapter, grades are viewed as a type of feedback by the students in this study.

papers; the chemistry lab report included only a grade with no other summative feedback.

Similarly, the only type of feedback that summed up the feedback on Omar’s assignments were grades. Marice was the only student in the study who received summative feedback from both of her instructors in the form of a longer note, written in prose, at the end of her essay.

One characteristic of the summative feedback from both Marice’s classics and English literature instructors was that it was in letter format. This example, which was typed, printed out, and attached to the essay, is feedback from her English literature instructor:

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██████████

Thank you for your essay. I can see that you have thought about *The Turn of the Screw* in great detail; however, your thesis statement is unclear because your introduction is quite underdeveloped. Please be aware of staying consistent with one’s writing; this includes issues with word choice, grammar (i.e., spelling, possessives) and also issues with tense. Your essay is not required to be broken down into sections—seeing as the instructions for this assignment were that the paper should be in MLA format. As well, you relied quite heavily on one of your secondary sources while the other four were only mentioned at the end of the essay.

In the future, be sure that you have clearly set out your thesis statement. You do not require a summary at the beginning of an essay, instead focus on your introductory paragraph. Use quotations from your primary and secondary sources instead of simply giving a page number. When alluding to a specific critic’s theory, you need to be ready to explain this in detail. As noted, there are some interesting ideas here, but the execution needs work.

C (61)

The feedback started with a greeting—Marice’s name is redacted in the example for anonymity—and what followed was in paragraph format. At the end of the letter, there was no closing or signature; instead, there was a grade, typical of all of the summative feedback Marice received. However, throughout the summative feedback, both instructors used “I” to refer to themselves. For example, both of Marice’s instructors used the phrase “I would like to see...” in the summative feedback more than once. Not only did this use of first person refer to the teacher as reader of the writing explicitly, it also created a juxtaposition between the summative feedback and the shorter, in-text feedback that primarily used imperatives to suggest that the writer should take action. The position of these statements in the holistic feedback put the focus

on the instructor rather than the student and seemed to suggest that the writer had a choice about the modifications or revisions she might make in her writing (e.g., “would like”). However, since the written comments explained, told, and commanded more than suggested, there seems to be little choice for the writer. Indeed, the amount of unexplained modifications made to the text by the instructors seems to suggest that she does not have a choice about the modifications or revisions: they had already been made for her by the instructor. Given that Maurice was not provided opportunity on any assignment to review and give the revision to the instructor, the message of needing to change what she had written was incongruent with the assignment context.

By using the letter format to provide the summative feedback, the instructor might be making a rhetorical choice; perhaps the instructor understands this rhetorical form, and the use of linguistically indirect language, as one that might cushion a difficult message and provide some guidance for future choices. If the student understands the purpose of the letter format and the letter’s message is consistent with the other feedback provided on the writing, then this choice could be a sound one. However, if the student does not understand the rhetorical conventions of a letter like this, and equally cannot understand the indirect language, then there could be a disconnect between the instructor’s choice and the student’s interpretation of this choice. The precedent for discussing the use of a letter as a format of feedback is not abundant in the research about feedback on EAL academic writing. However, in his rhetorical analysis of end comments provided by one instructor to one (non-EAL) student, Batt (2006) intimated the complexity of the form by suggesting that using a letter format to provide this feedback “could be construed as formal and distancing” before noting that “the handwritten first name of the teacher suggests a friendly, even warm, attitude” (p. 213).

Future research could examine the letter format for feedback on academic writing and EAL students' perceptions of the format. However, based on the examples from this study, in an academic setting, feedback written to a student in a letter or note format can be perceived as more personal, especially if the letter is addressed directly to the student, as it does in the summative feedback Marice received. However, as I have already noted, the absence of the instructor's signature on the letter seems to distance the instructor from the feedback. In their study of the relationship between student identity and feedback, Torres and Anguiano (2016) found that feedback discourse often disembodies the student from his or her writing. Phrases like “the first sentence of the last paragraph is just insane” (Torres and Anguiano, 2016, p. 7) refer to the writing, not the student. In the example from Marice's writing above, although the feedback is in a seemingly communicative format (in comparison to the in-line changes and written commentary that do not refer to the student at all) it does not do a lot to bring the student and instructor into a dialogue about the student writing. The feedback starts with a greeting to the student and a phatic comment that attempts to establish and maintain “a good academic and social relationship” between the instructor and the student (Hyatt, 2005, p. 344). The first sentence refers to both the instructor and student as active participants in the text: “I can see” and “you have thought.” However, the instructor's language in the next section does not maintain the student as an active participant in the text. Phrases like “please be aware of staying consistent with one's writing” and “your essay is not required” put the writing at the centre of the comments, not the student. Although “please be aware” can be interpreted as a polite format addressed directly to the student, the second part of the sentence “one's writing” is impersonal; it addresses a general person, not the specific writer whose writing is being evaluated and to whom the letter is addressed. The phrase “your essay is not required” also suggests that the essay is an

entity that has made certain choices about its own content, rather than the writer. The instructor does refer to the student again a number of times in the last section, addressing the student directly - “you do not require,” “you need to be ready” but does not refer to herself again, choosing to say “As noted” rather than taking ownership for the comments. In this example, the letter format as well as the language used in the letter problematize the feedback.

**Chemistry Lab Report.**

The feedback on Sunshine’s chemistry lab assignment is also a type of outlier among the feedback in this study. As I explained in Chapter 4, although this feedback was typed using the “comments” feature in Microsoft Word, I categorized it using the same codes as the feedback that was written by hand. This meant that I did not highlight some of the characteristics that made this feedback different from the handwritten feedback. One of these characteristics is that it was more readable; it was not necessary to decipher the handwriting of the instructor and, therefore, categorizing it for the purposes of this study was easier. The typed feedback was also different from the handwritten feedback because there were no instances of the instructor crossing out or writing over the student’s writing. Although there are ways to make an in-line change in Microsoft Word—by using the *track changes* feature to show that a change has been made to the original—the markers did not use track changes in this assignment. Instead, they chose to provide the suggested change as a written commentary, as in this example where the marker has suggested the change in the comment to Sunshine’s original:

tion reaction on alkyl halides is a technique of preparing alkenes. Four  
 resulted when 2-bromopentane or 1-bromopentane reacting with either

This type of in-line change on the chemistry lab assignment accounted for only 23 of the 87 total in-line changes on all of Sunshine’s assignments combined; the rest of the in-line changes were

on her academic writing assignments. In addition, of the five in-line changes with explanations in the entire study, four of them were in Sunshine’s chemistry lab assignment. The following example shows one of these instances:

natograms (Figure 4) has been analyzed. The relative information  
 ctive quantities of each product are shown in Table 1. Figure 3

Commented [LM15]: \*were - When referring to the results or the methods to achieve the results, write in past tense

The marker provided the change and explained why the word should be in past tense. With this explanation, the marker provided some disciplinary information to Sunshine about the tense to use when including results in a lab report. In contrast to the in-line change feedback on all the other assignments in this study, these explanations—though few—provided some context for the change.

The feedback on Sunshine’s lab assignment is distinctive within this study. It seems to be clearer and more explicit than other feedback and the way the feedback is provided, electronically, is also different than the other feedback in the study. It is important to note, also, that this feedback was provided not by the course instructor, but by markers. These markers were current or former students hired to mark the lab assignments. Each assignment was marked by both markers; one of them marked the first half of the lab report and the other marked the second half. One of the markers also was responsible for developing a training manual for marking the chemistry lab assignment. She had been part of a project that was an ongoing collaboration (since 2014) between the Chemistry and Writing departments to improve lab report writing among students by providing some explicit writing instruction as part of the chemistry lab courses. One of the markers had been part of the project since its inception. Though it is not possible to analyze with certainty the effect that this simultaneous study might have on the data in my dissertation study, it is important to consider that some of the feedback on the chemistry lab writing may have been provided with a heightened awareness of writing development.

**Absent and Minimal Feedback.**

Before I started the study, based on my perceptions of feedback and based on the types of feedback I provide my students, I had expected there to be much more feedback on the student assignments in the study than there was. The study parameters were that the student participants had to be taking one course in the designated term that included a writing assignment. When the students confirmed their participation and their subjects of study included academic writing, psychology, linguistics, English literature, and classics, I had assumed that the feedback on these assignments would be substantial. As the students started to share the returned assignments with me, I was surprised at the minimal amount of feedback on some of the papers and also surprised when Sofia and Bashir did not receive any feedback on their assignments.

Sunshine and Omar both received minimal feedback on their assignments. On the three academic writing assignments included in the study, Sunshine received some in-line change feedback (68 units) and mark-only feedback (8 units). However, she received no in-line feedback with explanation, only five units of written commentary (four of which were only one word—“spaces” or “repetitive”), and ten units of summative feedback of which three were grades and eight were fewer than three words each (e.g., “limited summary” and “minor format errors”). This means that out of 169 feedback units on Sunshine’s writing, only 91 units were on these three academic writing assignments. The remaining 78 units, almost half of all of Sunshine’s feedback units, were all on one assignment - the chemistry lab assignment. From my perspective, this is minimal feedback perhaps especially because Academic Writing is a course in which writing is the subject and at the university where the study takes place the stated<sup>27</sup> course goal is to teach writing for a university setting. The feedback on Omar’s assignments is equally

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<sup>27</sup> The course goal is paraphrased here, and no reference is provided because doing so might compromise the anonymity of the study participants.

minimal. He received a total of only 37 feedback units on his three psychology lab assignments. Of those, ten were grades, one was an in-line change, and nine were marks only, meaning he received only 17 feedback units of written commentary that included some explanation in words or sentences. There are a few possible reasons for the minimal feedback on Omar’s assignments. These are conjecture, since Omar and I did not speak specifically about this in our interviews and I was not able to interview the lab instructor who provided the feedback. It is possible that the convention in psychology labs is to provide minimal written feedback and more feedback during the lab itself, as the lab is class time that it in addition to the lecture time. Another possible reason could be the volume of assignments that instructors are required to mark. Psychology classes, especially in the first couple of years, can be large classes in some universities. This means that the instructor or marker would have a considerable number of assignments to mark, making the task of providing feedback quite labour-intensive.

Another type of absence of feedback is indicated in the participant profiles of Sofia and Bashir; both of them did not receive any feedback at all on the assignments that were part of this study. Research about feedback on academic writing reports very little about a perceived absence or lack of feedback. It is not clear whether this is because it is not part of the investigation, or because much of the research about feedback, especially in EAL writing classes, has a study design that guarantees that there will be feedback to study. In these research designs the feedback is provided by the researcher (Kang & Dykema, 2017; Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, & Parker, 2016), or both students and instructors are participants in the study from the beginning and therefore instructors are aware that they need to provide feedback for the study (Austen, 2016). Because of the design of this study, there was no guarantee that instructors would provide feedback to the student participants. The notion of an absence of feedback is raised by Chang

(2014) and Hyland (2013b), whose studies both concern feedback on disciplinary writing in a postsecondary setting and whose participants include students in a variety of disciplines and at a variety of levels in their studies. Chang (2014) noted that she found students were willing to share their feedback, but “actually did not have much to show” her (p. 267). She indicated that this is because students did not receive assignments back after the term had ended or because the assignments and feedback were posted on the learning management system and student access to this after the term had ended was limited. She reports that nine out of 17 students who participated in her study received little or no feedback (Chang, 2014, p. 267). Chang (2014) does not interpret what this absence of feedback means to students in her study but based on his research Hyland (2013b) posited that students interpret a lack of feedback as a message about the role of writing in the discipline. He stated that “by providing little advice on their assignments, these subject tutors convey the idea to students that writing is a straightforward matter and its conventions are self-evident” (Hyland, 2013b, p. 183).

The absence of feedback has been an emergent finding in this study and because of this I argue that while it is clearly not possible to look at the text of no feedback, this absence is itself a type of feedback. In the second part of this chapter, which focuses on the discourse practice, I will discuss the implications of this type of feedback by presenting Sofia and Bashir’s reactions to not receiving feedback from their instructors and their instructors’ processes for providing (or not providing) feedback.

### **What the Feedback Text Suggests About What is Important in Academic Writing**

This description and discussion of the feedback text reveals that, overall, the message in this feedback is that accuracy in style is important in academic writing and the instructor has the authority to determine what this accuracy is. The description and discussion of the feedback text

thus far points to some suggestions about how knowledge should be represented and how language should be used in academic writing. One of these suggestions is that style is important in academic writing. The feedback in this study focused predominantly on style – sentence structure, spelling, grammar, word choice – while content concerns – coherence, organization, development, completeness – were less prevalent in the feedback. Although it is not always possible to separate style from content (a discussion perhaps, for another investigation), the feedback text, which is the focus of this part of the CDA method, suggests that style-related concerns are important in representing knowledge in academic writing.

Another suggestion made by the focus of the feedback text on style, and especially the amount of in-line feedback that concerns word usage, is that student use of language that is not within the accepted conventions of grammar, spelling, and potentially even word choice, are errors. The feedback suggests that there is an expectation of linguistic homogeneity in student writing. This homogeneity could be based on institutional or disciplinary conventions that are required for students to succeed in a university setting. Or, it may be based on individual instructors’ own expectations. I am not suggesting that students should not be encouraged to write in a way that is understandable to their audience. In fact, an aspect of the role of instructors is to help students be successful in their writing. However, the focus on style in the feedback in this study, especially the large amount of in-line changes (corrections) to student writing, suggests that all of the student writing that does not conform to the accepted conventions are errors or should be written differently.

Another suggestion about academic writing found in the feedback text is that students need, and want, feedback that corrects their writing.<sup>28</sup> As discussed earlier, from a practical perspective in-line change feedback may be easier or faster for the instructor to provide than tackling the larger content or structural questions about writing that may involve more in-depth feedback and more time (although I am not sure that marking every needed change is a fast way of marking). However, the large amount of in-line change feedback compared to the amount of written commentary can present a certain message to students about what is important in academic writing: correcting *errors*. With the large amount of in-line change feedback on their assignments, what Marice and Sunshine saw when they received their essays back are texts that are considerably marked up (with mostly red marks) with notations and words – some of which they understood and some of which they did not – that sometimes overshadowed their own writing. Aside from it being potentially disheartening for the student to see so many red marks on his or her paper – in an interview Marice noted “I actually hate looking at my paper and seeing a bunch of stuff on it” – the authority of the instructor is reinforced through the number of changes. These in-line changes essentially send the message: “this is what you have done wrong in this writing and I will show you how to fix it.” In the study, there are 176 feedback instances where the instructor has crossed out or written over the student’s writing, which reinforces the notion that the instructor has the authority and power not only to point out the *error* to the student, but also to change the student’s writing for him or her. It is possible that instructors think this is what students want and it is possible that some students do want this but as I will discuss in the next section about student perceptions of feedback, Marice, Sunshine, and Omar

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<sup>28</sup> I should note that since Omar had only one instance of in-line change feedback on his assignments, this belief is most prevalent among the 5 instructors (3 instructors and 2 markers) who provided feedback on the assignments of Marice and Sunshine.

all state that they make choices in their writing. Some of those choices may mean that they take chances in their writing or that they might not make the same choice that the instructor would make. By changing the student’s writing, though perhaps not intentionally, the instructor is negating the student’s choice rather than entering into a conversation about what that choice was and how it might have been made differently. Again, though perhaps not intentionally, the instructor is also reinforcing a traditional hierarchy in educational settings, where the teacher has knowledge and imparts that knowledge to the student. In this educational setting, the power lies with the teacher so changing student writing to reflect the teacher’s choices is within the construct of the system.

Students do need to know why their writing might not be understood by their audience but feedback text that corrects each perceived error or includes comments that are not clear to the student are not necessarily the best way to ensure this understanding. These feedback texts potentially do no more than have students see their writing as *wrong*. As Lillis and Turner (2001) suggested, this feedback suggest that it is “the student-writers’ language use that becomes the ‘problem’” (p. 65), especially when the students do not understand that the discourse is falsely transparent; that it is a socially embedded discourse that they may not be privy to. In addition to this discourse of transparency, the sheer volume of feedback on some of the writing in the study could be considered testimonial injustice which is a prejudice that “causes a hearer [or reader] to give a deflated level of credibility to the speaker’s word” (Fricker, 2007, p. 1). While the instructors indicated that their goal was to help students improve their writing, the large numbers of feedback that point out form over content, and include symbols that are not explained so students do not know what to do with the feedback in relation to their writing questions these students as knowers (Fricker, 2007). Instructors may think they are being clear but do not realize

that their feedback is not clear to the students. The instructors may not intentionally be questioning their students as knowers, the opacity of their discourse for their students produces a hidden testimonial injustice.

### **Student Roles**

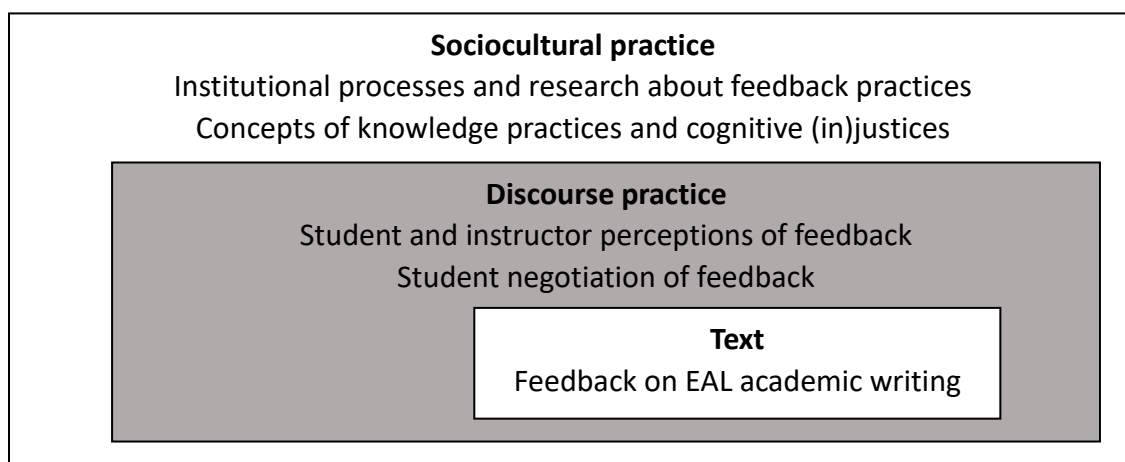
As just noted, because of the focus on style and the large number of in-line change feedback, these students saw their writing changed considerably. The number of changes and the focus of those changes speaks to student agency in the feedback relationship. On one hand, the large number of changes can be viewed as a lack of agency for the students because of the hierarchy of the teacher-student relationship. As Tardy (2006) stated, “students may feel pressured to follow teacher directives, even when students do not understand or agree with the feedback” (p. 61). Sommers (1982) also noted that feedback that is prescriptive can cause the student’s attention to shift from their intention in writing – “this is what I want to say” (p. 150) – to the instructor’s intention – “this is what you the teacher are asking me to do” (p. 150).

From another perspective, the focus of the feedback on accuracy can be viewed as a method of socializing the student into the academic discourse community (Hyland, 2013a). Rather than an authoritarian presence, Reid (1994) has argued that the instructor is a “cultural informant” (p. 275) in this socialization process, a type of liaison between the student and the discourse community. Tardy (2006) suggested that when feedback takes a dialogical approach, students have agency in making choices about their writing and are not passive receptors of the feedback, but active players in their writing. However, in the feedback in this study there is no demonstration of a dialogue for feedback and there is little possibility for dialogue because of the conditions in which the feedback is provided: the writing is not part of a process and the student is not able to revise the writing at all.

In the second part of this chapter, I will discuss student access to the discourses practice of this feedback by turning my attention to the conditions of the instructor production and student reception of the feedback.

**Part 2: Discourse Practice**

The second set of sub-questions in this study asks about instructor perceptions of their feedback practice and student perceptions and negotiations of feedback. These sub-questions are concerned with what Fairclough (2001) terms the interaction with the text, represented here in *Figure 8*. This has to do with viewing the text as both a “product of a process of production,” as well as “a resource in the process of interpretation” (p. 21). Essentially, this part of the analysis considers how the text is both produced and received. This second dimension of analysis is important because describing the text alone does not provide any insight, as Janks (2005) noted, into the “processes of production and reception nor the social conditions which govern both production and reception” (p. 108) of the text. In this study, the description of the text provides one picture of the feedback under examination. Though it is possible to infer some information from this description understanding how the feedback is produced and received can provide a more robust context for the feedback and is a step toward responding to the study’s primary research question.



*Figure 8.* Fairclough’s dimensions of discourse analysis with the focus on discourse practice. (adapted from Fairclough, 1995, p. 98 and Fairclough, 2001, p. 21)

The numbers detailed in the previous section provide an indication of the amount and scope of the feedback included in this study. However, these overall numbers cannot detail the specific feedback received by the student participants during the study, the story that led up to this feedback, and how the student participants reacted to it; such information was gathered during interviews. For each student participant, this story included a unique combination of the student’s views about writing and feedback in general, the student’s reactions to specific feedback, and the instructor’s ideas about feedback. In this section, I will present and discuss data from the student and instructor interviews that highlight student and instructor perceptions of feedback as a concept as well as student perception and negotiation of specific feedback discourse in the study. This discussion will provide some context for the feedback discourse as well as show student and instructor interaction with the text. Although each student and instructor’s interaction with the feedback discourse is nuanced, the findings demonstrate disconnects between the feedback texts and student and instructor interaction with the text. A main disconnect is between the idea – suggested by both students and instructors – that feedback is key to improvement in student writing and the methods in which students understand and negotiate the feedback text as a guide for improvement.

### **Student Perception and Negotiation of the Feedback**

In order to respond to the question about student perceptions of feedback, I asked each participant the same question: “In your opinion what is the purpose of feedback?.” The student responses to this question are fairly succinct: to improve their writing. For example, Marice responded (all emphasis in the student responses is mine): “I would say to get my writing *better*.” Omar first responded that the purpose of feedback was “to *improve*.” Bashir also stated that “the role of giving feedback is to help the students...fully develop what they...were

supposed to...to help you *move to the next level*.” He stated that an instructor’s comment can compel students to adjust their writing, so they can “move along and write a *better* one for next time.” In this way, the instructor would have helped the student along “the right path to where we are supposed to go.” Though they also thought that the purpose of feedback was to improve their writing, Sunshine and Sofia used a language of deficit to describe the purpose. They suggested that improvement is measured against the errors that the feedback highlights. For example, Sunshine said that the purpose was: “to correct us our mistakes or like to...for us to...like when doing the second, the essay next time we can do better and then learn from the mistakes that they have corrected.” Sofia’s stated that the purpose of feedback was to know “how was your performance and what was good; what did you do right and what did you do wrong and keep doing what you did right and improve on what you did wrong.” Although they see feedback as important, the students all admitted that they do not always read the feedback that they receive. Four of the five student participants indicated that they look at the grade first, and then decide whether they will read the feedback.

### **Student Perceptions of Feedback**

While *improvement* or *getting better* was the initial response to the question about the purpose of feedback the interview discussions reveal that, when given the opportunity, these students perceive and negotiate feedback in ways that are deliberate and nuanced. For example, Marice’s initial response to the question about the purpose of feedback was that it was to help her improve her writing, but she included a further explanation about her perception of its usefulness (emphasis added):

I think it makes you *improve* and it sure makes you think that that instructor or professor is really paying attention on what they are reading and your work. It sort of like shows

that they want you to improve and...I am having someone supporting me saying, “Hey, you can do better, you know, here is the feedback that’s how you can do it.”

She sees the feedback as an extension of her instructor’s support for her in her writing. While she also sees value in feedback that helps her to improve, for Sofia receiving the feedback did not mean accepting it unquestioningly. Perhaps because she had completed her undergraduate studies and had reflected on receiving feedback over the course of her studies, she did not seem to see feedback as unequivocally authoritative. Instead, she suggested that when a person receives feedback “you can take it and see if you agree with it or not and if you see that they have something to add you will work on that and improve...because just because someone gives you feedback doesn’t mean they’re right...you will take what you think, what you value from their opinion and you will work on it.”

***Feedback can often be difficult to interpret.***

That feedback can be difficult to read and interpret is the largest theme among student perceptions of feedback. Perhaps not surprisingly, students expressed that they sometimes could not decipher marker handwriting, but more importantly some of the markings, notations, and even words on their feedback were difficult for these students to understand because either the student did not know what the marking meant, or the student was unsure about why the instructor had made the change to his or her writing. That is, the marking did not give the student enough information to understand what the instructor was indicating. In a number of the instances that we discussed, the student explained that if the instructor had provided some guidance about what action should be taken based on the feedback, the feedback would have been less difficult to understand.

Marice explained this perception when she stated her idea about what unhelpful feedback was. Unhelpful feedback included words that she “couldn’t really understand” and could include “something small or...even a circle and something randomly” that does not explain what the issue is. In these cases, it would be more helpful for Marice if there was a written explanation about what the instructor meant. Feedback that had to do with word choice, which was the largest focus on the feedback on her writing (66 instances in in-line change, written summary, and summative feedback), was particularly unclear for Marice. About feedback that her English instructor had given her regarding word usage, Marice said, “She just says I had problems in here and there. She shows me where I had problems but not how I would fix the problems.” When I asked her what the instructor might have done differently, she said the instructor might have “given [her] different words as an example” because without an alternative she was not able to see “how that was totally wrong.” Marice was particularly unhappy with the feedback phrase “word choice” on her English assignments for that same reason, and she compared the feedback she received from her two instructors. She said, “I hate it when she says, ‘word choice’...because she talks about word choice but she doesn’t do like the other professor did...kind of like show me everything.”

Of one of the instances of written feedback that she received on papers in this study, Marice said, “it seems like just the instructor understood what they did in my paper but I couldn’t really understand what that meant for me,” which characterizes much of Marice’s perceptions of feedback throughout the study. This lack of clarity is important because Marice stated that she looks to the feedback to explain the grade on the paper, whether it is what she considers a high score or a low score. Marice’s perception here is also important because it suggests that she understands that the feedback is meant to convey information to her, but that the way that the

instructor has provided this information is understandable to the instructor, but not to Marice. Marice’s comment that the instructor understood the feedback, but that Marice could not hints at the notion that the feedback is using instructor-constructed conventions that are not understandable to Marice.

Sunshine also expressed that feedback was not helpful to her when she could not understand how to correct those perceived errors. She said that when she sees a lot of “red marks” on her writing (which she said implies “errors or something incorrect”) but the instructor “did not put comments at all,” she felt that there was nothing helpful in that; she just “feel[s] like oh, o.k..” Bashir also admitted to feeling frustrated with feedback that he had received, especially when he thought what he had written was correct and therefore did not understand what the feedback meant. He said: “Sometimes when I get those feedback, so I tend to get a little, let’s say, not mad, but just a little angry...Sometimes you just see a circle and a question mark...but you don’t know why this isn’t correct...while to you, you think the writing is correct.” In these instances, Bashir indicated that he would reach out to the instructor in person or by email for an explanation, but even so there have been times when he was frustrated with the feedback and thought: “O.k. I am done with this.”

Similarly, Omar stated that when the feedback was not clear or when he did not understand the feedback he has received, the purpose of feedback has not been filled. He told me about an instance prior to the study when he received feedback on a paper that received a failing grade; this feedback did not indicate to him what the instructor may have expected. Omar recalled that in the assignment he used the word “it” at the beginning of a number of sentences. As feedback, Omar said that the instructor wrote “what is it?” While Omar understood what the feedback was referring to (his use of the word “it”), he did not think that the instructor gave him

enough information to modify his writing. Omar said that he thought, “you didn’t tell me...what you want here.” Although Omar did not indicate specifically why he could not answer the question that the instructor asked, it is possible that he needed more information about how to rephrase his writing. The instructor asked what seemed like a straightforward question, but Omar could not easily respond to it. While he did not believe this feedback was beneficial, when I asked him if he thought the instructor had misunderstood his writing, Omar indicated that he was not sure whether it was his or the instructor’s problem. However, he added that if it was his problem, he felt that the instructor “should have wrote something more...he should have written...more details.” Omar concluded that this particular comment was “confusing rather than beneficial.” In this instance, Omar was not able to understand what the instructor expected of him by only reading the feedback on his assignment. He needed an interpretation of the feedback in order to understand what to do with it.

One specific feedback unit, a written comment on one of the article reviews, particularly puzzled Omar. The comment, seen in this example is about a quoted phrase that Omar had used in the summary of the article:

Child’s brain plasticity is enhanced by the synapses neuronal networks and the white matter pathways that are “under construction”, and many neurobiological mechanisms

*better to avoid quotes in scientific review*

The instructor has made a comment about the only words in quotation marks that Omar had included in the assignment. When I pointed out the feedback to Omar and asked him about it, he said “I didn’t know that was wrong.” Omar said he had written a review before but that was the first time he had used a quote in a review and so he did not understand why he could not use a quote. He stated that he had made the choice to put quotation marks around the word “under construction” because he “didn’t want to be accused of plagiarism.” He explained his reasoning

this way: “I think quotes are only used to avoid plagiarism or when it’s clearly something that can’t be phrased as good as the researcher.” He admitted that he had thought of paraphrasing the concept, but he did not know what “under construction” meant so he could not rephrase it. His use of the quotation was deliberate. It was a writing choice that he made based on his knowledge of what might be considered plagiarism and how he might avoid it. The feedback puzzled him because it did not include any explanation about why his writing choice was not a good one. Although the instructor’s reason for making the comment is not clear, it is also possible that the instructor also misinterpreted Omar’s intention here. Omar has done what he thinks is expected in academic writing; he has included source material that is the exact words in quotation marks. But, he has not included the reference information – the in-text citation – that is part of the conventions of academic writing. So, the instructor might not understand what the quotation marks mean in this case; it is possible that the instructor might think that Omar has put his own words in quotation marks to emphasize them. Perhaps the instructor means that quotation marks should not be used for the purpose of emphasis in a scientific review because it is part of the conventions for this type of writing in this discipline. It is possible that they have misinterpreted each other’s meanings in this case.

***Feedback is (and should be) different depending on the discipline.***

As they expressed their inability to understand or interpret some of the feedback they received the student participants often compared the feedback they received on assignments in different courses. These comments indicate that these students see the differences in feedback among instructors and disciplines and that they expect feedback will be different depending on the discipline that they are writing in.

In the earlier description of Marice’s difficulty in interpreting the comment “word choice,” her comment indicated that her English instructor “talks about word choice but she doesn’t do like the other professor did...kind of like show me everything.” The other instructor that Marice was referring to was her classics instructor. Marice identified the difference between the feedback of the two instructors; she perceived her classics instructor as providing more explanation about the feedback than her English instructor. More than identifying the difference, though, Marice concluded that her classics instructor provided better feedback than her English instructor because the classics instructor showed her which words to change and “how she thinks it would improve it.” Marice seemed to hold her English instructor to a different standard, noting that “from an English professor point of view, she should have done it”; I interpret this statement as meaning because the discipline is English, Marice felt the instructor had a greater responsibility to provide a certain type of feedback, especially about word usage. Marice seemed to be conflating the teaching of English literature as a discipline with teaching the English language in general. However, it also seems that she thought that writing and feedback in the two disciplines of English and the classics are different from each other.

Sunshine also made observations about feedback in different disciplines. As has already been discussed, Sunshine’s academic writing and chemistry assignments provided feedback in different ways. Sunshine commented on this difference by saying that she was not used to seeing “comments on the side” like on the chemistry assignment; she was more comfortable with the feedback on her academic writing assignment because she “got used to...seeing errors crossed out on the actual sentence.” However, she concluded that it was “o.k. to have comments on the side” in the science course, but that in academic writing, the feedback would be better provided on the actual paper. She did not give any reasons for these preferences, but it is possible to

speculate that Sunshine perhaps considers the chemistry lab report a different kind of writing than the writing assignments in her academic writing course.

Sunshine further expressed her views about feedback in different disciplines when she discussed an experience that she had with feedback on a sociology paper in the term before this study. This experience influenced her immensely; she spoke about the experience at length during our first interview and brought the paper to the second interview to show me<sup>29</sup> and discussed it further. She described it as a time that she was very successful with her writing. She spoke about the feedback on this paper extensively. Sunshine noted that her instructor included two checkmarks and the word “yes” about one of the points Sunshine had made. Sunshine speculated that the two checkmarks are because she supported her thesis. She said checkmarks made her feel like she “did it o.k. [she] did good.” Even so, Sunshine believed that her writing was not perfect. She said, “I am still thinking that at the back of my mind I feel like there is still... an error, like, punctuation” that the instructor did not point out. She thinks perhaps the instructor was not as concerned about the punctuation or other grammatical errors because “she was a sociology teacher...she’s not an English or academic writing professor.”

Marice and Sunshine are not able to explain in great detail why they think the feedback they receive from instructors in different disciplines is and should be different. However, their perception of the differences in the feedback from their instructors suggests that Marice and Sunshine understand that the focus of feedback, and by extension potentially the purpose for written assignments, in their disciplinary courses reflects what is important to the instructors in those courses. Their perception of the differences between feedback in courses suggests that

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<sup>29</sup> Sunshine brought the paper to show me, and we discussed it during the interview. Because the instructor for this class is not part of the study (I tried to contact her to see if she would agree for the feedback to be used in the study, but was not able to reach her), I cannot include details about the assignment. However, I am including some of Sunshine’s reactions to that feedback because it was so important to her.

Marice and Sunshine realize that there are potentially messages about disciplinary writing in this feedback, even if they do not understand what these messages are or how to interpret them.

***Grades are a type of feedback that also needs to be interpreted.***

One type of marking that was included on all student assignments was grades in the form of numbers.<sup>30</sup> As described in a previous section, these grades took a number of forms. Some numbers, usually in the form of a negative number like -2, indicated that the part of the writing warranted a removal of marks from the final total. Some numbers indicated the amount of marks attributed to a certain part of section of the writing and showed the student’s total within that section. Other numbers indicated the overall grade for the assignment. The grades on their assignments were important to all of the students in this study. When asked what they do first when they receive an assignment back from their instructor, every student responded that he or she looks at the grade first. Depending on the grade, the student might consider the feedback more closely or not look at the feedback at all. How these students interact with the feedback based on the grade is not straightforward, though. Marice, like students reported in other studies (eg. Leong & Lee, 2018), looks to the feedback to justify the grade she has received. For other students in this study, the grade was also a type of feedback that they felt they had to interpret. Following are some examples that show the nuanced ways that these students interpreted the grades on their assignments.

Omar viewed both final grades and marks that had been taken off for a portion of an assignment as a type of feedback on his assignments. Grades represented ten of the 37 feedback units on Omar’s assignments. In our discussions, he spoke about these grades. For example, in the first lab assignment one feedback unit included only a comment, while the one after it both

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<sup>30</sup> Sofia’s English literature assignments included a letter grade with a corresponding number grade.

had a comment and “-1” beside it. When I asked Omar what he thought about the instructor’s responses to the two questions, he said of the first one (comment only): “I think my answer was enough to get the full grade of the question, but he just needed more.” Of the second one (with the “-1”) he said, “I think if I would have added more here he would forgive me for this one.” Omar apparently saw the two questions as connected: if he would have had more information in the second question, he might have had full marks for both questions.

Omar also interpreted the final grades on his assignments by reasoning them out. On his final lab assignment, which is a summary of two articles, the instructor wrote “Focus more on ERP techniques. Hypothesis? Variables?” The grade that Omar received on the assignment was 6.5/10, which he considered to be “pretty generous”; he explained why: “Cause like I guess 3 out of 5 of the requirements of the assignment I didn’t provide which is the hypothesis the variables and talking about the main subject.” With the absence of written feedback to explain the grades – there were no summative comments on any of Omar’s assignments – Omar accepted the grades as feedback and interpreted what they meant. Interestingly, throughout the reasoning about grades and feedback, he never viewed the grades as unfair. In fact, he mentioned a number of times that the feedback was “fair” or “generous.”

Feedback about her MLA format assignment demonstrates Sunshine’s negotiation of understanding her grades as a type of feedback. Sunshine admitted that she was motivated by grades. During our interviews, as she reasoned out some of the grades she received on the assignments in this study, it became clear that she viewed grades as a type of feedback. With her MLA format assignment, Sunshine reported that when she received it back, she first looked at the grade—which was 8/10—and thought “Oh, O.k.” She was not happy with the grade, not because she thought she should have received a higher grade, but because she did not think she deserved

the mark because she did not put a lot of effort into the assignment. She reasoned that she received the grade because her “professor is very, very nice.” Her reasoning returned to the purpose for the assignment: demonstrating knowledge of MLA format, or as Sunshine put it, the instructor was focusing on “how the student will grasp or like will...feel comfortable to be writing MLA, APA ...or Chicago style.” Since the summative comment on the assignment was “minor errors,” she felt that the grade was fair.

Sunshine similarly interpreted the grade on her Chicago style assignment as feedback. The Chicago style assignment was difficult for Sunshine from the moment she started working on it. Because it was Chicago style, the assignment was about a historical topic. Of this Sunshine said: “because...English and then history are my most weakest...weakest, weakest...I really do not like and then, and then, like having to writing, like, this essay plus the history I cannot, I cannot, I feel like ah, I don’t want to do this anymore.” She pushed forward and read what she was supposed to summarize; the topic was the FLQ crisis in Canada in 1970. She found it difficult to understand the reading “because it’s about history and...I do not know what happened to Canada and then they’re like using deep words.” She did some searching about the topic on Google and visited the tutoring centre for some help, but she still was not able to navigate her way through the assignment. She wrote a short piece, which she described as a “crappy paper.” When she received the assignment back, with a grade of 5/10, she was not disappointed. In fact, she was happy with the grade for a number of reasons. First, she said that the grade looked like it had first been 4/10 and then the instructor changed it to 5/10. This surprised her, and she speculated that the instructor might have changed the grade because “she doesn’t want to give the student a low mark” or because “she’s very nice. She’s always smiling and everything and...she’s very, very kind” or perhaps because “she doesn’t want to fail her

students.” Although the instructor’s policy was that students could not rewrite assignments, she gave Sunshine permission to rewrite this assignment, but Sunshine did not follow through with the rewriting. She went to the tutoring centre for more help with the assignment and made some revisions to it but when the assignment was due, she did not hand it in; she explained to her instructor that she felt it would be unfair to her classmates that she had the opportunity to raise her grade, but they did not. Sunshine explained to me that she felt the assignment was her responsibility, that she should have worked harder on it, and that she received a mark that was “way better” than she deserved.

Bashir’s interpretation of grades was tied to his identity as an international student and what grades mean to international students. Perhaps he, more than the other students in the study, understood the final grade on his assignment as feedback because he was not able to meet with his instructor to get verbal feedback. Bashir said this of the grade he received on his assignment, 15 out of 20: “for me as an international student, I feel like it’s a bad grade.” He seemed to start to tie his disappointment with the grade to his tuition. He said: “’cause when you pay what, almost 1600...for the course...compared to Canadians so I feel like if you get a bad mark it’s...” But he doesn’t finish this thought. Instead he said simply: “I just feel bad if I get a grade that I feel like I wasn’t satisfied with it.” It is not possible to know what Bashir was going to say about the bad grade and the amount of tuition that he pays for the course as an international student. However, it is possible to speculate that he either considered the grade as part of the tuition transaction – that he should get a better grade because he pays a lot for the course – or that he was disappointed in himself because he had paid so much for the course and had not done as well as he had hoped. He admitted that 15 out of 20 – 75% – is not a bad grade in general, but that he considers it not a good grade for him. He expressed that he was going to focus on the next

assignment –another article analysis – for the course and try to do better on that assignment. However, it is not clear how he will improve on the assignment when he did not receive the feedback from the instructor about the first article analysis.

As indicated in the examples above, a number of the students expressed having been surprised by the grade that they received on an assignment in the study (Sunshine, Omar, Bashir, Marice), either because they had anticipated a lower grade because they did not feel they had put the appropriate amount of effort into the assignment to receive the grade they did. Or, in the case of Bashir, because he felt that he had put more effort into the assignment than the grade warranted. Grades seem to be a type of signifier for these students. This could be a signifier of how well they represented their knowledge in their writing, but also of the instructor’s evaluation of the effort that they put into the assignment. This tie to effort is interesting since it is not possible, unless the students tell them, for the instructor to know how much effort the student spent on the assignment. Sutton (2012) confirms that grades are often a “powerful form of feedback” (p. 34) for students and suggested that, while some instructors view student preoccupation with grades as superficial, for students grades often signify success and failure, but also “educational identity” (p. 34). In the case of the students in this study, their interpretations of their grades as feedback does seem to contribute to how they are constructing their educational identity, either as a knower in the disciplinary area (like Omar), as a labourer in the educational system (Sunshine), or as an international student (Bashir).

***There are limitations to feedback.***

As we discussed specific feedback on their assignments, I asked students how they might use the feedback they had received to improve their writing in other assignments. Although they see the value in feedback for helping with writing improvement, most of the students expressed limitations to the usefulness of the feedback. Rather than questioning their instructors’ methods,

students realized that there are institutional structures (such as the structure of academic terms and courses) that limit the ways in which instructors can assign writing and provide feedback that will allow students to improve their writing on a specific assignment. For example, Marice and Bashir recognized the amount of time that providing feedback takes on the part of the instructor. Omar tied the purpose of feedback to understanding the expectations of the instructor so that the student can “write according to what the professor wants.” He thought that it was important to understand the audience for the writing. He said, “I guess writing you have to understand your target audience so if you understood your target audience you can write the way they like it.” His view of understanding his audience was very specific; he wanted to understand the audience for any current piece of writing and not necessarily an academic audience in general.

Another limitation to their use of feedback on other assignments that the students noted was their inability to rewrite or revise their assignments. In this study, all of the assignments submitted by students were final; only Sunshine, as explained above, was provided an opportunity (against instructor policy) to revise her assignment, which she did not do. Only two of the assignments in the study were overtly scaffolded as part of the development of student writing: the chemistry lab assignment was built on questions that students responded to and received feedback on after having completed the lab and, as Judy and Leyla explained, the feedback that they provided on the lab assignment itself was meant to help students with the next lab assignment. Marice’s critical source analysis for her classics class as Dr. Iris explained, was meant to prepare students for their longer term paper by providing them with an opportunity to evaluate a source and receive feedback before they produce the longer paper. Aside from these, there is no other writing in the study for which students had an opportunity to write and then revise based on the feedback they had received. Even the assignments described, while potentially part of a process approach to writing, do not really afford the student the opportunity

to rework the same assignment. The non-possibility of rewriting an assignment has implications for an analysis of the feedback the student has received: it calls into question, for example the purpose – stated by students and instructors alike – of feedback to help a student improve his or her writing. I will address this further in the section about instructor feedback processes. Another implication that the lack of revision for these assignments has is that these students perceive revision as part of a feedback process, primarily because they have seen the results of revision in other writing assignments and they perceive these results as leading them to success.

For example, the experience that Sunshine had with feedback on the sociology paper, mentioned earlier, included revision. The assignment for the sociology class was about breaching a social norm. Sunshine had to do some fieldwork to breach that norm and then report her findings about reactions that people had to her. Of the required five pages for the assignment, she said that she first thought, “Oh my gosh, it is too much for me, I can’t even write one page.” However, after she had completed her draft, she took it to her instructor during office hours, where she received some verbal feedback about it. Sunshine reported that her instructor explained parts of the format of the writing and gave her “tips on how...[she] would be able to express more” in her writing “such as describe things that happened and then be more descriptive.” Sunshine revised her draft based on that feedback and credited that interaction with the instructor as helping her to receive an A+ on the assignment. She said: “I followed those guidelines and then, yah! All my hard work paid off.” In the classroom, the instructor even highlighted her paper as one of three that had completed the assignment exceptionally, an honor that came with a “prize”—a chocolate bar. The feedback and revision process in this instance might not have been formally embedded into the instructor’s plan for the course but Sunshine

saw the opportunity to receive feedback on her paper and then revise her writing based on that feedback as key to her success with that paper.

Bashir also pointed to feedback and revision in a previous class he had taken, French Composition, as an example of what he believed a feedback process could be. He did not seem to find isolated feedback to be beneficial; instead, he preferred the feedback as part of a writing cycle in the course. He reported that in the course, there was a 500-word composition assigned every week. The instructor would provide feedback on that composition relatively quickly, so students could use it in their next compositions. Bashir indicated that the feedback and the process worked for him. The comments were, in his words, “fully developed” so that he was able to “read the comments and...read what [he] did wrong.” He would use the comments to develop his writing in the next composition and gauged his success by comparing the compositions. Although this is not a formal revision of the exact composition that he had handed in, the process of writing, receiving feedback and being able to use that feedback right away in that class was beneficial to Bashir.

Although she did not receive any feedback on her assignment in the study, Sofia spoke about her ideal process for feedback in a university course and this process included the opportunity to revise her writing. She suggested that grades should reflect a process approach to the assignment: “it shouldn’t be about write a paper and get marked on it, but write a paper, get a mark, rewrite it and get another mark and how much you improved, that should be your mark.” Although she expressed that she saw the potential of feedback to help a writer improve, she did not see the potential for feedback transfer from one course to another, at least not in the system in which she had been studying for the last four years. Sofia indicated that this view was because the feedback was specific to the topic of the course. She stated: “The feedback that you would

get that you usually get it would be specific for that topic because that’s what the prof is focusing on not on how you write, like more your ideas on the topic or how you develop ideas for this topic. So, the feedback is more topic-specific and not process.” Interestingly, this view does not represent the feedback data in this study, which is primarily focused on the writing form, not the content. The non-transferability of feedback for Sofia is a continuation of the same systemic pressure she expressed feeling about getting her writing right the first time. In most of her upper-level classes, she said, it was not possible to improve upon the paper based on the feedback she received: “We hand in the final research paper and then we get feedback, but we can’t do anything with that feedback...because that was the final paper, that’s it...we can’t go and fix it.”

Explaining her feelings about not receiving her paper back led Sofia to further elaborate on the deficiencies that she sees in the way that courses she has taken are structured. She admitted that getting the feedback for this paper would be more useful if she “planned on working more on that paper, improving it.” This idea that feedback is not beneficial when there is no possibility for improving that particular piece of writing based on the feedback was a theme throughout the interviews with Sofia. When I asked her what professors could do to make sure that feedback was more useable, she said that it “isn’t about professors in specific but more so how classes are structured.” When there is a final paper in the course and then the class ends, she explained, there is no opportunity to use the feedback. She explained that she thinks feedback is something that students should learn from but that, from the perspective of an instructor, “if that’s the last time you are going to see them [the student] ever, what’s the point in investing that time and wanting them to learn from this if they are not going to apply it anyways?” She added, “maybe that’s why profs don’t really give feedback.” To help students use the feedback they receive, she suggested that the system should be modified: “For me, it would be ideal if the paper

was due maybe half way and having a feedback appointment with your prof and then handing it in at the end, and then that way you can learn.” In identifying this potential process change, Sofia also identified another systematic issue. She said, “But classes are not meant that way because you’re not only just writing a paper but also getting information about other stuff so...if classes were that way it would be more just very focused on writing and I guess classes are also right now actually focused on...shoving information into students more than students producing.”

### **Student Negotiation of Feedback**

Student perceptions of the purpose of feedback are that it is to get better, improve, or learn, but when it comes to negotiating that feedback the students in this study indicated that they do not often know, in a concrete way, how to do this. In the earlier section that focused on the students’ difficulty in understanding feedback, there are a number of examples, but one student comment that perhaps exemplifies the need for help in negotiating feedback is from Marice. Reacting to feedback from her instructor, she said: “She just says I had problems in here and there. She shows me where I had problems but not how I would fix the problems.” Similarly, when I asked other students how they think they would use or if they could use the feedback in the future, none of the students had a concrete answer. Even though the language used in the feedback is comprised primarily of statements and is linguistically direct, this language did not seem to provide students with an indication of what action they should take, perhaps because these are often one word like “elaborate,” “focus,” “include,” and “expand.” It is only the imperatives like “italicize” and “cite” that describe an action that is a little more concrete. Even then, however, “cite” may be clear to students when it refers to including the in-text citation for a source they have used, but it might not be clear when the instructor asks the student to cite a source that has not been included already by the student. The student might not know what part of the source to cite or why the instructor has indicated that a citation is needed.

Although the students indicated that they often did not know how to interpret or use the feedback that they received, in the interviews, they demonstrated some strategies that they used for negotiating the feedback.

***Thinking about and explaining disciplinary concepts and writing choices.***

One of the strategies for negotiating feedback that surfaced during the student interviews involved thinking about the – sometimes complex – disciplinary concepts that they had written about in the context of the feedback they had received. When given the opportunity during the interviews, the student participants explained in detail the disciplinary concepts that their instructor had commented on as incorrect or incomplete. This often included explaining the choice they had made to use a specific idea, word, or construct in their writing. In a number of instances, the student’s perception of feedback was tied to the choice he or she had made as a writer.

One example of a way that a student explained her writing choice is Marice’s reaction to a specific instance of feedback about word choice that she found particularly distressing. The feedback, shown in this example, was about a word that she had used in her creative assignment in her English literature class:

“We need to kill him. I think he knows Iphigenia wasn’t my daughter. He was very mad after you left and that was how he decided to <sup>avenge</sup> ~~revenge~~ himself. We need to kill him Helen! If we don’t, he might use it against us. You could possibly be considered polluted and sentenced to death.” *word choice*

Marice’s instructor circled the word “polluted” and wrote “word choice” underneath it; there were actually two instances where Marice used this word, and the instructor circled both. Of this feedback Marice said, “this part I really didn’t like that she did this because in Greek I learned that you could be polluted so spiritually you are polluted.” Marice said that she had made a very conscious choice to use the word in her writing because she had learned its use in her classics

class. In reaction to the comment “word choice” she said: “It’s not a bad word choice. That’s how they would talk. That’s why I used it. I’m not so stupid.” She speculated that the instructor made the comment because “she doesn’t know the meaning of being polluted.” The instructor assumed that Marice had chosen an inappropriate word and by including simply the circle and the phrase “word choice” she did not engage Marice further about the use of the word or leave open the possibility for a conversation about the word use. Although Marice reacted strongly to the feedback because she felt that it undermined a deliberate choice she had made in her writing, perhaps the instructor’s lack of engagement in the feedback about Marice’s word choice is why Marice did not go to see the instructor even though Marice had indicated in the interviews that it was instances like this that would cause her to talk to the instructor about the feedback. Her strong reaction – “I’m not so stupid” – also suggests that Marice thought her instructor was questioning her as a knower.

In Fricker’s (2007) explanation of testimonial injustice she noted that prejudice – which can be related to identity power – can cause a hearer (or reader in this case) to attribute credibility to the speaker (or writer). This credibility can be in excess or deficit, based on the hearer’s level of identity power in comparison to the speaker. Since identity power operates “in conjunction with other forms of social power” (Fricker, 2007, p. 15) such as gender, language, or class, Marice’s instructor in this case has more identity power than Marice and may even consider Marice as having less credibility as a knower because of her situation as an international student, and an EAL speaker. Fricker (2007) argued that the hearer’s obligation is that “she must match the level of credibility she attributes to her interlocutor to the evidence that he is offering the truth” (p. 19). If Marice’s instructor attributes a low level of credibility to Marice because of her social situation, she may not consider that Marice’s use of the word *polluted* is accurate or

even within the possible parameters of the academic discourse that the instructor expects. Since Fricker (2007) argued that identity power is “at the level of the collective social imagination” so it “can control our actions even despite our beliefs” (p. 15). Therefore, Marice’s instructor may not purposefully have set out to engage in testimonial injustice, but because of her identity power, she has questioned Marice’s credibility.

At other points throughout our discussions about the feedback she received, Marice reinforced that she had made choices in her writing and that the instructor was responding to those choices, and again perhaps questioning Marice’s credibility as a knower. For example, at one point she explained her writing choice in relation to the disciplinary material in the assignment. In reaction to a statement Marice made about a “Greek awakening,” her classics instructor wrote “This suggests that the Greeks did not have values before.” Marice responded by explaining her reasoning in detail:

No, they did have values before. I never said that. In relation of moral values, not values. My paper was talking about how these two historians came to talk about problems that Homer had in his texts, saying that the Trojan War happened. So if it really did happen the story behind it is more talking about ... how Helen just...she ran away with Paris to somewhere else and that’s why they had a huge war that went for years and years. And these two historians they talk about how that’s not enough for a war and they talk about justice and they talk about moral values, for example not having a war because of one person, because of one king. And they talk about power and how those kings had a lot of power and people were afraid of them...and those are not moral values, like you don’t start a war and kill a bunch of people because your wife ran away. So, it’s kind of like that’s what I mentioned.

Marice was able to explain her reasoning in detail verbally in a way that she was not able to do in her essay; although she did not quite explain her aims in a way that might be acceptable to her instructor, she starts to reason out her writing choices. Her instructor opened up the possibility for this reasoning by making the comment on Marice’s writing. However, the timing of the feedback was too late for Marice; there was no possibility for her to revise the essay with her extended reasoning, nor was the comment an invitation for Marice to engage in a discussion with her instructor about the disciplinary material. Like much of the feedback in this study, the comment has a finality about it that suggests the student is incorrect but does not encourage further engagement on the topic. In fact, further engagement on the topic is not possible because Marice is not able to revise her writing.

At other points in our interviews in reaction to the feedback she received, Marice explained her choices about using sources and references in her writing. These explanations not only reveal why she made the choices she did, but also her perceptions of academic writing. In her English term paper, for example, the instructor circled the page number in some of the in-text citations and wrote “quote” by one of them, as seen in this example:

as Mahbobah (151) <sup>awik</sup> suggested in her feminist point of view. Moreover, Brookes (219) <sup>quote</sup> mentioned

Marice interpreted the feedback to mean that the instructor “wants direct quotations...that was what she was trying to say here.” But she explained that she did not use direct quotations because she “always thought direct quotations are not better than paraphrasing.” Marice made a choice not to quote because she understood that “there is always a limit how many quotes you can use, how long they can be.” When I asked her whether this understanding is based on feedback she received in the past, she indicated that it was just what she understands about academic writing

in general, not from feedback she received. Although her perception may not be accurate, her choices were based on her understanding of academic writing.

Marice’s perceptions of academic writing arose in her reaction to other feedback as well. In her classics term paper, the instructor made the comment “cite a passage here to support this” in response to a sentence of summary about *The Odyssey*. Marice indicated that she had chosen not to include a citation because “it’s common knowledge, you know. People just, they hear about it and it’s so normal.” She stated that she did not think it was necessary to cite the source in this instance. The classics instructor also commented on Marice’s use of sources in the summative comments, as seen here:

you bring up many important issues here, but I would like to see you develop them fully and support them with more direct references to the texts themselves. (You have enough space to do so here - this is a little short.)  
 \* Make sure that you are consulting reliable sources and carefully proof-reading your work for clarity.

The instructor asked Marice to include “more direct references to the texts themselves” and consult “reliable sources.” In the interview, Marice responded by saying, “I picked those sources because I agreed with all of them.” She interpreted the instructor’s comment in this way:

I think what she is saying is like she wanted me to pick some sources that I disagreed with and kind of show them the ones I agree, the ones that I disagree with. I think...in my opinion that is what she was saying. But I’m not sure if I was supposed to do that or if I was I probably missed it.

Although Marice’s choices about source usage do not seem to align with the instructor’s ideas about source use and citation in academic writing, Marice was able to explain her choices to me.

She understood the instructor’s meaning in this feedback and seemed to intuitively understand what she was “supposed” to do. Again, though, she was not able to revise this assignment to reflect her understanding of the feedback. Although the feedback language suggests what Marice might do in future work—“I would like to see you develop,” “make sure you are consulting reliable sources” —that future work would not be in the same classics class. It is unclear how much of this information Marice would transfer to her work in other classes, given the choices she made in this assignment based on her perceptions of academic writing

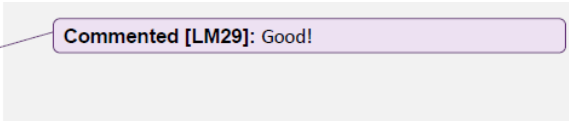
Finally, Marice appeared to reason with the instructor’s feedback, even if she did not agree with it:

she didn’t say how she marked me. So that’s something I would like to see in here. You lost points because of this and this and this. You know what I mean? Like how many points did I, you know, did I miss because of my bibliography? Or how many did I miss because of my in-text reference? Or grammar problems?

When I asked her what she thought when she saw some words in her writing crossed out or written over, she said that she hated “looking at [her] paper and seeing a bunch of stuff on it” and that she would rather the instructor only make markings when she “really needed to.” However, she also reasoned that in the cases where the instructor suggested an alternate word “she’s just using a different word that she would use.” Marice indicated that if she was doing the marking, she would “probably do that all the time too.” Although she thought that, in the specific instance we were discussing, the instructor’s meaning was clear, she reasoned that the instructor was “just trying to make it look nicer...or look like the way she would do it.” Marice has a sense that her instructor has an ideal for the writing that Marice hasn’t reached.

Sunshine also demonstrated her awareness of the importance of disciplinary conventions in writing and how she negotiated these conventions in her writing. This awareness was tied to the feedback she received because she perceived feedback (and the grades that accompany it) as confirming her use of appropriate disciplinary conventions in her writing. One example of Sunshine’s negotiation of disciplinary conventions was revealed in our discussions about comments on the discussion section of her chemistry lab report. We were looking at the feedback, shown in this example, where the marker had written “Good!”:

s. It followed the Zaitsev’s rule of having the more  
duct that favours *E* over *Z* isomerism. *E* geometric isomer is



Commented [LM29]: Good!

Sunshine speculated that the comment was included because the markers were “looking for words, specific words” and Sunshine had included the right ones in this section. She had explained to me earlier that in parts of the lab report, the markers were looking for specific language in the lab report that demonstrates that the student can apply what was learned in the lectures to the labs. She said, “They did not tell us what word they are looking for but then it is our just our responsibility or duty to just put it in the...report.” She explained that she learned about the need to include these key words from a writing tutor to whom she had gone for help with her first Organic Chemistry lab in the previous term. Sunshine interpreted the positive feedback that she received on the assignment as showing that she had understood the *hidden* requirements of the disciplinary writing.

Sunshine’s perception of the requirements for disciplinary writing were also revealed when we discussed the MLA format assignment for her academic writing class. When I asked her whether the feedback on the assignment could have been different or more useful to her in any way, she said “no” because she thought the instructor had provided adequate explanation

about MLA format in class to be able to complete the assignment. The instructor had explained about “ellipses and then the paraphrasing and then the quotation mid-sentence or everything and the...and the square brackets.” Sunshine had included all of these in the assignment because the instructor had pointed them out in class. Sunshine said, “I feel like it’s part of what she is grading.” Although these had not been listed as part of the formal assignment expectations, Sunshine had interpreted (or intuited) that she should include all of them in her assignment to demonstrate that she understood the conventions of writing. In the assignment, Sunshine did not receive any written feedback about her use of MLA format. She did receive some in-line change feedback about the spacing of the ellipses, and the capitalization of words within the quotations. The summative feedback did not mention the MLA format specifically: “minor errors” and “some repetitive points in analysis.” Since Sunshine did not receive any written feedback specifically on her use of MLA format, it was unclear whether her choice to include all of the MLA formatting that the instructor covered in class was validated. However, Sunshine did interpret “minor errors” to mean that she had made mistakes “grammatically and with the MLA format.”

Finally, Omar also negotiated feedback on his assignments by reasoning out what it might mean, rather than dismissing the feedback he could not fully understand. In some cases, this is simply his attempt to understand what the feedback is drawing attention to. This approach was the case in his reasoning about this feedback:

turtles that was in the experiment breed, it would be better to have their learned behaviour as adaptive behaviour.

*Any important as learned? environment is dynamic?*

**5. We tend to think of intelligence as adaptive, but there is a potential cost to learned**

The instructor asked Omar questions about his response to the question. As he talked through the feedback, Omar reiterated what he wrote—“‘cause I said here the learned behavior like as important as adaptive behavior” and then repeated the comment—“So he is like ‘why is it as important?’” to show that he understood what it meant. However, he did not stop there. He confirmed the comment by saying, “I didn’t write why.” He explained that he thought his answer was “good enough” but said of the instructor, “I guess he needed more.” In this case, Omar reasoned through the feedback by trying to think about what the instructor might expect, which was consistent with his view of feedback as to help understand what the audience wants.

Another way that Omar reasoned out his feedback was by talking through disciplinary concepts that were highlighted by the feedback and suggesting how he might have rewritten the assignment to include the information expected by the instructor. One example was in relation to the feedback in this example:

- Like the example above, turtles learned to utilize their spatial learning and adapt to their controlled environment. However, that might cost them their innate mechanism to weaken. And if they were to be released to the wild that is supposed to be their main environment, they might not be able to survive because their learned behaviour might overlap their innate behaviour. Their innate behaviour that is supposed to be the behaviours that help them live in the wild.

*↳ adapting to environment is their learned behavior regardless of lab or wild. your point is correct but explanation isn't fully right. -1.5*

*fully not correct*

The instructor wrote that the point Omar made in the answer was correct, but that his explanation was not. Omar admitted that he forgot to include an explanation about the adaptation and that the instructor’s “argument is actually pretty valid” because of this. He suggested that he could have included information about the adaptation that would have clarified his point. He said, “I guess if I said like, uh, if you...if you move the turtles in the experiment environment to the normal

environment, they would need time to adapt to the...that environment but not completely not being able to adapt.” In another case, in response to the instructor’s feedback question, “Why can’t it be learned? Need to explain disadvantage of it being learned behavior,” Omar referred to a conversation that we had at the beginning of the interview about adaptations in animals to suggest how he might have written the response to meet his audience’s expectations. He said it “is the same thing that I told you about that they learn it and then at some point they became innate so that’s how...it become learned. And I didn’t write that, so I guess he put the comment on it.” Omar’s explanation of his writing emphasized his engagement with the disciplinary material and his need to discuss or talk through his ideas about the material.

Although Omar, Sunshine, and Marice do not fully understand the feedback they received in these instances, they use the information that they have, perhaps acquired from other classes (Marice) or the writing centre (Sunshine), or perhaps an extension of knowledge already learned (Bashir) to contextualize the feedback, explain it, and suggest why their writing choices were appropriate or not in the given circumstance. These students understand that they have made choices in their writing and are able to explain those choices. They also seem to know that it is important to represent their knowledge of the discipline in a way that is understandable to the instructor in that discipline and that feedback about their writing choice indicates that the instructor does not understand the choice or sees it as a choice that does not adhere to the instructor’s expectations of writing in the discipline. In Sunshine’s case, she has been able to find the disciplinary information that she needs to succeed: she knows the key words that need to be included in the lab report and has used the code which conforms to her reader’s expectations of the discourse. But, rather than being easily accessible to her, she has had to search for these words.

For Marice, and to a certain extent Omar, the disciplinary information that they need to be successful in their disciplinary writing is still elusive to them. Marice explains her reasoning —about her discussion of the Greek awakening, for example — but she does not get any further information about whether her reasoning is acceptable within the discipline. So, even though she is able to reason, if her reasoning does not fit with disciplinary conventions her ideas about the concepts will perpetuate as they are, rather than help her to understand the disciplinary conventions. While the feedback might be providing her with some idea about the expectations in the discipline, Marice does not seem to have the resources to understand those messages. Omar’s situation is similar because although he does reason out the feedback and explain his writing choices, his explanations are not confirmed by his instructor so it is not clear whether he is perpetuating choices in his writing that are within the expectations of the discipline.

***Looking to other sources of feedback in addition to instructor feedback.***

In the interviews, every student indicated that they would speak with their instructor if they needed clarification about the feedback, or did not agree with the feedback they received. Throughout the term of the study, though, only Bashir spoke with his instructor about his assignment and this was not, as indicated earlier, through an appointment with his instructor as was required to receive the feedback, but as part of a group of students who approached the instructor after class. He received minimal information about his assignment, as the instructor was speaking generally about the class’s assignments. Sofia did interact with her instructor briefly in person and through email to attempt to get her assignment feedback, to no avail. When discussing feedback on a specific assignment in the study, Marice and Bashir each indicated that they should ask their instructor about feedback that they did not understand. However, when I

followed up with them during the next interview, neither one of them had discussed the feedback with their instructor.

There are a number of reasons why a student (particularly an EAL student) might not approach their instructor to speak about an assignment: the student might feel that their instructor does not have the time, or the student might feel that his or her English will not be understood by the instructor. Perhaps the student is not used to a system where students and instructors interact in this way, or maybe the student just doesn't have time to meet with the instructor. Sunshine even noted that she would only feel comfortable meeting with her instructor if the instructor seemed approachable, someone who “seems to really, like really, want to help the students.” However, when an instructor seems “intimidating” she will “hold back what [her] concerns are.” Sunshine described an intimidating instructor as someone who “answer[s] [her] back with a question” when she approaches him or her for help.

In lieu of approaching their instructors about the feedback they had received or even for help with an assignment, as students spoke about aspects of their writing process that are important to them, it became clear that the students in this study have another way of getting and negotiating feedback on their writing; these students consulted the writing centre, peers, classmates, or family members for feedback on their writing. For example throughout her writing process, Marice consults with, and receives feedback from, a variety of people including her boyfriend, her host mother, or other student roommates. Similarly, Sofia mentioned a number of times that she often asks family or friends to work with her on her writing. She has one friend in particular who she consults with when she has a block in her writing, especially when it comes to language. She noted that the friend would say, “o.k. you can say this this way and she would put a lot of words in and kind of make this flow.” Sofia often consults the same friend before handing in a paper. She talks with her friend, explains what she is trying to say, and the friend provides consultation

to her by helping her “twist it a little bit around.” Before handing in the paper that was part of this study, she asked her dad to read it because she expressed feeling that he is “the ultimate word” and that his “expectations are way too high, like higher than my prof’s.” Sofia said that her dad reacted positively to the paper and also pointed out parts where she could work on it by expanding ideas or rethinking her sources. Sunshine and Omar also mentioned speaking with friends about their writing, or feedback they have received. Sunshine specifically mentioned asking a friend to “peer edit” her essays because the friend is “really, really good at English.”

As indicated earlier, Sunshine also visited the university’s writing centre to get help with her writing in both academic writing and chemistry. It was on these visits that she gathered important information about the disciplinary writing that she was doing. The writing centre tutor explained the key words that the markers were expecting in the chemistry lab report. In the case of one of her academic writing assignments, Sunshine was not able to understand the reading that she was assigned to write about because, as she put it, it has “deep meaning or like symbolism or something.” The writing tutor was able to help Sunshine by explaining the reading and also with “how to construct” her essay. Sunshine was able to rely on the writing centre for a type of feedback throughout her writing process for the assignments in both of these classes.

Bashir also got feedback on the assignment in this study, after he had received his grade back, from a friend. He noted that the friend was surprised by the grade Bashir had received on the assignment. The friend thought it should have been higher. However, Bashir was also strategic about getting feedback from places other than his instructor before handing in his assignments in the class in this study and in other classes he has taken at university. He stated that he sometimes works with other students in his class to understand and write the assignment. In one class when he was in his first year of studies, he noticed that some of his classmates that

were in second year knew “a lot about APA format” so he asked them to explain it to him and because of that he revised his presentation based on their information.

These students perceived the importance of alternative sources of feedback and are able to negotiate some of the feedback on their assignments with these alternative sources. Séror (2011) also found that students viewed these alternate sources of feedback as “valuable sources of advice on writing that could compensate for perceived problems with content instructors’ feedback” (p. 118). Certainly, it seems that the students in this study looked to other sources of feedback to fill in some of the limitations, like not being able to improve their assignments based on the feedback that they had received. That students look for some interaction – with peers, tutors, family members, or instructors – during their writing process reinforces the idea that feedback is a social event (Séror, 2008) and can have a dialogical nature (Ajjawi & Boud, 2017). The students in this study seem to value both an iterative process for writing and feedback that involves interaction about that writing.

What is not clear in the information gathered in this study is whether the instructors realize that students are looking to other sources of feedback in addition to the instructor’s. The feedback discourse suggests that instructors value accuracy in writing and provide feedback about inaccuracies with authority (for example by changing student writing). If instructors understand that students consult other people for feedback on their writing, would instructor feedback change? Similarly, if these instructors understood that students value a process in writing, would the instructors build a process into their writing assignments, or do they also feel limitations to the assignment process in their classes?

**Summary: Student perceptions and negotiation of feedback**

As consumers of the feedback discourse in this study, the students identified the purpose of feedback as to improve their writing, but their perceptions of feedback that they received, and their expectations of feedback indicated that much of the feedback in this study did not help them achieve that purpose. The students perceived feedback as difficult to interpret; they indicated that they often do not have enough information to understand what to do with the feedback and suggested that they would benefit from more explicit explanation about the feedback. Like the students in Sutton's (2012) study, these students indicated that they required guidance about how to use the feedback. The need for guidance in their feedback is a realistic need; in their classes these students were not formally taught how to improve their writing based on the feedback they received. Most of the student participants also noted that they had not received feedback in the same way (or at all) on writing in their own language. So, feedback on academic writing in English was a new genre of discourse that they had to negotiate.

Some of the discourse that the students had to interpret was the language and notations used in the feedback. It has been pointed out in the past that the language of feedback is often confusing or vague to students – both EAL and non-EAL alike (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, Best et al., 2015). Earlier studies noted that students found feedback “puzzling” (Chang, 2014, p. 270), and had “difficulties in decoding their feedback and the academic jargon it contained” (Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, & Parker, 2016, p. 5). Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, and Parker (2016) also found that feedback providers thought that their comments could be “easily decoded and used” (p. 5), but that students did not think this about the feedback. Because of the variety of types of feedback in this study, students did not always have the knowledge and resources to interpret the feedback. As Bashir noted, “sometimes you just see a circle and a question mark, but you don't know why this isn't correct.” Even feedback that may have seemed conventional to instructors, such as editing marks,

was unclear to the students in this study. The students were unaware of the meanings of most of the marks (they had not encountered them in previous feedback on writing in their own language, for example) and had not been given instruction about how to interpret them.

The language and notations of the feedback was challenging for students to understand, and so were the messages in the feedback that were implied, rather than explicit. In their perceptions of the feedback, these students observed that the feedback was different (and sometimes expected it to be different) based on the discipline in which they received the feedback. However, they couldn't always articulate what the difference was or why they expected that there be a difference. As students negotiated this feedback, they also explained their writing choices, sometimes in relation to what they perceived as disciplinary conventions. Previous research found that instructor feedback included disciplinary messages that were hidden (Hyland, 2013b) or implied (Basturkmen, East, and Bitchener, 2014). Unlike the students in Hyland's (2013b) study, who were able to “notice discernible messages in the feedback that told them about the discipline” (p. 182), the students in this study did not uncover or articulate those messages. Instead, because the feedback was not explicit, the students (like Marice in the example described earlier) risked misinterpreting disciplinary conventions or perpetuating their own ideas about these conventions. The feedback did not engage the student so that he or she understood what the feedback meant in relation to the writing choices that he or she had made. These student perceptions highlight the importance of the instructor engaging with the student, rather than simply negating those choices or questioning them as wrong, as much of the feedback in this study does, so that both the instructor and the student understand the writing choices the student has made.

Ajjawi and Boud (2017) suggested that feedback “may have powerful effects” on students, but that student responses to feedback are not only dependent on the feedback itself, but

also “by what they [the students] bring to them” (p. 253). The students in this study are not able to understand how to respond to the feedback that they received, even though they use multiple methods of negotiating the feedback. Although the feedback might include information that the students need to be able to act on it, the students do not necessarily have the resources to interpret this information.

**Instructor Perceptions of Their Feedback Practices**

As detailed in the Research Methods chapter, instructor participation in the study was twofold: all instructors agreed to have their feedback included in the study, but not all instructors agreed to be interviewed for the study. Therefore, it is a subset of instructor participants – summarized in Table 19 – whose insights contribute to this section about instructor perceptions of feedback practices. Even though not all instructors participated in interviews, as my analysis of the interview data took shape, important insights emerged about these instructors’ perceptions of feedback, their feedback practices, and how these feedback perceptions and practices intersect with the feedback they provided the student participants in this study. After a short discussion of instructor perceptions of feedback, I provide an analysis of each of the instructors individually.

**Table 19**  
*Summary of Instructor Participants*

<b>Student Participant</b>	<b>Instructor Discipline</b>	<b>Feedback</b>	<b>Interview</b>	<b>Instructor or Marker Participant Pseudonym</b>
Marice	English Literature	✓	✗	N/A
	Classics	✓	✓	Dr. Iris
Sunshine	Academic Writing	✓	✗	N/A
	Chemistry	✓	✓	Leyla Judy
Omar	Psychology	✓	✗	N/A
Bashir	Social Sciences	✓	✓	Dr. Bond
Sofia	Linguistics	✓	✓	Dr. Lexico

**Instructors’ purposes for feedback.**

As with the student participants, I asked each instructor participant their opinion about the purpose of feedback. Their responses were strikingly similar to the student responses, and even uses the same language of improvement and development as the students used. Dr. Iris, for example, said (all emphasis in the quotations used in this paragraph is mine): “Well, I mean *improvement* is I think, sort of the one-word answer. The feedback is there to make your work stronger...It really is there just there to help you *improve*.” Dr. Lexico explained that, no matter the level of the student, the role of feedback which was to help the student “develop the skills” they need at that level. The purpose of feedback, for him, was that “they [the student] would *improve*, essentially...They would *get better*.” Leyla and Judy both used similar language to explain what they thought the purpose of feedback was. Leyla said, “I think ultimately feedback is for the students to know how to *improve* their work overall,” and Judy explained that feedback is “so you can learn where your mistakes are...where you made the mistakes and then you can learn and be able to fix them to make your writing a little bit more better than the last time, even though it’s never going to be perfect, but you can just always keep *improving*.” Dr. Bond was the only instructor who did not provide a clear response to my question about the purpose of feedback. He said that he didn’t have a concept of what he wants “to see as an outcome or purpose of it.” Instead, he said: “I’m more interested in ensuring that a student feels comfortable enough to want to discuss their assessment with me and for me to provide that feedback.”

These instructors (with the exception of Dr. Bond) have a vision of feedback that includes working toward improvement on the part of the student. Each instructor also expressed what improvement might mean for them. Dr. Iris acknowledged that the concept of improvement is subjective but stated that for her it meant that students “become better writers; express

themselves more efficiently and effectively and read and think more critically. Sort of the big goal of the humanities.” Leyla and Judy also had big picture goals for their feedback; they expressed that they hoped it would not only help students with the writing in the Organic Chemistry course but also with writing in other science courses. Leyla hoped that students would use the feedback to “change not only their approach to writing but also how they approach science” because “in order to think like a scientist you also have to learn how to write and communicate like a scientist.” Judy wanted her students to learn “how to write in science... because people think science is just about the science but it’s about the writing as well. ‘Cause you have to be able to...discuss what you did so other people can read it and redo the experiment as well.” Although not speaking directly to student improvement based on feedback, Dr. Bond and Dr. Lexico both expressed their views about what academic writing should be, a kind of ideal of what they expect from their students. Dr. Lexico said that academic writing was important so “you know how to express yourself properly, to stay on the topic, to arrange your thoughts so that you know, other readers, or whoever is on the other side will understand.” Dr. Bond stated that good academic writing means that the student can “articulate and demonstrate... mastery of knowledge and be able to disseminate that in as efficient a manner as possible.”

While Judy acknowledged that she hoped students would “fix some of the mistakes that they made” from one lab report to another based on the feedback she provided, most of these ideas about student writing are higher-order concepts: mastery of knowledge, critical reading and thinking, communicating like a scientist. If these are the instructor’s guiding purposes for providing feedback to students, it follows that instructors would have these purposes in mind as they compose the feedback for their students. Looking again at the feedback discussed in part one of this chapter, it would be possible to infer that the improvement these instructors are

focused on is mainly stylistic; the feedback attends extensively to local style-related concerns, with some attention, primarily in the summative comments, to global, content-related concerns. While stylistic concerns may lead to the type of high-order improvement that the instructors expressed hoping for their students, it is only one aspect of the range of skills the instructors mentioned. There is a disconnect, then, between what the instructors’ stated purposes for providing feedback are and the feedback text in this study. I should note that Dr. Iris, Judy, and Leyla are the only instructors who both agreed to be interviewed for the study and who provided feedback on student writing that is included in the study, so it is easier to correlate their intentions with their feedback practices. Dr. Lexico and Dr. Bond both agreed to be interviewed, but since they did not provide feedback to Sofia and Bashir, it is not as possible to make the same correlation. However, as I will discuss later in this section, the absence of feedback on the writing assignments of Sofia and Bashir, whose instructors are Dr. Lexico and Dr. Bond, can also be construed as part of the disconnect between instructor intentions and practice. All of these instructors described their perceived processes for providing feedback (for improvement) to their students. These processes are varied but demonstrate that this disconnect between the feedback and instructor intentions is nuanced. Since these feedback processes are unique, I will discuss them individually.

*Dr. Iris.*

In the interview, Dr. Iris elaborated on her expectations of students in writing. She said that as an instructor in the humanities, she expected that students would do some writing because that is “one of the...clearest ways to communicate the skills...or work on the skills that you achieve, hopefully, in the humanities.” That this writing, for an undergraduate class, was an (8-10 page) essay is a given for the instructor. However, because she realized that this length

assignment was “significant enough for an undergraduate,” she changed how she asked students to undertake that writing (the first iteration of this change was in the class that Marice took). Instead of a mid-term exam, she added shorter quizzes throughout the term and added a shorter writing assignment mid-term, a 2-3 page critical source analysis that was meant to prepare students for the longer paper by providing them with an opportunity to evaluate a source and receive feedback before they produce the longer, “thirty percent of their mark type of assignment.”

This assignment modification process seemed to be a move toward aiding her students achieve what the instructor viewed as good academic writing. She described her ideal student paper in the following way:

Very clearly organized, very well put together using high quality sources. You know, using academic, peer reviewed sources. Using ancient sources... and using it comfortably... This is maybe hard to articulate, but you can tell when you are looking at a paper when a student has mastered the material or when the material sort of has mastered them, right. And I want it to go obviously in the other direction where they are comfortable using it and working with it... on its own terms.

Although this is her ideal, she admitted that not all students would get to that level. She generally expected students to “put together something that is relatively well-organized” and that has a structure that includes an introduction, a conclusion, and a thesis that is supported with evidence. Ultimately, she wanted students to think about the evidence they were using and how they were using it because “that’s basically what... Classicists would say that [they] do generally”:


If I were to think about it in terms of what my students produce, I would like them to sort of do a mini version of what I do professionally and that is one thing I tend to do with

my...when I teach upper level students is to do sort of mini-conferences, mini...and get them to do peer feedback so they are doing peer review.

The critical source analysis assignment supports her emphasis on the important of evidence in academic writing in classics. Dr. Iris' stated expectations for her student writing are firmly rooted in both disciplinary structures and conventions of academic discourse in classics specifically, and the humanities in general.

Dr. Iris explained in detail her process for providing feedback to her students. She started by noting the mode of the feedback; she marks by hand, usually with a pencil so that she can go back and change the feedback if need be. She indicated that she does not like giving feedback electronically, and even when students have submitted assignments electronically, she has printed them out and written the feedback on them. When she graded an assignment, she wrote feedback throughout that was “mostly grammar...and a couple of sort of contenty [*sic*] comments.” She described her process: “typically I work through a paper and...I would mark out any obviously grammatical, spelling, punctuation errors...I put fairly small notations for content, you know a check mark if I really like an idea by a sentence.” She also said: “I tend to ask questions—I’m a classicist so I am very Socratic about that—‘what do you think this means?’—or something to that effect, you know, marginal notation. But pretty small. Nothing more than a short sentence within the body of the paper.” With the mark at the end of the essay, she would “typically give a paragraph addressed to the student, so Bob or Sally or whatever, you know four or five sentences.” She indicated that she addressed the content at the end more than throughout the paper, starting with positive feedback before providing more constructive or negative feedback. She indicated that she used phrases like “higher” beside the mark to indicate that it is a good paper but “a specific flaw has caused it not to do as well.”

The process that she described for providing feedback to her students is consistent with the feedback that Marice received from Dr. Iris on her classics papers. She addressed grammatical, punctuation, and spelling errors through style-related markings with in-line changes (143 instances) on both assignments and content-related comments (50 instances) in written commentary and summative feedback. The written comments throughout the assignments included 11 questions about the content and how Marice had represented or interpreted it, but also included directions like “expand here” (3 instances). The summative feedback on both of Marice’s assignments was primarily content-related and both, as Dr. Iris stated was her convention, began with a positive comment about the paper before indicating what could be improved, as in this example:

 You use a lot of very good details here.  
I would like to see a clear intro, & conclusion  
guiding me to your overall conclusions,  
Proofread for grammar and errors.  
your formatting is correct (e.g. margins)  
I was pleased to see that you contradicted  
Dr. Can. Great initiative!

Essay:  $\frac{7\frac{1}{2}}{10}$  (higher w/ intro/conclusion,  
formatting/grammar)

Comments:  $\frac{5}{5}$

Total:  $\frac{12\frac{1}{2}}{15}$

The example also included a “higher with...” comment about Marice’s grade to indicate what could be improved to raise the grade of the paper. In addition, consistent with Dr. Iris’ views

about the importance of evidence and support in academic writing in the classics, she included written comments about the use of references material (10 instances) and the format for referencing (15 instances). What was not indicated in the instructor’s description of her process, but was in the feedback on Marice’s assignments, is the word-level focus of the in-line change feedback; word choice, verb tense, and verb form have a combined total of 60 instances of feedback.

In providing feedback to her students, Dr. Iris stated that she hoped students reflect on “how they can become better at this.” When they receive their feedback, she hoped that students “read it, that they would go back through and look for the marks, the notations that I’ve made and um consider why I have made them, look for patterns in that, you know am I seeing three notations for sentence fragments per page.” She indicated that she realized that “it’s a cumulative process” and that students won’t become “radically different” writers in the three months that they are in her course. However, she also hoped that students also see the feedback as “a process rather than something that gets produced quickly.”

Dr. Iris’s stated feedback process aligns with the feedback that Marice received on her writing assignments; she provides feedback about both style and content. However, both the feedback text and the feedback process do not necessarily align with the vision that Dr. Iris has voiced about the purpose of feedback, her expectations about what students will do with that feedback, and her description of the ideal student paper. The dominance of feedback that is focused on style (165 instances) as well as the 44 instances of mark-only feedback means that 209 of the 273 total instances – or 77% - of the feedback on Marice’s writing is provided without any explanation. As noted in the section about student perception of feedback, this type of unexplained change is not always clear to Marice; she is not always able to interpret the non-

word marks in her feedback and though she can reason out her writing choices, the reasoning does not always align with the disciplinary expectations and she is not able to interpret the expectations from the feedback. So although Marice may look at the feedback she has received and consider why the feedback has been given, actions Dr. Iris stated she hoped her students will take, without explanation or interpretation, Marice may not be able to make the changes and improve her writing the way Dr. Iris hoped her students will. In addition, Dr. Iris suggested that the improvement may be a cumulative process, Marice cannot necessarily see how to apply the feedback Dr. Iris has provided to writing assignments in other classes, so without the opportunity to revise the assignments in Dr. Iris’s classes, the feedback that Dr. Iris provided may not help Marice improve her writing in the way Dr. Iris hoped her students will. What Dr. Iris does in providing feedback to her students is the same as what she says she does, but this may not necessarily lead to the outcomes she wants for her students.

*Dr. Bond and Dr. Lexico: Seeking Alternatives to Written Feedback.*

It has already been noted that Sofia and Bashir did not receive feedback on their assignments that are included in this study and that Bashir was not expecting feedback, but the lack of feedback was a surprise for Sofia. Both Dr. Bond and Dr. Lexico, the instructors for the classes where no feedback was provided, spoke about their processes for providing feedback and the reasons why they do not provide written feedback. Dr. Bond’s method for providing feedback is stated in the course outline:

**FEEDBACK ON ASSESSMENTS (EXCLUDING THE FINAL EXAM):**

In lieu of written comments, feedback on internal assessments (excluding any final exams) will be offered via student-initiated, one-on-one consultation meetings with me during my office hours (see [website]). This service is available to you regardless of the

grade earned on an assessment. Importantly, when you make an appointment it shall not be seen by me as a request for a higher grade. Rather, it is an opportunity for you to receive direct advice and guidance regarding your writing style, structure, logic and argumentation and the use of references/secondary material. Note that all Term Tests and Exams are not returned to the student, but you may request access to them for review purposes at any time during the semester. Article Analyses are available to be returned at the end of the semester, but are discarded after being unclaimed for 12 months.

Dr. Bond explained that he started using this method 15 years ago because he believed that providing written feedback was not a “good use” of his time. He explained that at that time he observed that “the vast majority of students...do not come back and retrieve the document upon which I have actually done some underlining or written comments.” He further explained that he considered the method he used “active feedback, as opposed to passive feedback and ‘Here you go; have a nice day.’” He suggested that this method actually was “more work” on his part because it required him to “sit down with students...and go through” the assignment. For him, this work was necessary because he believed that students “expect value out of a course.” He stated that students “expect access...to somebody” and that instructors should be willing to provide that access. He estimated that in a typical introductory course (of about 80 – 100 students), 10 to 20 students meet with him to receive their feedback. He expressed that he strived to make clear to students that when they discuss feedback with him, his “default position is never, ever, ever, that you are coming to ask for more grades” or to change the grade. He said there have only been a handful of students since he has been at this university who have approached him with the intention of asking him to change their grade. He speculated that this

might be because of the atmosphere that he created, which he described as one of authority in the class:

I try to cultivate that atmosphere of, look, I’ve done this a long time. I know what I’m doing, we’re reasonably professional at this course, we know how it’s gonna work, I know how you guys are gonna perform, I have a pretty good idea of how the class is gonna come out.

Through this method of feedback, Dr. Bond expressed that he hoped his students would “feel comfortable enough to want to discuss their assessment” with him. He anticipated that this method would demonstrate to students that it was “o.k. for them to ask for help on things.” Of the specific feedback that he provided in his conversations with students, he stated that he hoped the students would “take what they want of the buffet of the advice that they’re given and find something that suits them best in how they work and figure out what they have to change if anything.” Ideally, this would mean that students would do better both in his course “and in other courses as well.”

Dr. Lexico’s approach to feedback is somewhat similar, although not as overtly written on his course outline as Dr. Bond’s. Dr. Lexico sees a purpose for feedback on academic writing but he stated that he did not necessarily provide written feedback to all students. He explained that his approach started when he taught academic writing and continues in his current courses: “I always used to ask whoever wants feedback let me know. If you want the feedback I will write it on this essay and give you back, right. But I am not going to write on 50 students if only 5 of them come, right.” Contradicting the experience that Sofia had with pursuing and receiving feedback, he said that in his current courses, if students expressed interest in receiving their feedback, he would say: “No problem. Meet next week, and we can do the full feedback. For

those other 90% or 80% who don't come, I am not going to chase them down the hallway.” He explained that this system works; it is the people “that are interested in...learning more and...developing their skills” who ask for feedback. It is ironic, then, that Sofia pursued him and he did not respond. It seems important that educators realize their stated processes do not always pan out.

Dr. Bond and Dr. Lexico seem to be attempting to do a number of things with their alternate ways of providing feedback. One is redistributing the labour that they feel comes with providing written feedback to all students. This is not an unusual concern. Horner (2017) and Séror (2009) also discussed the labour involved in teaching writing and providing feedback. In this study, Dr. Iris also expressed the amount of work marking student papers takes, especially when she has a larger class. She indicated that the larger class has affected her “approach to things like feedback and the amount of time [she has] to devote to reading a paper.” Part of this redistribution of labour may be refocusing their energies to the students whom they feel are most engaged for the ‘right’ reasons. The student participants in this study indicated that they do not always read the feedback they receive on their writing from front to back, and it is likely that they are not alone in this, so these instructors are potentially looking at ways to maximize their time. Lee (2009) found that teachers often continue to mark student writing in the same ways they always have “although they think their efforts do not pay off” (p. 18). It is possible that Dr. Bond and Dr. Lexico are trying to move away from providing feedback in the same way that they always have in order to be able to see the results of their efforts. Finally, they also seem to be attempting to engage students in a dialogue about their writing.

In addition, in an attempt to break down the hierarchy implied in feedback, other feedback research has considered feedback as a relationship (Zawacki & Habib, 2014) between

students and instructors. This method attempts to put the student at the centre of the feedback relationship and draw the student into a dialogue that is not about *right* and *wrong* in the writing. However, the conditions in place for students to receive feedback on their writing from Dr. Bond – and Dr. Lexico to a certain extent – place the instructor at the centre of the feedback relationship. Although he indicated that he hopes he creates an atmosphere in his class so that students will feel comfortable to make an appointment to speak with them about their assignments, Dr. Bond sets all of the conditions for the students to receive the feedback: when and where they can receive it and what they cannot ask about the feedback. He is asking them to come to see him to get the feedback (that is the only way they can get their feedback) and then telling them the conditions of getting that feedback. His comments about knowing how the class is “gonna work,” how the students are “gonna perform,” and how the class is “gonna come out” also suggest that he already has a preconceived idea about the capabilities of his students. Dr. Bond suggested that his method of providing feedback is active, rather than passive, but it is only active for the students who are able to fulfill the conditions for getting the feedback that he has set.

As he explained how he provided the feedback in the way he does, I got the sense that Dr. Bond was trying to be fair in his feedback practices – giving every student the opportunity to receive feedback and in the same way – giving every student access to him. His descriptions of the feedback process and Dr. Lexico’s explanation that if a student wanted to receive their feedback he would meet with them without hesitation gave me the sense that they considered their feedback practices just; fair for all students. However, these conditions may be problematic for students in general, and EAL students in particular. Bashir wasn’t able to keep his first appointment with Dr. Bond because he had to work and when he tried to make a second

appointment, there were no spots open when he was available. What about other students who just cannot work within the parameters because they work a number of jobs, have families, or there are other circumstances preventing them from visiting the instructor during non-class hours? There are no alternatives for them to receive their feedback, even if they are students who are invested in their learning and want to understand how they can improve their work. For EAL students making an appointment with the instructor may be problematic for other reasons. They may not feel comfortable with their English language skills and therefore embarrassed to speak with their instructor. Or, they may come from an educational system that is one in which the student-teacher relationship is not congenial and to speak with your instructor is viewed differently than in North America. As Wang and Li (2011) suggested, students from cultures “where the absolute authority of the teacher is emphasized” may find it difficult to “communicate openly” with their instructors (p. 109). The conditions for the feedback, though seemingly fair for all students, may put some students at a disadvantage and therefore not provide them with the opportunity to improve their writing through obtaining the feedback.

Sofia and Bashir also had reactions to the lack of feedback for their writing as well as the processes for potentially receiving their feedback. In lieu of speaking about feedback, Sofia spoke extensively about the process of writing the paper and her feelings about not receiving feedback on her paper. The paper focused on the South American indigenous language, Muisca, which she chose because it is the language of her father’s indigenous community. Sofia voiced feeling motivated to write this essay because she was “more related to the topic than in previous occasions and previous classes.” It was a deviation from her usual dread of writing. For this paper, she said:

I felt that...I was the most organized compared to other papers. So, I felt like, from the beginning of the class, because it was something that interested me, I didn't put it off as much as other papers. Um, with other papers I wouldn't even start researching until quite late whereas for this one I started researching and looking for information. Maybe not reading it right away...or writing...starting writing or keeping quotes from what I read but I definitely went to look up information earlier than in other cases.

Sofia admitted that if she had not have been involved in this study, she would not have pursued her instructor to get the feedback on the paper because usually when she hands in a paper, she does not want to see it again, she only wants to know her grade. However, because the topic of the paper was of particular interest to her, she thought it “would still be nice to get feedback and see what he thinks about it and what his input is.” Sofia asked for her feedback a number of times, but did not receive it. She gave Dr. Lexico the benefit of the doubt stating that she knew he was going out of the country so he might not be able to give the feedback but even a few months later when we met for her last interview, she still had not received the feedback. Sofia seemed to meet Dr. Lexico's conditions for receiving feedback – she contacted him, she was interested in learning more – but she wasn't able to receive the feedback.

For Bashir, Dr. Bond's method of providing feedback by appointment only was a challenge. He said, “from your own perspective you...spend let's say...five days on it and you feel like you are confident and will get a higher mark. And then at the end when the marks come out you see...the mark that you were expecting wasn't it. So, yah, it tends to bring you down.” However, while the grade on the assignment was important to him, Bashir's concept of self-reliance guided him in negotiating his response to this disappointment. He did not blame the instructor for the lack of feedback or for the unexpected grade. Instead, he explained that he

believed the instructor provided everything that Bashir needed to succeed on the assignment. He said, “In class, he gave us a really good explanation on how we should do the article analysis. That...that I will accept. He gave us a really good explanation...since he even sent us through [the learning management system] how we are going to do the article and how we are going to send it to him like through [learning management system].” Bashir took responsibility for the assignment and the grade by saying, “I feel like I’m at fault since I didn’t fully...utilize...the materials he gave us to fully develop my article.” Because of this experience in this course, Bashir expressed that he was more equipped for the second half of this introductory course that he was going to be taking with the same instructor in the next term. He explained that he had a strategy for finding support to succeed in the course: “I will try to meet some of the classmates from the friends in the class...so we can try to see how we can improve our writing.” He also had a strategy for improving writing for his audience:

I will give him a fully developed explanation in what we are thinking since what he want [sic] is just your creativity and how you can develop your article analysis. It’s not just good to go on the internet and just can write what you just read. He just want [sic] you to think and give him a fully developed answer on what you just read and on the things you learned in class with him.

Bashir takes responsibility for his learning and makes his own plan for improving his writing. He does not rely on meeting the conditions for receiving feedback from his instructor to put this plan in place.

***Leyla and Judy: Outliers among the feedback providers.***

Although their situations were different than the other instructors in the study because they were markers, not instructors, Leyla and Judy were invested in providing feedback to students that would help the students in their future writing. To help students become better

writers, Leyla and Judy attempted to make their feedback as clear as possible. They used rubrics for grading, and both followed the same format for providing feedback through the comments feature in Microsoft Word. The feedback examples from Sunshine’s chemistry lab in the previous section shows the process that they used: Judy explained that they highlighted a section in the student’s document that they want to comment on, wrote the comment, and then indicated in parentheses the number of marks that are being taken off of that section “so that it’s really obvious that we said why we were taking off the mark.” Leyla added that she tried to “be clear with [her] comments and specific so that they know for next time...so that they’re not confused about what they did wrong.” She explained that she does this because “if an instructor were to just give a mark on their paper with checkmarks and Xs with no explanations for any of them...the student wouldn’t really know what they did correctly and what they did wrong.” Although the type of feedback that Leyla describes here (in-line changes with no explanation or mark-only feedback) comprised the majority of the feedback in this study, the feedback that Leyla and Judy provided Sunshine was an exception. There was more written commentary in the feedback (43 instances) than in-line changes and mark-only feedback (34 instances total). In addition, this assignment included 4 instances (of a total of 5 in the study) of in-line change feedback with explanations.

Both Leyla and Judy spoke extensively about how they developed their ideas about feedback and how those ideas had evolved. Leyla’s ideas about feedback emerged from her experiences as a student and a tutor. As a student, she preferred to receive “specific and constructive feedback” for use in future writing. As a tutor, she tried to word feedback “carefully so that the student knows what they could improve on and in a way that’s positive so that they are not let down too much and have this feeling that they’re not improving.” Judy reflected that

her approach to feedback changed over time. She said that when she first started marking, she focused on “grammar and stuff,” but she soon realized that she would “go crazy...fixing every error.” That led her to “focus more on the main idea and...decide what is actually the most important thing to have there and it’s the scientific arguments and the way they analyze their results.” She explained that she thinks it important that the students demonstrated they understood the experiment. Interestingly, she remarked specifically about EAL student writing challenges:

like sometimes I notice I can’t understand what this person is saying, like that’s when it becomes a problem. And it’s tough too, it’s tough to mark like the ESL students’ reports sometimes because you could kind of tell, like when they are struggling and at that point it’s tough because I’m like it’s not really their fault ‘cause they’re probably understanding they just can’t say it.

Her words suggest a tutor thoughtfully attuned to her student readers’ needs, and they indicate that perhaps she would benefit from training in how to help EAL students specifically. In sum, however, both chemistry lab markers revealed a deep interest in helping their students write better lab reports specifically and to write more fluently generally.

Like Dr. Iris, Leyla and Judy’s described feedback practices aligned with the feedback that they provided on Sunshine’s chemistry lab. They also seemed to align with Sunshine’s perception of the purpose of feedback – to correct mistakes – and her perception of what is helpful feedback: feedback that includes comments from her instructor with which she can understand how to correct her errors. When we discussed the feedback on her chemistry lab report, Sunshine rarely indicated that there was feedback that she did not understand. Although it is not possible to tie these findings directly to one part of the feedback process, the circumstances

around Leyla’s and Judy’s feedback on the chemistry lab assignment may contribute to this alignment. One of these circumstances, as mentioned earlier, might be that the chemistry course was part of a study/project with the aim of helping improve writing in the sciences. This project included training for markers, instructors, and additional writing instruction for students. Another difference between this feedback and the other feedback in the study is that it was provided electronically, rather than handwritten. It is possible that providing feedback this way required a different thought process for Leyla and Judy. Basturkmen, East, and Bitchener (2014) suggest that feedback that is written can reflect the instructor’s “real-time processing” of their reactions, which is a response to the writing that is “in a process of transformation” and not “crystallised yet into one overriding message” (Basturkmen, East, & Bitchener, 2014, p. 442). It is possible that typing the feedback might have allowed them to compose the feedback more deliberately, although this is speculation since I did not ask Judy or Leyla specifically about their process of typing the feedback. A final difference is that because Leyla and Judy were both marking each assignment they adhered quite closely to the rubric that was established for the course. They both used the same rubric and the same coding for the marking for consistency and this system included indicating the grades for each section of the lab as well providing specific feedback that indicated where the student had lost marks.

**Summary: Process of production of feedback.**

It is not unusual for instructors’ feedback practices to be misaligned with their beliefs about the purposes for those practices. For example, Lee (2009) found similar mismatches between instructors’ beliefs about feedback and their feedback practices. Other research has also found that instructors’ stated perceptions of feedback emphasize “the learning process of their students, where the feedback provided was seen not as a product in itself but as a means to an

end” (Leong and Lee, 2018, p.155; see also Treglia, 2019), yet the feedback did not match with the purpose.

In this study, the instructor’s stated practices, and sometimes their actual practices, do not always align with the feedback text or their perception of the purpose of feedback – to improve student writing. There is a disconnect between feedback discourse and the discourse practice. The descriptions of the instructor perceptions and practices discussed above, in addition to student perception and negotiation of feedback suggest a few reasons for this disconnect. First, the feedback text itself can be confusing or difficult for students to interpret. Students mentioned that they did not know what action they could take in their future writing based on the feedback that they received. This is consistent with other research that has found that “feedback providers presumably expect that their comments can usually be easily decoded and used” but students need “further intervention to decode complex messages and language” (Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, & Parker, 2017, p. 2031, see also Carless, 2006, Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Another reason for the misalignment could be that, like Sofia and Bashir, the students are not able to meet the conditions to receive the feedback. In addition, in this study, though instructors note that improvement is a purpose of feedback, there is no indication that they (or the students) have a way to understand what improvement means. Some of the instructors mention what good writing means for them, but not how they would know if their purpose of feedback has been met and the student writing has improved.

Finally, but importantly, another reason for the misalignment in instructor feedback, practice, and perception may be the finality of the writing in this study. There was no possibility for student revision of any of their writing in the study. So, while it might not be possible for instructors to track how their feedback helps students improve their future writing in other

classes, these instructors did not build in any possibility to understand how their feedback might influence the improvement of student writing in their own classes. Student participants indicated that having the opportunity to revise their writing was important to them in the feedback process.

### **Discussion: Feedback Discourse in Relation to Discourse Practice**

Critical discourse analysis based on Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional approach is concerned not only with the description of each of the dimensions, but also with the interaction between them. In Fairclough's (1995) model, this is the interpretation of the text in the context of the discourse practice, and the sociocultural practice. Throughout this section, I have moved back and forth between the discourse practice of the feedback in the study (the production and reception of the feedback) and the feedback text to demonstrate the complexity of the interactions between them. There are two observations about these interactions that inform this study's research questions. The first observation is that the feedback that the students received in this study and their reception of the feedback are inconsistent in complex and contradictory ways. The feedback text includes messages that students cannot interpret and little explanation is provided for these messages. The second observation is that there is a disjuncture between the instructors' and students' stated purposes for feedback and the actual feedback text. As I have demonstrated in this section, instructor feedback practices often undermine student and instructor perceived goals of feedback. When viewed through a cognitive (in)justices lens, these observations highlight how feedback practices can disadvantage some students.

#### **Epistemic injustice.**

The first observation, that the feedback the students received and their interpretation of this feedback are not always complementary, is not unusual in previous research about feedback. Hyland's (2013b) assertion that there are hidden messages in feedback and Basturkman, East,

and Bitchener’s (2014) findings that messages are implied all demonstrate a type of disjuncture that Higgins, Hartley, and Skelton (2001) identified as resulting from an “oversimplified model of communication” (p. 273) of feedback that is conceived as linear: information is transferred from the instructor to the student through some kind of medium.

In this study, the feedback provided by the instructors seems to be premised on a linear model of communication. As discussed throughout this chapter, an assumption on the part of the instructors who provided the feedback in this study is that feedback should focus on form over content and that the in-line changes and non-linguistic marks which are the predominant types of feedback provided by the instructors in this study, communicate a message that the students will understand and be able to interpret. As Higgins, Hartley, and Skelton (2001) pointed out, “our everyday communication usually ‘works’ because it is based on shared understandings. Both parties have access to appropriate discourses which enable them to construct and reconstruct meaning from implicit messages” (p. 273). But if both parties do not “have access to appropriate discourses” in order to be able to gain meaning from the messages, the communication breaks down. In this study, students have expressed that the feedback they receive is often difficult to interpret so the linear model of communication breaks down because the assumption is that the information is perceived in exactly the same way that it is transferred. That is, it is assumed that the student receives the feedback information and understands in it the instructor’s message.

There is a lack of shared understandings – between students and instructors – of feedback discourse. To interpret this disjuncture through a cognitive (in)justices lens, it is possible that this is not simply a lack of shared understanding, but also a type of epistemic injustice, specifically hermeneutical injustice.<sup>31</sup> If the messages in the feedback are not understandable to students,

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<sup>31</sup> It is possible that there is also a level of testimonial injustice within this feedback as well. The sheer volume of feedback on some of the student assignments that changes or crosses out the student’s writing without offering any

potentially because they are rooted in a dominant episteme, then students who are in the dominant social group who have epistemic privilege also have the knowledge to interpret the messages in the feedback and therefore succeed, but those who are marginalized – or who potentially have backgrounds that involve non-dominant epistemes because of their linguistic or cultural backgrounds – may not be able to make their interpretations of the feedback intelligible. This is a type of hermeneutical injustice because there is a “gap in collective interpretive resources” that puts this group at an “unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences” (Fricker 2007, p. 1). It is possible that the students in this study do not understand the instructor feedback not only because there is a lack of shared understanding between these students and their instructors, but also because, as EAL students, these students do not have the interpretive resources to understand the social experience of feedback.

Elzinga (2018) provided some explanation and context for the meaning of interpretive resources. He explained that for someone to “experience something as F, they have to have a concept of F” (p. 63). For example, if someone is to experience “an object as a coffee cup” they need to have “the concept of a coffee cup” (p. 63). However, Elzinga (2018) also suggested that interpretive resources include being able to use them “for a variety of social and political ends and to do so with reliable success” (p. 65). He further posited that it is possible to gain conceptual resources through learning; not institutionalized learning but learning through self-regulation, using a type of trial and error approach. Someone who “regulates their conceptual skills comes to live up to the normative standards governing the use of a concept by experimenting with it” (Elzinga, 2018, p. 71) and responding to feedback about it. Though in a

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explanation questions the student as a knower. If writing can be considered a series of choices, as the student participants in this study see it, pointing out the perceived deficiencies in those choices in copious ways can be considered questioning the writer as a knower.

footnote, Elzinga (2018) acknowledged that undertaking this self-regulation is not arbitrary but “influenced by one’s background and knowledge capacities” (p. 71). A hermeneutical gap can be a result of the *situatedness* of epistemic agents (Elzinga, 2018); knowers are situated because they “are repeatedly exposed to certain features of the world as a result of the social and political position that they occupy” (Elzinga, 2018, p. 74).

In this study, the student participants noted their difficulty in interpreting the feedback they received on their writing. The situatedness of these students – their cultural and linguistic backgrounds – may present a hermeneutical gap in their understandings of feedback potentially because the knowledges available to them through culture or language are not dominant knowledges. There may also be a hermeneutical gap in these students’ understandings of feedback because of their *situatedness* as international students who have varying years of experience with North American educational systems. The feedback in this study and the processes involved with that feedback are opaque. These students were not provided with resources that would help them interpret and negotiate the feedback. They turned to other types of feedback – like peer feedback – to fill this gap.

Even if the students in this study could interpret the feedback they received it is still not certain that they would know what to do with the feedback. The students regarded feedback as different in each discipline, and specific to the assignment on which they had received the feedback. Although a student might experiment with a concept in order to “live up to the normative standards governing the use” of the concept (Elzinga, 2018, p. 71), for these students that experimentation will not be for the writing that they received the feedback on, as none of the students were able to revise any of the work they had submitted.

### **Abyssal thinking**

The second observation about the relationship between the feedback and the discourse practice in this study is that there is a disjuncture between the instructors’ and students’ stated purposes for feedback and actual feedback text. Instructors and students stated that the purpose of feedback is improvement; none really said that feedback was not necessary or not helpful. In research literature about feedback, this is similarly the case. Even in research that problematizes feedback, the message in the introduction is often about the usefulness of feedback. For example, before discussing the hidden messages in feedback in his study, Hyland (2013b) noted that feedback is “potentially a powerful influence on learning and achievement in higher education. It is typically highly valued by students” (p. 180). Similarly, Mulliner and Tucker (2017) stated that “feedback is an essential component of effective teaching and learning in higher education” (p. 266) and Torres and Anguiano (2016) suggested that “traditionally, feedback has been viewed as a tool that can be used by students to improve their learning” (p. 2). This message potentially speaks to the conventions for research articles (for example, research articles often start with a general statement about the topic) but also to a larger message about feedback that is perpetuated in the literature and presumably to students: it is better to get some feedback than no feedback at all (Lee, 2009; Molloy and Boud, 2013).

In this study, both instructors and students provide a type of idealized notion of what feedback is or should be. A closer look at their perceptions shows that this idealized notion is not enacted in the instructor actions or in the student perceptions and negotiations of the actual feedback that they received on their assignments. Both groups indicated that the main purpose of feedback was improvement. How that improvement takes place, is measured, or understood is unclear. The instructor feedback in this study primarily focused on local style-related aspects of

student writing and provided no opportunities for the students to revise their writing based on this feedback. In addition, two of the instructors did not provide feedback to the students, leaving a large question about how improvement will take place for those students. Even Dr. Iris, whose perceived feedback process matches what is evident in the feedback text that she provided Marice, does not provide a clear way forward for her students to improve their writing. If *improve* means to socialize into disciplinary discourse, the feedback texts and student interpretations of them (or their inability to interpret them), coupled with a lack of ability for students to revise their writing, demonstrate that this feedback is more of a gatekeeping function than a socialization function. When the feedback messages are implicit, when the students are not able to revise based on the feedback, when there is no or little feedback, and when students are not engaged with instructors, then I argue that the feedback practices have more of a gatekeeping than socialization function. In these cases, feedback represents epistemic authority.

The idea that feedback practices and instructor ideas about feedback are not always compatible is not unique to this study. Hyland (2013a) found that faculty feedback was “shaped by a desire to see students write in disciplinary approved ways” but did not support students in that goal (p. 240). Similarly, Lee (2009) noted a number of mismatches between the feedback beliefs and practices of teachers, not least of which was that “teachers continue to mark student writing in the ways they do although they think their effort does not pay off” (p. 18). Though these studies note this disconnect between perception and practice, I think it is necessary to contemplate why there is such a pronounced disconnect. It is possible that the practice of feedback in Western (or at least North American) educational systems is part of an epistemology of blindness (Santos, 2007b) that results in abyssal thinking about feedback which makes it impossible for us to see beyond the social reality on “this side of the line” (Santos, 2007a, p. 1)

to acknowledge conceptualizations of *feedback* that might be rooted in non-dominant epistemologies. One of the assumptions that underlies the institutionalization of feedback in North American education systems, as evidenced in feedback research as well as in the perceptions of feedback by instructors and students in this study, seems to be that feedback, though problematic, is a necessary interaction that provides the discourse enculturation that the students need in order to succeed academically. This assumption is rooted in “this side of the line” and, in an epistemology of blindness, renders “the other side of the line” (Santos, 2007a, p. 1) — non-dominant knowledges that “cannot be fitted” (Santos, 2007a, p. 2) into the dominant way of knowing — invisible and non-existent.

Because abyssal thinking renders these knowledges invisible, it is not possible (at least for me, in my position of epistemic privilege) to know what feedback might look like in non-dominant knowledge systems. The evidence, though, that there is abyssal thinking in North American educational systems is apparent to me in the tacit acceptance in the feedback literature of feedback as necessary, though problematic. In this dissertation study, abyssal thinking is evident in the language of the responses about the purpose of feedback by both students and instructors. As noted earlier in this section, both instructors and students use variations of the term *improve* to describe the purpose of feedback. It is almost as if this is language that those instructors and students think is expected of them in their descriptions of feedback, or that they have heard so many times that the language is indoctrinated into their discourses about feedback because it is dominant in North American educational settings. The student participants in this study all indicated that feedback was not part of the educational systems in which they had previous experience (in their home countries for example), and some of them have not had extensive experience in North American

educational systems, yet the language that they used to describe the purposes of feedback is similar to the language used by their instructors.

The feedback in this study, which is dominantly local and style-related focuses on errors – the *right* and *wrong* of the student writing. In doing so, it “policies” and regulates knowledge (Santos, 2007b, p. 16) in a way that potentially represses non-dominant knowledges. This type of policing can be interpreted (and has been interpreted by participants in this study and other research about feedback) as helping students to improve their writing. While this help may be acknowledged by students who interpret the instructor’s role in providing feedback that points out what is *wrong* as necessary, this could be a neo-colonial interpretation of *help* which does not acknowledge the knowledge of the students and which provides a type of help that is not necessarily wanted or needed.

#### **An Outlier Among the Feedback: Sunshine’s Chemistry Lab.**

Sunshine’s chemistry lab assignment and the feedback that she received on it has been a type of outlier throughout the study. The feedback on this chemistry lab assignment included a similar number of feedback points about content as about style, a much different ratio than the overall ratio for the feedback in the study where local style-related feedback is more prevalent than feedback about content. In addition, the feedback on Sunshine’s chemistry lab includes more phatic comments throughout her writing than other assignments in the study. The chemistry lab also has four of the five feedback points in this study that are in-line changes with an explanation. Examining only the text – the feedback on the assignment – seems to suggest a less opaque discourse than some of the other feedback in this study.

The discourse practice that surrounds the feedback seems to contribute to the seemingly transparent nature of the feedback. In our interview, Sunshine questioned the feedback on her

chemistry lab less than the feedback on her academic writing assignment. Interviews with Leyla and Judy, the chemistry lab markers, reveal that their feedback practices are deliberate, and contribute to the clarity of the feedback for Sunshine. In this case, the production and the reception of the text seem to align. There are specific social conditions that were part of the formulation of the feedback for the chemistry lab that are different than the social conditions of the feedback for other classes represented in this study. The chemistry lab was the only assignment in the study that was located in a scientific discipline (not Arts or Social Sciences). The feedback was provided by markers, not the instructor or lab demonstrators for the course, and there were rubrics for the assignment that were clearly given to the students ahead of time. Although the students were not able to revise this lab assignment, the lab previous to it, as well as assignments that led up to it, were meant to prepare students for this lab by giving them some instruction and feedback on the conventions and structure of a chemistry lab report. Finally, the feedback on this chemistry lab report was provided electronically instead of handwritten like the other feedback in this study.

Delving a bit further into the broader sociocultural conditions of the text, however, reveals a dissonance that problematizes the feedback on Sunshine's chemistry lab report. This dissonance surfaced earlier in this chapter in the discussion about ways in which students negotiate feedback. I described how Sunshine negotiated disciplinary concepts in her writing in response to feedback she had received on her chemistry lab report. Sunshine speculated that she had received a positive comment on her report because she had used the appropriate language in her writing. Sunshine said that the markers were “looking for words, specific words” in certain parts of the lab assignment. She said that the instructors and lab demonstrators are not overt about those words, but that it is the student's “responsibility or duty to just put it in the...report.”

Sunshine said that the lab instructor “did not tell anything but then this tutor that I met, he has done this before so, yah, he knows already so then, yah, he gave me tips.” Sunshine included the appropriate words in her lab report and speculated that her success on the assignment was because she used the appropriate words.

Though the feedback and discourse practice involved with the chemistry lab report seem to be fairly transparent for Sunshine, the sociocultural practice of the discipline — and perhaps the department, institution, or faculty involved — presents a possible barrier for her in writing the chemistry lab report, and potentially in interpreting the feedback she receives on the report. There is epistemic privilege involved in knowing the *right words* to include in the assignment. Whether or not she understands or can demonstrate an understanding of the concepts associated with those words, Sunshine perceives that by including them in her assignment, she has used a code which (again, she perceives) conforms to the reader’s expectations of the discourse. The (positive) feedback from the marker — whether or not it is related to her use of these right words — reinforces Sunshine’s perception that she has cracked the code required to succeed in this academic writing. There is epistemic privilege required to determine what the code is, how to find it, and where to use it in her writing. Whether or not it is the use of the right words that has resulted in Sunshine receiving positive feedback, Sunshine’s perception is important here. She did not come to the writing from a place of epistemic privilege but has managed to figure out the knowledge she needs, not through an overt process explained to her in class by her disciplinary instructor, but almost by chance.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I presented the findings of the study using Fairclough’s three-dimensional model for critical discourse analysis, focusing on the feedback text in this study and the

discourse practice for that feedback. I highlighted the dissonances between the feedback text and the discourse practices and discussed these using a cognitive (in)justices lens. In the final chapter I will turn briefly to the sociocultural practice dimension of Fairclough’s model as a way to understand the overall research question for the study before providing some suggestions for modifying feedback practices.

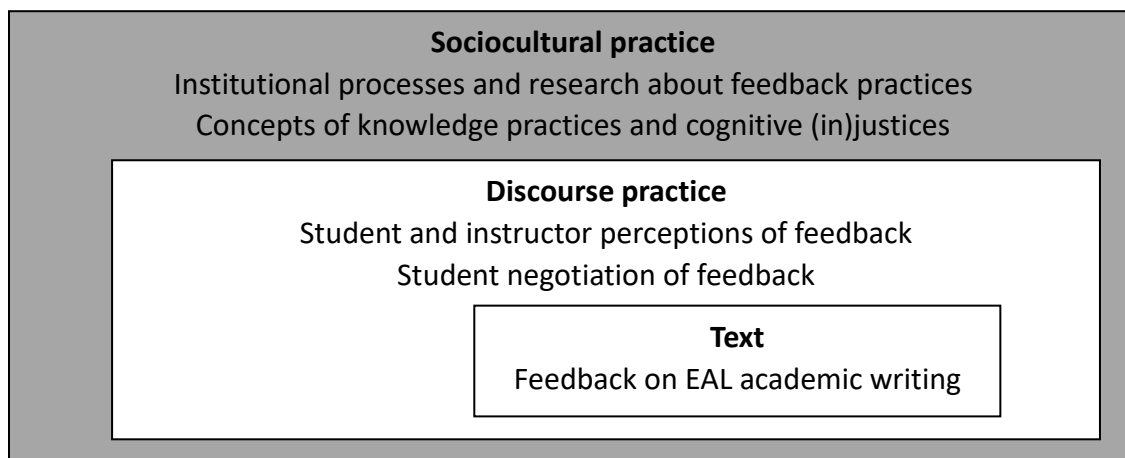
### **Conclusions: Towards Cognitively Just Feedback Practices**

Feedback is an everyday epistemic practice in North American educational settings. For EAL students the messages in feedback may be hidden or implied because of opaque or coded language, unclear purposes, and unfamiliarity with Western academic conventions. This dissertation study used a critical discourse analysis methodology that focused on the interactions between feedback text and discourse practice related to that feedback text to question relationships between instructor language, student perceptions, and considerations of justice in feedback on the academic writing of EAL university students. The analysis reveals that there are dissonances in these relationships that problematize the forms and methods of feedback and the negotiation of feedback by students and instructors. In this final chapter, I will draw together the first two parts of the analysis by discussing sociocultural contexts of the feedback and raising questions about the implications of the analysis. Finally, I will outline some modifications to feedback practices that are suggested by this analysis that move toward cognitive justice.

### **Sociocultural Contexts of Feedback**

In Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis, examining the connections between the text, the discourse practice, and the sociocultural practice in which the text is sent is the final dimension of analysis (*Figure 9* illustrates the dimensions of Fairclough’s analysis with the sociocultural practice dimension highlighted). Although the two parts of the previous chapter focused on the feedback text and the discourse practice of the creation and reception of that text respectively, much of the discussion included an analysis of the sociocultural practice related to the feedback, especially as viewed through a cognitive (in)justices lens. To draw this sociocultural analysis together, I will briefly revisit the

assumptions about feedback based in the industrial origins of feedback with which I began this dissertation.



*Figure 9.* Fairclough’s dimensions of discourse analysis with the focus on sociocultural practice. (adapted from Fairclough, 1995, p. 98 and Fairclough, 2001, p. 21)

This set of assumptions that Boud and Molloy (2013) suggest began in, and have grown since, the adoption of industrial concepts of feedback by the field of education – that feedback is telling, that it is a one-way transmission of information, that it is unambiguous and can be interpreted in the same way it was intended – are also evident in the feedback and feedback practices in this study. The feedback in this study *tells* by focusing on local style-related aspects in the student writing and by using non-linguistic marks to correct the perceived errors. The feedback is not meant to be a conversation, or a discussion (with the exception of the feedback that Dr. Bond provides in a conversation, if the student is able to make an appointment), instead it is meant to tell. Even the predominance of the use of direct language in the feedback suggests that the feedback is directive. The feedback in this study demonstrates that hierarchical binary: stylistic elements are marked wrong or corrected so that they look like they are in the correct code.

To take Boud and Molloy's (2013) description about assumptions about feedback even further the feedback in this study, as well as the student and instructor ideas about feedback, is results-oriented. All of the students in the study said that they look first at their grade before they read the feedback on an assignment. They also view the grades as a type of feedback that provides messages about their performance. Instructors and students alike suggest that the purpose of feedback is improvement, even if the feedback in the study does not necessarily provide a path for that improvement. The models of feedback in this study seem to support an economic model of education, which is perhaps inevitable given the roots of feedback in industrial practices. To extend the industrial metaphor, the students are the producers (in industry, the equipment) for whom there is no perceived room for breaking down. Sophia expressed this during her interview when she suggested that students are not “allowed to fail” or make mistakes, which causes anxiety in students. She said: “If it was an environment where it said o.k. write whatever comes to mind. It's o.k. if you have grammar mistakes, it's o.k. if you...it's o.k. to make mistakes. Then maybe you would be a bit more relaxed.” The conditions of the production of the texts for students in this study were closed. Students were not able to revise their writing so the purpose of feedback, in an industrial model and for the students and instructors in this study, of improvement is not fully served.

Even if the students in the study were able to use the feedback they received to its full capacity — if it was fully understandable to them, they knew how to act upon it, and they were able to revise their writing — is an industrialized model of feedback what we want for our students? Is it appropriate for students who are linguistically and culturally diverse and who have multiple ways of knowing? A closed system does not acknowledge these ways of knowing. What are models of feedback that support this diversity? In *Epistemic Responsibility, Code*

(1987) suggested that it is necessary to question “the assumptions that underlie the institutionalization of epistemic authority in educational systems” (p. 247). Challenging the assumptions that underlie the epistemic authority involved in feedback practices on academic writing means asking who determines what needs to be fixed or changed to make the writing conform to disciplinary or academic discourse conventions. It means challenging an economic model of knowledge production that values product over process (Horner, 2017).

As Hall and Tandon (2017) point out, “[u]niversity knowledge systems...are derivations of the Western canon, the knowledge system created some 500 to 550 years ago in Europe by white male scientists” (p. 7). Within this system, feedback is a Eurocentric paradigm that should be broken down. Feedback on academic writing, as has been pointed out throughout this paper, is a method of academic socialization. But socialization into this Eurocentric system privileges those who can understand and interpret the resources that are afforded to them and marginalizes those whose knowledges do not conform to the dominant one. Assumptions about the purpose of feedback are based in this system and reflect an epistemological blindness and abyssal thinking. Post-abyssal thinking involves “a radical break with Western ways of thinking and acting” and to “think from the perspective of the other side of the line” because it has been “unthinkable in Western modernity” (Santos, 2007a, n.p.). At very least, it is “engagement with complexity, diversity and uncertainty” (Andreotti, Ahenekew, and Cooper, 2011, p. 45) which is different than the hierarchical binaries, tacit understandings, and prescribed methods of representing knowledge that are the hallmark of the Eurocentric system.

### **Engaging Feedback with Complexity, Diversity, and Uncertainty**

Despite being recognized as an important part of student learning, feedback is not always a central activity for instructors, or recognized as such by institutions. The work of providing feedback on student writing is an activity often done after hours, in the evenings, or on

weekends. Rather than a central activity for instructors, it can be an afterthought, or something that just has to “get done” at the end of a term and when faced with a pile of papers to be graded, the task is often a daunting one. From a feedback literacy perspective, Sutton (2012) advocates for “more time and space for feedback within the curriculum” (p. 34), which would recognize the value of feedback. Similarly, Molloy and Boud (2013) suggest that feedback should not be “an episodic act linked to marking of assessed work, but rather as situated *as part of* the overall design of the curriculum with a clear function to perform” (p. 12, emphasis in original).

In this dissertation study, Sofia observed a similar need for continuity between coursework and feedback. She said that the lack of opportunity for using feedback for learning is systemic. In the current structure (the one in which she had just completed four years of studies) she suggested that instructors may not provide the best feedback because “what feedback is for so that your students can learn from that and if it’s the last time you are going to see them ever then what’s the point in investing that time and wanting them to learn from this if they are not going to apply it anyways.” She suggested that the courses should be structured differently:

If we could...if we start our paper from earlier and then that way throughout the semester like we had to hand in the paper mid-way and then get feedback and then write like...work on that feedback and then hand it again. But classes are not meant that way because you’re not only just writing a paper but also getting information about other stuff ...I guess classes are also right now actually focused on um shoving information into students more than students producing. So...for me it would be ideal if the paper was due maybe half way and having a feedback appointment with your prof and then handing it in at the end and then that way you can learn.

Sofia’s frustrations with the system for producing knowledge in this structure were also noted by Winstone, Nash, and Rowntree (2017) who found that students expressed frustration about transferability of feedback to other courses. The authors suggest that this is a disempowerment of students that stems from “the modular structure common to many degree courses, whereby individual assignments are perceived as unrelated” (Winstone, Nash, & Rowntree, 2017, p. 9).

Considering how to modify this structure requires a break from the systemic processes that underlie it, including the processes and methods for providing feedback that are based on the industrial origins of feedback that assume that any input will *correct* the product. Although feedback in this structure is part of the production process, the feedback is focused on the product. When the focus is on the product, rather than the process, it is not as possible to engage complexity, diversity, and uncertainty, because these are not valued in an industrial system. A university system that is based in Eurocentric values and where the representation of knowledge in writing must conform to the code, or risk being deemed *incorrect*, also values product over process.

One emergent way of engaging in complexity, diversity, and uncertainty in university settings is embodied in the concept of transnationalization — the “crossing of cultural, ideological, linguistic, and geopolitical borders and boundaries of all types” (Duff, 2015, p. 57). In this global reality, “communication and meaning-making,” and specifically “language use and learning,” can be examined as “emergent, dynamic, unpredictable, open ended, and intersubjectively negotiated” (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p. 19). Therefore, it is necessary to consider what it means to be a proficient writer in English in a globalized, post-colonial world in which the number of people for whom English is not their first language is “substantially larger” than the number of people who claim English as their first language (House, 2003, p. 557).

Engaging complexity, diversity, and uncertainty might mean questioning the monolingual norm that is part of North American university systems. Questioning monolingualism has led to the concept of translanguaging, an approach that views language differences as a “resource for producing meaning in writing, speaking, reading, and listening” (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011, p. 303) rather than as barriers to communication. This research argued that language differences should be “understood as the norm” (Horner, NeCamp, & Donohue, 2011, p. 286) in academic writing and pedagogy. Some applied linguists agree that rather than insisting on using only English in academic writing classes, teaching academic writing to EAL students should incorporate “different forms of knowledge” (Marshall & Moore, 2013, p. 474) that multilingual students bring to their writing because of their diverse linguistic repertoires. Yet, recognizing these different forms of knowledge is not necessarily part of the institutional processes, including feedback, in North American university settings. As has been seen in this dissertation study, the feedback instead acts as a type of gatekeeping device to ensure that knowledge is represented in specific, disciplinary, ways. As MacArthur (2016) practically puts it: “Many institutions embrace internationalization and yet resist rethinking the curriculum and assessment in the light of a more diverse student body” (p. 970).

### **Instructors**

Engaging the complexity of feedback means considering the purpose of feedback within the course or curriculum context. Beyond helping students “to improve,” instructors should consider what role feedback plays in their course and in their philosophy of teaching in general. Some of these considerations are as follows.

*Treat feedback as a discourse that has to be taught, not deciphered.*

As advocated in a feedback literacy (Carless & Boud, 2018; Sutton, 2012) approach, students need to understand the language of feedback. Instead of accepting a tacit understanding of feedback – a discourse of transparency (Lillis & Turner, 2001) – instructors should be honest about the meaning of feedback and clear about what it means in their classes. Within feedback, instructors could use consistent language and engage fewer discrete types of language or words so that there is less that the student has to decipher. Practically, an instructor could provide the students with a chart of the feedback language, its meaning and then provide some instruction or suggestions about how the student might follow through with the feedback. If instructors believe that feedback should help students, then the types and language should reflect that belief.

*Focus the feedback*

As has been seen in the feedback in this study, when instructors pointed out every perceived error for the students, the feedback was unfocused and unclear. Attempting to *fix* every aspect of the writing is not sustainable for students or instructors. Focusing feedback might mean letting students know that for a specific assignment, the instructor will be focusing on content related to evidence, citing, and sources. In another assignment the instructor might focus on local style-related aspects of the writing. This might save instructors time and energy and also eliminate the copious feedback on student writing that questions the students at every turn, potentially questioning them as knowers. As with all of the suggestions here, providing a focus for the feedback also means being explicit about this focus with students.

*Use feedback as a process, not a product.*

A main reason why the feedback in this study was not seen as effective was because the students did not have an opportunity to use the feedback for the purposes both they and the instructors stated: to improve their writing. The students were not able to revise any of their

assignments. Instructors could provide opportunities to revise assignments or adopt a process approach to writing assignments – where students submit (perhaps shorter) writing more frequently. This would provide students and instructors opportunities to engage with focused feedback. It is also more akin to writing in the *real world*. It is not often that we write one version of something. We get feedback on the version and then revise, perhaps multiple times, before finalizing it. This is a process that is even espoused by the peer review and editing process in academic publishing, but not necessarily one used in the courses that are represented in this study.

*Consider, welcome, and incorporate other sources of feedback into student writing processes*

Student participants in this study looked to multiple sources for feedback on their writing. It is not clear whether the instructors in this study (and instructors in general) realize that students consult multiple sources for feedback and what they think about this. In institutions that have writing centres or peer tutoring, instructors may know or expect that students will seek out feedback from other sources. However, it is not clear how those feedback sources might be integrated into the instructor’s own feedback practices. By considering and welcoming (or even just acknowledging) these multiple sources of feedback, and potentially incorporating them in the student’s writing process, instructors could recognize multiple knowledges and ways of knowing and diffuse concepts of epistemic privilege, so engrained in our educational systems, where the teacher is the knower and the student the receptor of that knowledge. Acknowledging that there are multiple sources of feedback for the student to access, that are all valid, might decentralize knowledge practices.

## **Institutions**

Following from Sofia’s suggestion that ineffective feedback is not necessarily the responsibility only of the instructor but that it is systemic, institutions have a potential role in creating more cognitively just conditions for feedback. As Sofia suggested, institutions might rethink course structures and timing to provide an opportunity for students and instructors to use a process approach to writing and feedback. If current perceptions about the purposes of feedback reflect abyssal thinking, institutions should try to imagine a post-abysal system. Because I am engrained in the Eurocentric system — I have epistemic privilege in this system — though I understand that there could be abyssal thinking involved in feedback practices, I do find it challenging to look beyond the abyss. I have some inklings of what this might mean, but by no means is it a full comprehension of what non-dominant knowledges might offer in terms of ideas about feedback. As a start, an institution might:

*Provide opportunities for collaboration between writing instructors and disciplinary instructors*

In this study, Sunshine’s chemistry lab report was an outlier for many reasons. One of them was the way in which the feedback was provided (electronically) but another was because of the chemistry students’, instructors’, and markers’ involvement in a project that was deliberate about preparing students for writing in the discipline. In universities, not all instructors have gone through a teacher education program. They are experts in their disciplines, but not necessarily in writing or providing feedback. They may not have the language to provide feedback to their students or they may provide feedback to their students in the same way that they received feedback from their instructors, which potentially perpetuates the assumptions about feedback described by Boud and Molloy (2013). Writing across the curriculum (WAC) is a concept that has been espoused in universities across North America that works on integrating

writing instruction into disciplinary courses; perhaps a part of this integration should also be the concept of “feedback across the curriculum.”

*Enact multiple opportunities for feedback across the institution*

Akin to the idea that instructors might consider the multiple sources of feedback that their students access, institutions could also engage in fostering opportunities for multiple sources of feedback. Many institutions have writing centres. These institutions might be deliberate about how feedback is communicated in writing centres and what concepts of feedback are espoused by these centres. Are the writing centres approaching feedback with a similar set of assumptions about it as the students and instructors in this study? Could there be other opportunities for feedback within the institution that is considered as powerful as the expert knowledge of the instructors who provide feedback in courses?

### **Further Opportunities for Research**

As with, I think, much research this study leads to further questions about writing, feedback practices, and cognitive (in)justices, which is all fodder for future studies: are there other models of feedback that are beyond the abyssal thinking involved with current assumptions about feedback?, what are alternate models for responding to academic writing that acknowledges an ecology of knowledges?, are there ways knowledge is mediated in non-dominant knowledges? Future studies could consider only one type of feedback — summative feedback, for example — through a cognitive (in)justices lens or apply the lens to other areas of academic writing such as instructions about writing assignments, writing instruction, peer feedback, and academic publishing. As hinted earlier in this chapter, future studies might investigate how cognitive (in)justices intersects with concepts of plurilingualism and translanguaging both theoretically and practically. Both plurilingualism and translanguaging

question the notion of a single *native English speaker* and theorists in these areas of study<sup>32</sup> consider what it means when “changes and innovations” to the language come from the “majority, non-native users” (Baker, 2013, p. 29) who challenge the accepted usage of the language in a variety of situations through the multiplicity and plurality of their language use (Kubota, 2014). Translanguaging has become a key term for designating a number of multiple discursive practices that writers use drawing on “the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system” (Canagarajah, 2011a, p. 401). Future studies about feedback that examine the focuses of feedback using plurilingual or translingual theories could investigate, among other things, whether there is cognitive (in)justices at play in the feedback on the writing of students who use translingual structures in their writing.

Finally, study design could include interviews with all instructors and students, and potentially follow one or both of these groups in a longitudinal study to see how or if their conceptions of feedback change over time. Certainly, I also advocate for studies that consider authentic feedback in a critical discourse analysis method, with students’ concerns at the heart of the investigation. Questioning feedback in a critical way will continue to problematize our assumptions about feedback, which is important to understanding its role in confirming or negating knowledge and knowers and in moving beyond an industrial model of feedback in our educational practices.

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<sup>32</sup> In addition to Baker (2013), Kubota (2014), and Marshall and Moore (2013), some scholars in the field of Rhetoric and Composition studies have considered what plurilingualism means in their classes and practice. These include: Bizzell (2014), Horner (2014), Horner and Kopelson (2014), Horner, NeCamp, and Donohue (2011) and Ritter and Matsuda (2012). Work on translanguaging has been done by, among others, DePalma and Ringer (2011), Mazak and Herbas-Donoso (2015), and Zawicki and Habib (2014).

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## Appendices

**Appendix A: Student Recruitment Documents****Student Recruitment letter**

UNIVERSITY  
OF MANITOBA

January 5, 2017

Hello:

I am a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba and my supervisor is Dr. Clea Schmidt. For my dissertation, I am undertaking a study about feedback on the academic writing of students whose first language is not English (EAL students). This study will investigate assumptions about knowledge and language in this feedback and understand how this feedback is accessible (or inaccessible) to EAL students. The overarching question for this study is: What are the connections among instructor language, student perceptions and considerations of justice in the feedback on academic writing of undergraduate EAL students in a Canadian university?. My study is called “Critical discourse analysis of feedback on English as an additional language academic writing through a cognitive (in)justices lens”.

In order to conduct my research, I need to recruit 4 undergraduate students in their **second year of studies or higher** who consider themselves English as an Additional Language students (students whose first language is not English). A parameter of participation is that the student must be registered in at least one course in the Winter 2017 term in which writing assignments are part of the course requirements. The feedback on the student’s writing in this course will be the focus of the study. If you agree to participate in the study throughout the term you will share with me with any writing assignments on which you have received written feedback. In addition, I will interview you three to four times during the study – at the beginning of the term, at the mid-term point (or at two points during the term), and at the end of the term. The first interview, at the beginning of the term, will focus on your current educational context as well as your past experiences with academic writing and feedback on academic writing. The interviews at the middle and end of the term will focus on checking in with you about your reactions to the feedback you have received on academic writing assignments throughout the term. I anticipate that these interviews will be about an hour to an hour and a half each and will be conducted at a time and place that is convenient for you.

If more than four individuals express interest in being involved in the study, and meet the requirements for participation, I will select the first four who responded; if time/schedules do not allow for the scheduling of initial interviews with one or more of the first three participants, or if the participant decides (before the term starts) to forego participation in the study, I will contact potential participants in the order that they responded until four participants have been confirmed. In addition, if the first four people who expressed an interest in the study (and have confirmed participation) decide to withdraw from the study, I will proceed down the list of interested individuals in the order that they contacted me.

Before the study begins, I will give you a consent form to read, consider and sign. I will go over this form with you and if you have any questions at that time I will do my best to address your questions. The consent form will detail information about the study and about collecting your writing samples. I will record each of the interviews using an iPad and later I will transcribe the interviews verbatim. I will also take written notes which will help me remember the conversation and as a back up in case the recording doesn't work or is inaudible in any way. I will use these notes in my analysis if necessary. At the end of the interview I will review my notes with you and highlight the major points we have covered.

If you agree to participate in the study, your confidentiality will be maintained. I will not refer to you by name; I will assign you a pseudonym. I will also not identify any organizations, groups or individuals you may mention during the interview by omitting the reference or assigning a pseudonym.

Participation in this study is voluntary and will have no impact on your academic activities or successes. If you choose to participate in this study, you may refuse to answer any questions, end an interview, choose not to share certain pieces of writing in the study, or withdraw from the study completely at any time, including between interviews. You can withdraw by e-mailing me, phoning me, or speaking to me in person. In consideration for your involvement you will be given a \$5.00 Starbucks gift card. You may keep this gift card even if you choose to withdraw from the study.

As the Principle Investigator, I will transcribe the interview. I will send a copy of the transcription to you (by e-mail or mail, according to your preference), ask you to read it over, make changes if I have misstated or misunderstood anything, and make additional comments if there is more to add. Once I have done a preliminary analysis of the data, I will send a summary to all participants. This summary will also be sent to the groups who have been asked to distribute recruitment letters: the University of Winnipeg International Student Services Centre, the Global Welcome Centre at the University of Winnipeg, cultural and language-based student groups at the University of Winnipeg, international students who are known to me, University of Winnipeg instructors who are known to me and the professional organization TEAM (Teachers of English to Adults in Manitoba). A report of the findings, with all information about participants anonymized, will also be sent to the course instructors/departments that provided the

feedback on the writing that you shared in this study. Detailed study findings will also be disseminated as part of my dissertation and may become part of a published article (or articles).

The only person who will have access to the raw data will be me, the Principal Investigator. My thesis supervisor, Dr. Clea Schmidt will have access to the anonymized data. Raw digital data will be stored in the encrypted file on the hard drive. The Principal Investigator is the only person who uses this computer and it is not part of an external network. The computer is located in the office of the Principal Investigator Winnipeg. Hard copies of the notes will be kept in a locked drawer in the office of the Principal Investigator until the dissertation requirements are complete (anticipated to be May, 2018). Once the requirements are complete all digital recordings, transcripts and notes will be destroyed. The electronic data will be erased (expunged) from the hard drive. Hard copy data will be deposited in the shredding container in the Faculty of Education for professional shredding.

I do not anticipate any risks to participants as a result of participating in this study. If you should feel uncomfortable during any of the interview sessions, or decide not to continue in the study, you are free to end the interview or discontinue in the study at any time. However, you may feel that this topic is relevant to you and that it is important to give your opinion about the topic. Many undergraduate students look for ways in which to better understand academic writing and speaking about the feedback that you receive on your writing may give you an opportunity to think more methodically about the feedback. You may also find it valuable to express your ideas about feedback in a situation that is less formal than an in-class discussion or a discussion with your instructor.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact me or the Human Ethics Coordinator at [204-474-7122](tel:204-474-7122), or e-mail [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca).

If you would like more information or if you would like to take part in this research project, you contact me (my contact information is at the end of this letter) or my supervisor, Dr. Clea Schmidt at (204) 474-9314 or [Clea.Schmidt@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Clea.Schmidt@umanitoba.ca).

Thank you,

Joanne Struch

[struchj@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:struchj@myumanitoba.ca)



**Student consent form**



UNIVERSITY  
OF MANITOBA

February 22, 2017

**Research Project Title:** “Critical discourse analysis of feedback on English as an additional language academic writing through a cognitive (in)justices lens”

**Researcher:**

Joanne Struch, Graduate Students, Faculty of Education

E-mail: [struchj@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:struchj@myumanitoba.ca)

Phone: (XXX)XXX-XXXX

**Research Supervisor:**

Dr. Clea Schmidt, Professor, Faculty of Education

E-mail: [Clea.Schmidt@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Clea.Schmidt@umanitoba.ca)

Phone: (204) 474-9314

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to investigate assumptions about knowledge and language in this feedback and understand how this feedback is accessible (or inaccessible) to students whose first language is not English. The overarching question for this study is: What are the connections among instructor language, student perceptions and considerations of justice in the feedback on academic writing of undergraduate EAL students in a Canadian university?

Research Procedures and Recording

In order to conduct my research, I need to recruit 4 undergraduate students in their second year of studies or higher who consider themselves English as an Additional Language students (students whose first language is not English). A parameter of participation is that the student must be registered in at least one course in the Winter 2017 term in which writing assignments are part of the course requirements. The feedback on the student’s writing in this course will be

the focus of the study. If you agree to participate in the study throughout the term you will share with me with any writing assignments on which you have received written feedback. In addition, I will interview you three to four times during the study – at the beginning of the term, at the mid-term point (or at two points during the term), and at the end of the term. The first interview, at the beginning of the term, will focus on your current educational context as well as your past experiences with academic writing and feedback on academic writing. The interviews at the middle and end of the term will focus on checking in with you about your reactions to the feedback you have received on academic writing assignments throughout the term. I anticipate that these interviews will be about an hour to an hour and a half each and will be conducted at a time and place that is convenient for you.

I will record each of the interviews using an iPad and later I will transcribe the interviews verbatim. I will also take written notes which will help me remember the conversation and as a back up in case the recording doesn't work or is inaudible in any way. I will use these notes in my analysis if necessary. At the end of the interview I will review my notes with you and highlight the major points we have covered.

Participation in this study is voluntary and will have no impact on your academic activities or successes.

If more than four individuals express interest in being involved in the study, and meet the requirements for participation, I will select the first four who responded; if time/schedules do not allow for the scheduling of initial interviews with one or more of the first three participants, or if the participant decides (before the term starts) to forego participation in the study, I will contact potential participants in the order that they responded until four participants have been confirmed. In addition, if the first four people who expressed an interest in the study (and have confirmed participation) decide to withdraw from the study, I will proceed down the list of interested individuals in the order that they contacted me.

### Risks and Benefits

I do not anticipate any risks to participants as a result of participating in this study. If you should feel uncomfortable during any of the interview sessions, or decide not to continue in the study, you are free to end the interview or discontinue in the study at any time. However, you may feel that this topic is relevant to you and that it is important to give your opinion about the topic. Many undergraduate students look for ways in which to better understand academic writing and speaking about the feedback that you receive on your writing may give you an opportunity to think more methodically about the feedback. You may also find it valuable to express your ideas about feedback in a situation that is less formal than an in-class discussion or a discussion with your instructor.

### Anonymity and Confidentiality

Participants in this study will identify themselves by name during the recruiting process and the interviews which will be audio-taped using a digital recording device. Notes will also be taken.

The interviews will be transcribed verbatim by me, the principle investigator. As a participant, your anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained by:

- Removing all identifying characteristics (including individual names, names of organizations and places) from the transcripts and replacing them with pseudonyms.
- Removing any identifying information from the notes.
- Removing audio files from the digital device after the interview session and transferring them to an encrypted file on the Principal Investigator's personal computer. The only person who will have access to the raw data will be me, the Principal Investigator. My thesis supervisor, Dr. Clea Schmidt will have access to the anonymized data. Raw digital data will be stored in the encrypted file on the hard drive. The Principal Investigator is the only person who uses this computer and it is not part of an external network. The computer is located in the office of the Principal Investigator.
- Keeping hard copies of the notes in a locked drawer in the office of the Principal Investigator until the dissertation requirements are complete (anticipated to be May, 2018). Once the requirements are complete all digital recordings, transcripts and notes will be destroyed. The electronic data will be erased (expunged) from the hard drive. Hard copy data will be deposited in the shredding container in the Faculty of Education for professional shredding.

The study involves the examination of instructor feedback on the written work of participants. The researcher will keep copies of the written work. Any identifying characteristics revealed through the written work, the feedback or the discussion of the work in the interview will be removed from the transcripts and replaced with pseudonyms. Copies of the work will be destroyed after the dissertation requirements are complete.

In addition, although during the Winter, 2017 term, course instructors will be made aware that students in their classes are participating in the study, they will not know which specific students are participating or that the study is about EAL academic writing.

\*\*After the term is completed, I will be contacting some of the course instructors to ask if they if they would be willing to be interviewed about their approach to feedback on written assignments. At that point, although these instructors will be made aware that a student in their class has participated in the study, they will not be made aware of which student it is. The interview will not discuss specific feedback, but their ideas about feedback in general. On the information and consent form for the Instructors, I have omitted any reference to the study being specifically about EAL academic writing in order to maintain the anonymity of the student participants.

These measures will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of participants. However, it is possible that instructors will have seen posters about the study posted throughout the university. If the instructors see the poster, and understand that it is the study that I have made them aware of because a student in their class is participating in the study, they may realize that the study is about feedback on EAL writing. It is possible, then, that the instructor may be able to deduce

which student is the participant if there is only one or two EAL students in the class. In this case, then, the identity of the participant will be known to the instructor.

In the dissemination of the findings, though, it is unlikely that the confidentiality of participants will be compromised. The findings will be disseminated as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator. The results of the study may become part of a published article (or articles). No identifying characteristics will be included in these pieces of writing. Although it is possible that, due to the principal investigator's institutional and faculty affiliations (which are included in the dissertation and may be included as information about the author in the published article), the institution and faculty involved in the research may be gleaned by the readers, individuals within the study will not be identified by name

### Compensation and Participation

For participating in this research project, you will receive a \$5.00 Starbucks gift card at each interview session, which you will receive when you arrive to participate in the interview. If you choose to participate in this study, you may refuse to answer any questions, end an interview, choose not to share certain pieces of writing in the study, or withdraw from the study completely at any time, including between interviews. You can withdraw by e-mailing me, phoning me, or speaking to me in person. You may keep the gift card(s) you have received, even if you choose to withdraw from the study. If you choose to withdraw from the study, I will ask you if you will allow the data already collected to remain in the study or if you want the existing data removed from the study. If you indicate that you want the data removed from the study, transcripts and notes of your interview will be destroyed. The electronic data will be erased (expunged) from the hard drive. Hard copy data will be deposited in the shredding container in the Faculty of Education for professional shredding.

### Feedback and Debriefing

At the end of each interview, I will review my notes with you and highlight the major points we have covered. After the interview is transcribed I will send a copy of the transcription to you (within 2 – 3 weeks). If you find any problems with the transcription or if you wish to add or change anything you have said, you can call or e-mail me with the changes. Once the data has been analyzed I will send a summary of the preliminary findings to all participants. I anticipate sending the summary within 2 months of data collection. You will be offered the opportunity to receive the transcript and summary by either regular mail or electronic mail.

### Dissemination of Results

The preliminary summary of findings will also be sent to the groups who have been asked to distribute recruitment letters: the [Name of University] International Student Services Centre, the Global Welcome Centre at the [Name of University], cultural and language-based student groups at the [Name of University], international students who are known to me, [Name of University] instructors who are known to me and the professional organization TEAM (Teachers of English to Adults in Manitoba). A report of the findings, with all information about participants anonymized, will also be sent to the course instructors/departments that provided the feedback on

the writing that you shared in this study. Detailed study findings will also be disseminated as part of my dissertation and may become part of a published article (or articles). I anticipate the study to be completed by March, 2018 at the latest and will send the summary by or before that time.

Destruction of the Data

The only people who will have access to the raw data will be me, the Principal Investigator, and my supervisor, Dr. Clea Schmidt. Raw digital data will be stored in an encrypted file on the Principal Investigator's computer. Hard copies of the notes will be kept in a locked drawer in the office of the Principal Investigator. Once the dissertation is complete all digital recordings, transcripts and notes will be destroyed. The electronic data will be erased (expunged) from the hard drive and hard copy data will be deposited in the shredding container in the Faculty of Education for professional shredding at the completion of the study, anticipated to be March, 2018.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Joanne Struch

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact me or the Human Ethics Coordinator at [204-474-7122](tel:204-474-7122), or e-mail [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca).

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Participant's Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Researcher's Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

**I wish to receive the transcript and summary by regular mail. My address is:**

**I wish to receive the transcript and summary by e-mail. My address is:**

## Appendix B: Instructor Recruitment Documents

### Email to Department Chair

Dear [name of chair]:

I am a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba and my supervisor is Dr. Clea Schmidt. For my dissertation, I am undertaking a study about feedback on academic writing. This study will examine student perceptions of feedback and analyze the feedback itself.

In order to conduct my research, I have recruited undergraduate students who are registered in at least one course in the Winter 2017 term at the [name of university] in which writing assignments are part of the course requirements. The feedback on the student's writing in this course and the student's perceptions of that feedback will be the focus of the study. The student will share with me with any writing assignments on which he or she has received written feedback throughout the term. In addition, I will interview the student three to four times during the study – at the beginning of the term, at the mid-term point (or at two points during the term), and at the end of the term. The first interview, at the beginning of the term, will focus on the student's current educational context as well as his or her past experiences with academic writing and feedback on academic writing. The interviews at the middle and end of the term will focus on checking in with the student about his/her reactions to the feedback he or she has received on academic writing assignments throughout the term.

The methodology of the study is such that if individual instructors are aware that a student in their class is involved in the study, it may compromise the study findings. For example, if the instructor is made aware of the study and its purpose, he or she might alter feedback for the purposes of the study. This feedback, then, would not be authentic samples of feedback on academic writing assignments. In addition, if the instructor is aware that there are students in the class participating in the study and the specific demographic of the students, the instructor may be able to determine the identity of the students, which would compromise the confidentiality and anonymity of the study.

I am writing to you because one of the participants in this study is taking a class in your department for which the feedback will be part of the study. Therefore, I am asking that you send the attached letter from me to all of the instructors in your department, to make them aware of the study.

Once I have done analysis of the data, I will send a summary to all participants and to you. I anticipate the study to be completed by May, 2018 at the latest and will send the summary by or before that time.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) and the [name of university] University Human Research Ethics Board (UHREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact me or the Human Ethics Coordinator at [204-474-7122](tel:204-474-7122), or e-mail [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca).

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor, Dr. Clea Schmidt at (204) 474-9314 or [Clea.Schmidt@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Clea.Schmidt@umanitoba.ca).

Thank you in advance for your help,

Joanne Struch  
[struchj@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:struchj@myumanitoba.ca)

## Letter to Departmental Instructors About the Study



UNIVERSITY  
OF MANITOBA

January 19, 2017

Dear Faculty Members in the [name of department]:

I am a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba and my supervisor is Dr. Clea Schmidt. For my dissertation, I am undertaking a study about feedback on academic writing. This study will examine student perceptions of feedback and analyze the feedback itself.

In order to conduct my research, I have recruited undergraduate students who are registered in at least one course in the Winter 2017 term in which writing assignments are part of the course requirements (including labs). The feedback on the student's writing in this course and the student's perceptions of that feedback will be the focus of the study. The student will share with me with any writing assignments on which he or she has received written feedback throughout the term. In addition, I will interview the student three to four times during the study – at the beginning of the term, at the mid-term point (or at two points during the term), and at the end of the term. The first interview, at the beginning of the term, will focus on the student's current educational context as well as his or her past experiences with academic writing and feedback on academic writing. The interviews at the middle and end of the term will focus on checking in with the student about his/her reactions to the feedback he or she has received on academic writing assignments throughout the term. I anticipate that these interviews will be about an hour to an hour and a half each and will be conducted at a time and place that is convenient for the participant.

Participation in this study is voluntary and will have no impact on the student's academic activities or successes. Participants can withdraw from the study at any time, including between interviews. Participants can withdraw by e-mailing me, phoning me, or speaking to me in person.

The methodology of the study is such that if individual instructors are aware that a student in their class is involved in the study, it may compromise the study findings. For example, if the instructor is made aware of the study and its purpose, he or she might alter feedback for the purposes of the study. This feedback, then, would not be authentic samples of feedback on academic writing assignments. In addition, if the instructor is aware that there are students in the class participating in the study and the specific demographic of the students, the instructor may be able to determine the identity of the students, which would compromise the confidentiality and anonymity of the study.

I am writing to you because one of the participants in this study is taking a class in the [name of department] for which the feedback will be part of the study and may be in your class.

I do not anticipate any risks to participants as a result of participating in this study. For student participants, before each interview I will explain that if the participant should feel uncomfortable during any of the interview sessions, or decides not to continue in the study, he or she is free to end the interview at any time. In addition, I will ensure that the participant understands that if there are pieces of writing with feedback that he or she does not want to share as part of the study, that is fine. I will also explain that there is no penalty if the participant decides not to participate, asks to end an interview session early, or decides not to share a piece of writing. However, participants may feel that this topic is relevant to them and that it is important to give their opinion about the topic. Many undergraduate students look for ways in which to better understand academic writing and speaking about the feedback that they receive on their writing may give them an opportunity to think more methodically about the feedback. The participants may also find it valuable to express their ideas about feedback in a situation that is less formal than an in-class discussion or a discussion with their instructor.

The study is anonymous. The only person who will have access to the raw data will be me, the Principal Investigator. My thesis supervisor, Dr. Clea Schmidt will have access to the anonymized data. As the Principle Investigator, I will transcribe the interviews. Raw digital data will be stored in an encrypted file on the Principal Investigator's computer. Hard copies of the notes will be kept in a locked drawer in the office of the Principal Investigator. Once the course requirements are complete all digital recordings, transcripts and notes will be destroyed. The electronic data will be erased (expunged) from the hard drive and hard copy data will be deposited in the shredding container in the Faculty of Education for professional shredding at the completion of the study, anticipated to be May, 2018.

Once I have done an analysis of the data, I will send a summary to all participants and to you. I anticipate the study to be completed by May, 2018 at the latest and will send the summary by or before that time.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) and the [name of university] University Human Research Ethics Board (UHREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact me or the Human Ethics Coordinator at [204-474-7122](tel:204-474-7122), or e-mail [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca).

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor, Dr. Clea Schmidt at (204) 474-9314 or [Clea.Schmidt@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Clea.Schmidt@umanitoba.ca).

Thank you in advance,

Joanne Struch  
[struchj@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:struchj@myumanitoba.ca)

## Letter to Participant Faculty



UNIVERSITY  
OF MANITOBA

April, 2017

Dear [name of instructor]:

I am a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba and my supervisor is Dr. Clea Schmidt. For my dissertation, I am undertaking a study about feedback on academic writing. This study will examine student perceptions of feedback and analyze the feedback itself.

In order to conduct my research, I recruited undergraduate students who are registered in at least one course in the Winter 2017 term in which writing assignments are part of the course requirements. The feedback on the student's writing in this course and the student's perceptions of that feedback are the focus of the study.

In January or February, you received a letter to let you know that one of the participants in this study was taking a class in the [name of department] department for which the feedback will be part of the study. This student was in your [name of class] class. (If you did not receive a copy of the letter, please let me know and I will forward it to you).

I am writing now for two reasons:

1 - to obtain your consent to use the feedback that you provided the student, information from the course outline and assignment information as part of my dissertation study.

2- to see if you would be interested in participating in an interview about your approach to feedback on writing in your classes. I anticipate that the interview will be about an hour and can be conducted at a time and place that is convenient for you. The focus of the interview will be your approach to feedback in general; we will not discuss the specific feedback that the student involved in the study received from you.

If you are willing to be interviewed, I will have the consent form for both the interview and the use of the feedback at the interview. Participation in the interview is optional. I ask, though, if I can meet you for a few minutes to answer any questions that you have about the study and for you to sign the consent form for the use of the feedback. I have attached the consent form for the use of the feedback, for your information.

**Can you please let me know by Wednesday, May 17 about your involvement in the study?**

The study is anonymous. The only person who will have access to the raw data will be me, the Principal Investigator. My thesis supervisor, Dr. Clea Schmidt will have access to the anonymized data. As the Principle Investigator, I will transcribe the interviews. Raw digital data will be stored in an encrypted file on the Principal Investigator's computer. Hard copies of the notes will be kept in a locked drawer in the office of the Principal Investigator. Once the course requirements are complete all digital recordings, transcripts and notes will be destroyed. The electronic data will be erased (expunged) from the hard drive and hard copy data will be deposited in the shredding container in the Faculty of Education for professional shredding at the completion of the study, anticipated to be May, 2018.

Once I have done an analysis of the data, I will send a summary to you. I anticipate the study to be completed by May, 2018 at the latest and will send the summary by or before that time.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) and the [name of university] University Human Research Ethics Board (UHREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact me or the Human Ethics Coordinator at [204-474-7122](tel:204-474-7122), or e-mail [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca).

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor, Dr. Clea Schmidt at (204) 474-9314 or [Clea.Schmidt@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Clea.Schmidt@umanitoba.ca).

Thank you in advance,

Joanne Struch  
[struchj@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:struchj@myumanitoba.ca)

## Instructor Consent Form for Use of Feedback



UNIVERSITY  
OF MANITOBA

April 22, 2017

**Research Project Title:** “Critical discourse analysis of feedback on academic writing through a cognitive (in)justices lens”

**Researcher:**

Joanne Struch, Graduate Students, Faculty of Education

E-mail: [struchj@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:struchj@myumanitoba.ca)

Phone: (XXX)XXX-XXXX

**Research Supervisor:**

Dr. Clea Schmidt, Professor, Faculty of Education

E-mail: [Clea.Schmidt@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Clea.Schmidt@umanitoba.ca)

Phone: (204) 474-9314

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

**Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this study is to investigate assumptions about knowledge and language in feedback and understand how this feedback is accessible (or inaccessible) to students. The overarching question for this study is: What are the connections among instructor language, student perceptions and considerations of justice in the feedback on academic writing of undergraduate students in a Canadian university?

**Research Procedures**

In order to conduct my research, I recruited 4 undergraduate students in their second year of studies or higher and who were registered in at least one course in the Winter 2017 term in which writing assignments were part of the course requirements. The feedback on the student’s writing in this course is the focus of the study. Course information, such as assignment information and course outlines will be used to provide context for the analysis.

I copied the student assignments with the feedback; the feedback will be analyzed using a critical discourse analysis methodology. The feedback will be analyzed both in situ and in conjunction with feedback across the assignments that participants provided.

**Risks and Benefits**

I do not anticipate any risks to participants as a result of participating in this study as feedback on student work is a pedagogical activity that instructors undertake in their day-to-day work.

However, you may feel that this topic is relevant to you. In receiving the preliminary analysis of the results, instructors may find that the study of feedback practices is interesting and relevant to their pedagogical practices. Student comments about, perceptions of, and reactions to the feedback may be beneficial to instructors, who may not otherwise receive this reaction to the feedback that they provide to students.

### **Anonymity and Confidentiality**

You will identify yourself by name during the process of consent. But after this process, your anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained by:

- Removing all identifying characteristics (including individual names, names of organizations and places) from the student assignments and course outlines and replacing them with pseudonyms.
- Removing all information from the recordings of student interviews that may identify the instructor.
- Removing any identifying information from the researcher notes about the feedback.
- Removing audio files from the digital device after the student interview session and transferring them to an encrypted file on the Principal Investigator's personal computer. The only person who will have access to the raw data will be me, the Principal Investigator. My thesis supervisor, Dr. Clea Schmidt will have access to the anonymized data. Raw digital data will be stored in the encrypted file on the hard drive. The Principal Investigator is the only person who uses this computer and it is not part of an external network. The computer is located in the office of the Principal Investigator.
- Keeping hard copies of the notes in a locked drawer in the office of the Principal Investigator until the dissertation requirements are complete (anticipated to be May, 2018). Once the requirements are complete all digital recordings, transcripts and notes will be destroyed. The electronic data will be erased (expunged) from the hard drive. Hard copy data will be deposited in the shredding container in the Faculty of Education for professional shredding.

In the dissemination of the findings it is unlikely that your confidentiality will be compromised. The findings will be disseminated as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator. The results of the study may become part of a published article (or articles). No identifying characteristics will be included in these pieces of writing. Although it is possible that, due to the principal investigator's institutional and faculty affiliations (which are included in the dissertation and may be included as information about the author in the published article), the institution and faculty involved in the research may be gleaned by the readers, individuals within the study will not be identified by name

### **Compensation and Participation**

There is no compensation for consenting for the feedback to be used in the study.

### **Feedback and Debriefing**

Once the data has been analyzed I will send a summary of the preliminary findings to you. I anticipate sending the summary within 2 months of data collection. You will be offered the opportunity to receive the summary by either regular mail or electronic mail.

### **Dissemination of Results**

The preliminary summary of findings will also be sent to the groups who have been asked to distribute recruitment letters. A report of the findings, with all information about participants anonymized, will also be sent to the departments that provided the feedback on the writing shared in this study. Detailed study findings will also be disseminated as part of my dissertation and may become part of a published article (or articles). I anticipate the study to be completed by March, 2018 at the latest and will send the summary by or before that time.

**Destruction of the Data**

The only people who will have access to the raw data will be me, the Principal Investigator. My thesis supervisor, Dr. Clea Schmidt will have access to the anonymized data. Raw digital data will be stored in an encrypted file on the Principal Investigator's computer. Hard copies of the notes will be kept in a locked drawer in the office of the Principal Investigator. Once the dissertation is complete all digital recordings, transcripts and notes will be destroyed. The electronic data will be erased (expunged) from the hard drive and hard copy data will be deposited in the shredding container in the Faculty of Education for professional shredding at the completion of the study, anticipated to be March, 2018.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding the use of your feedback on the writing of the student participants in this study. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw your consent any time without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Joanne Struch  
Phone: (204)788-4861

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact me or the Human Ethics Coordinator at [204-474-7122](tel:204-474-7122), or e-mail [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca).

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Instructor's Signature** **Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Researcher's Signature** **Date**

I wish to receive the study summary by regular mail. My address is:

I wish to receive the study summary by e-mail. My address is:

**Instructor interview consent form**



UNIVERSITY  
OF MANITOBA

April 22, 2017

**Research Project Title:** “Critical discourse analysis of feedback on academic writing through a cognitive (in)justices lens”

**Researcher:**

Joanne Struch, Graduate Students, Faculty of Education

E-mail: [struchj@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:struchj@myumanitoba.ca)

Phone: (XXX)XXX-XXXX

**Research Supervisor:**

Dr. Clea Schmidt, Professor, Faculty of Education

E-mail: [Clea.Schmidt@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Clea.Schmidt@umanitoba.ca)

Phone: (204) 474-9314

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

**Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this study is to investigate assumptions about knowledge and language in feedback and understand how this feedback is accessible (or inaccessible) to students. The overarching question for this study is: What are the connections among instructor language, student perceptions and considerations of justice in the feedback on academic writing of undergraduate students in a Canadian university?

**Research Procedures and Recording**

In order to conduct my research, I recruited 4 undergraduate students in their second year of studies or higher and who were registered in at least one course in the Winter 2017 term in which writing assignments were part of the course requirements. The feedback on the student’s writing in this course is the focus of the study.

Once the term ended, I contacted each of the instructors of the courses where the feedback was part of the study to ask if he or she would be interviewed about their approach to feedback on written assignments. Although these instructors will be made aware that a student in their class

has participated in the study, they will not be made aware of which student it is. The interview will not discuss specific feedback, but their ideas about feedback in general.

If you agree to be interviewed for the study, I anticipate that these interviews will be about an hour to an hour and a half each and will be conducted at a time and place that is convenient for you.

I will record each of the interviews using an iPad and later I will transcribe the interviews verbatim. I will also take written notes which will help me remember the conversation and as a back up in case the recording doesn't work or is inaudible in any way. I will use these notes in my analysis if necessary. At the end of the interview I will review my notes with you and highlight the major points we have covered.

Participation in this interview is voluntary.

### **Risks and Benefits**

I do not anticipate any risks to participants as a result of participating in this study as feedback on student work is a pedagogical activity that instructors undertake in their day-to-day work. If you should feel uncomfortable during the interview session, or decide not to continue with it, you are free to end the interview at any time. However, you may feel that this topic is relevant to you and that it is important to give your opinion about the topic. Instructors may find that the study of feedback practices is interesting and relevant to their pedagogical practices. Student comments about, perceptions of, and reactions to the feedback may be beneficial to instructors, who may not otherwise receive this reaction to the feedback that they provide to students.

### **Anonymity and Confidentiality**

You will identify yourself by name during the process of setting up the interview and in the interview itself, which will be audio-taped using a digital recording device. The interviews will be transcribed verbatim by me, the principle investigator. As a participant, your anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained by:

- Removing all identifying characteristics (including individual names, names of organizations and places) from the transcripts and replacing them with pseudonyms.
- Removing any identifying information from the notes.
- Removing audio files from the digital device after the interview session and transferring them to an encrypted file on the Principal Investigator's personal computer. The only person who will have access to the raw data will be me, the Principal Investigator. My thesis supervisor, Dr. Clea Schmidt will have access to the anonymized data. Raw digital data will be stored in the encrypted file on the hard drive. The Principal Investigator is the only person who uses this computer and it is not part of an external network. The computer is located in the office of the Principal Investigator.
- Keeping hard copies of the notes in a locked drawer in the office of the Principal Investigator until the dissertation requirements are complete (anticipated to be May, 2018). Once the requirements are complete all digital recordings, transcripts and notes will be destroyed. The electronic data will be erased (expunged) from

the hard drive. Hard copy data will be deposited in the shredding container in the Faculty of Education for professional shredding.

In the dissemination of the findings, though, it is unlikely that your confidentiality will be compromised. The findings will be disseminated as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator. The results of the study may become part of a published article (or articles). No identifying characteristics will be included in these pieces of writing. Although it is possible that, due to the principal investigator's institutional and faculty affiliations (which are included in the dissertation and may be included as information about the author in the published article), the institution and faculty involved in the research may be gleaned by the readers, individuals within the study will not be identified by name

### **Compensation and Participation**

For participating in this research project, you will receive a \$5.00 Starbucks gift card at the interview session, which you will receive when you arrive to participate in the interview. If you choose to participate in this interview, you may refuse to answer any questions or end the interview at any time. If you choose to end the interview, I will ask you if you will allow the data already collected to remain in the study or if you want the existing data removed from the study. If you indicate that you want the data removed from the study, transcripts and notes of your interview will be destroyed. The electronic data will be erased (expunged) from the hard drive. Hard copy data will be deposited in the shredding container in the Faculty of Education for professional shredding.

### **Feedback and Debriefing**

At the end of each interview, I will review my notes with you and highlight the major points we have covered. After the interview is transcribed I will send a copy of the transcription to you (within 2 – 3 weeks). If you find any problems with the transcription or if you wish to add or change anything you have said, you can call or e-mail me with the changes. Once the data has been analyzed I will send a summary of the preliminary findings to you. I anticipate sending the summary within 2 months of data collection. You will be offered the opportunity to receive the transcript and summary by either regular mail or electronic mail.

### **Dissemination of Results**

The preliminary summary of findings will also be sent to the groups who have been asked to distribute recruitment letters. A report of the findings, with all information about participants anonymized, will also be sent to the departments that provided the feedback on the writing shared in this study. Detailed study findings will also be disseminated as part of my dissertation and may become part of a published article (or articles). I anticipate the study to be completed by March, 2018 at the latest and will send the summary by or before that time.

### **Destruction of the Data**

The only people who will have access to the raw data will be me, the Principal Investigator. My thesis supervisor, Dr. Clea Schmidt will have access to the anonymized data. Raw digital data will be stored in an encrypted file on the Principal Investigator's computer. Hard copies of the notes will be kept in a locked drawer in the office of the Principal Investigator. Once the dissertation is complete all digital recordings, transcripts and notes will be destroyed. The

electronic data will be erased (expunged) from the hard drive and hard copy data will be deposited in the shredding container in the Faculty of Education for professional shredding at the completion of the study, anticipated to be March, 2018.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in this interview and agree to participate in it. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to end the interview at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Joanne Struch  
Phone: (204)788-4861

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact me or the Human Ethics Coordinator at [204-474-7122](tel:204-474-7122), or e-mail [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca).

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Instructor's Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Researcher's Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

**I wish to receive the transcript and summary by regular mail. My address is:**

**I wish to receive the transcript and summary by e-mail. My address is:**

## Appendix C: Interview Guides

### Student Participant Interview Guides

#### Interview Guide – Initial Interview

Hello and thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As you know, from reading and signing the study consent form, I am investigating feedback on academic writing. I think it is important to research this topic in order to understand what types of feedback are understandable for students and what impressions students have about the feedback they receive on their academic writing.

During this initial discussion, which will be about one hour, I will ask you some questions. I am interested in your response to those questions. There are no right or wrong answers; I am just interested in your opinion and experiences.

If there are questions that you do not want to answer that is fine; you don't have to answer them. If you get tired of talking to me, let me know. You can tell me that you have had enough at any time.

Do you have any questions? Let's start with you telling me about yourself.

- What year of studies are you currently in?
- What is your major?
- What language are you the most comfortable speaking and writing in?

I would like to ask you some questions about feedback you receive on writing assignments. Feedback is the comments that a professor, instructor or teaching assistant writes on your assignment when he/she is marking it.

- What do you do when you see feedback on a writing assignment?
- What do you think when you are reading the feedback?
- What do you do with the feedback? How do you use it?
- What is the most helpful type of feedback that you have received?
  - Why was it helpful?
- What is the least helpful type of feedback you have received?
  - Why was it not helpful?
- Do you ever go and speak to your professor/instructors about the feedback you receive?

Finally, I would like to ask you some questions about how feedback is given in the academic tradition with which you are most familiar.

- Have you gone to school in a country other than Canada?
- What was the language of instruction in that country?
- How is feedback given on writing assignments in that country?

Is there anything else you want to say that we have not already talked about?

### **Interview Guide – Subsequent Interviews**

In the previous interview we discussed some questions about feedback in general. In this discussion we will talk about some of the specific feedback you have received on recent writing assignments that you have brought with you. Again, I am interested in your response to those questions. There are no right or wrong answers; I am just interested in your opinion and experiences.

Like last time, if there are questions that you do not want to answer that is fine; you don't have to answer them. If you get tired of talking to me, let me know. You can tell me that you have had enough at any time.

Do you have any questions?

Let's start by noting the specific assignments you have recently received feedback on and have brought today to discuss.

- What assignment(s) have you brought today?
- How did you feel about the writing when you were doing the assignment and when you submitted it?
- What do you think about the feedback you received on these assignments? We can discuss them in general or go over the assignments one by one.
- What did you do when you received this feedback?

Questions about specific assignments (These questions will be largely guided by the student response to the feedback on the specific assignment.):

- What do you understand this comment to mean? (Can be repeated for a number of comments)
- Is there any part of this feedback that you don't understand?
- What is the most helpful feedback that you received on this writing? Why?
- What is the least helpful feedback you received? Why?
- What kind of feedback would you like to have received?
- Is there a type of feedback that you would find more helpful?
- Did you address these comments in other writing for this course or in another course? That is, did you change/modify something about your writing based on these comments?
- Have you discussed any of this feedback with your instructor?
  - If yes, which?
  - If no, why not?
- Is there anything else you would like to say about the assignment feedback?

## **Instructor Participant Interview Guide**

### **Interview Guide – Instructor Interview**

Hello and thank you for agreeing to be interviewed about your approach to feedback on academic writing. As you know, from reading and signing the study consent form, I am investigating feedback on academic writing. I think it is important to research this topic in order to understand what types of feedback are understandable for students and what impressions students have about the feedback they receive on their academic writing.

As you are also now aware, a student who was in your class this past term is a participant in this study. I interviewed him or her about her impressions about feedback in general and about specific feedback that he or she received in your class.

During this discussion, which will be about 45 minutes, I will ask you some questions about your approach to feedback. I am interested in your response to those questions. There are no right or wrong answers; I am just interested in your opinion and experiences.

If there are questions that you do not want to answer that is fine; you don't have to answer them. If you get tired of talking to me, let me know. You can tell me that you have had enough at any time.

Do you have any questions?

Let's start with you telling me about yourself.

- What department are you currently teaching in?
- What are your research interests?
- Do you speak more than one language? If so, what language are you the most comfortable speaking and writing in?

I would like to ask you some questions about the types of assignments that you require in your courses. I'm interested in all types of assignments that you require.

- What types of assignments do you require from your students?
  - Does this vary depending on the course you are teaching?
- How much writing do you ask your students to do in your courses?
  - What types of writing do you favor?
- What do you expect from your students when it comes to writing?
  - What do you expect at the beginning of the course?
  - At the end of the course?
- Has your approach to assignments changed over time? Why?
- How would you define academic writing?

Now, I would like to ask you about your approach to marking those assignments and specifically your approach to and ideas about feedback on assignments.

- How do you respond to your students’ assignments?
- Do you give your students feedback on their assignments?
  - How do you give this feedback (verbally, in writing, electronically)?
- What is your focus for the feedback?
- Has your approach to feedback changed over time? Why?
- In general, what do you think is the purpose of feedback?
- What do you hope your students do with the feedback on their writing assignments?

Is there anything else you want to say that we have not already talked about?

**Appendix D: Sample Student Spreadsheet**

Student	Class	Assignment information	Student Text	Feedback (instructor words in italics)	Interview comment
Marice	Greek Society	Evaluation of a resource (website)	...and not academic, an example is	changed comma to period	
Marice	Greek Society	Evaluation of a resource (website)	“free Greek people” did not have clocks	<i>This is bizarre!</i>	J: And she wrote “this is bizarre” here M: yah I think it was just what the person said. J: yah, not like about what you wrote M: yah not what I wrote J: yah just about what the person said. M: yah
Marice	Greek Society	Evaluation of a resource (website)	are children books	Added 's' to ‘children’.	
Marice	Greek Society	Evaluation of a resource (website)	are children books	circled the end of ‘children’	
Marice	Greek Society	Evaluation of a resource (website)	at the end of the bibliography	<i>*cite titles of specific articles</i>	
Marice	Greek Society	Evaluation of a resource (website)	Carr, Karen Eva. Quatr.us	wrote <i>Greek Slavery</i> above entry	
Marice	Greek Society	Evaluation of a resource (website)	Carr, Karen. Quatr.us	wrote <i>About</i> over entry	
Marice	Greek Society	Evaluation of a resource (website)	Dr. Carr is also responsible for writing the article about Greek Slavery - “What did slaves do in ancient Greece”, <b>the</b> article mainly discuss about what the slaves did...	capitalized 'the'	