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A NONNATIVE STUDENT'S REACTIONS TO INSTRUCTORS' FEEDBACK
ON HIS PAPERS: A CASE STUDY OF AN UNDERGRADUATE HISTORY
STUDENT

by

Iwona Woroniecka

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning
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University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT

**A Nonnative Student's Reactions to Instructors' Feedback on His Papers:
A Case Study of an Undergraduate History Student**

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Master of Arts, 1998

Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

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The central question addressed in the present study was: How does a nonnative university student perceive and respond to the feedback his instructors' provide on his papers? The participant was a male, Polish-English bilingual, full-time undergraduate student of history at a university in Ontario. I used think-aloud protocols and questionnaires to obtain a detailed picture of the participant's reactions to his history instructors' comments on 15 of his written papers submitted for 9 courses over 3 years. Most of these instructors' feedback involved explicit corrections of grammar, mechanics, and organisation. The participant, however, wanted and expected faculty feedback mainly on the ideas in his papers, and he strongly expressed his dissatisfaction with the extensive focus on language issues. These findings differ from those of previous research in regular ESL composition classes, suggesting that the pedagogical context may be a significant factor affecting L2 students' perceptions, expectations, and preferences about the responding practices of their university instructors.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
List of Tables	vi
List of Figures	vi
Chapter 1	
Introduction	1
Teachers' feedback	3
Students' responses to teachers' feedback	6
The present study	13
Research questions	15
Assumptions	15
Chapter 2	
Method	17
The participant	17
The context	19
The data	23
Data collection	24
Data analysis	26
Corroboration and consistency of analyses	34
Chapter 3	
Findings	36
Research question 1	36
Research question 2	42
Research question 3	54
Corroboration of multiple data sources	55
Summary of findings	56
Chapter 4	
Discussion	57
Value of a case study approach	61
Implications	63
References	66
Appendix A: Preliminary Questionnaire	70

Appendix B: Follow-up Questionnaire	73
Appendix C: Comparison of responses to content vs. responses to grammar, mechanics, and organisation on individual papers	75
Appendix D: A sample full translated and transcribed think-aloud protocol	78

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Previous research on students' responses, reactions, attitudes to and preferences about teacher's feedback: An overview	7
Table 2: Courses and writing tasks	21
Table 3: Summary of the procedures of data analysis	35
Table 4: Responses to 15 marked papers (mean scores)	53

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Distribution of instructors' responses on individual papers	38
Figure 2: Distribution of instructors' responses (mean percentages)	39
Figure 3: Comparison of comments on content vs. comments on grammar, mechanics and organisation (mean percentages)	41
Figure 4: Comparison of paper length and amount of feedback on each	43
Figure 5: Breakdown of participant's verbal behaviours (all papers)	44

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Mastering the skill of writing in a second language (L2) is a long and complex process. Instructors and researchers alike have been looking for ways to help nonnative speakers of English acquire this skill so they can function successfully in educational institutions. One thing that makes this task particularly difficult is that L2 writers do not fall into one homogeneous category. For example, there are English as a second/foreign language students (ESL and EFL, respectively) within regular ESL programs simply acquiring a second language, for whom writing is an integral part of language practice (Hedgcock and Lefkowitz, 1994). Likewise, there are immigrant students attending English-medium educational institutions at the elementary and secondary levels, as well as immigrant and visiting L2 students enrolled in universities where they compete directly with native speakers of English and where instructors have little or no training in teaching L2 learners. Therefore, many L2 students not only need to “attain a facility with written English”, but are expected to become entirely fluent in English (Land and Whitley, 1989, p. 284). At the university level, nonnative students need to acquire a high level of academic proficiency in writing to enable them to pursue their education and career goals. However, immigrants pursuing education in their new homeland might have different perceptions of language proficiency (including writing) than do visiting foreign students, who may return to their home countries and pursue their careers there. Their views and perceptions might still differ from those of ESL

learners attending regular ESL composition courses.

To help nonnative students function successfully at the university level, researchers have attempted to document and analyse the nature of writing required in academic settings. They have looked at assessment issues, for example, to design the most effective prompts for tests of writing (e.g., Hamp-Lyons, 1990; Horowitz, 1990; Johns, 1990), conducted in-depth studies of writing tasks (e.g., Hale, Taylor, Bridgeman, Carson, Kroll & Kantor, 1996; Horowitz, 1986; Johns, 1986, 1995), or analysed faculty members' attitudes towards nonnative students' writing (Santos, 1988; Vann, Meyer and Lorenz, 1984). Such studies have aimed to gain insights into the nature of academic literacy; some academic faculty often tend to speak of foreign students as 'academically illiterate'. Zamel (1995), for instance, observed that faculty members at one university in the U.S. often confused the nonnative students' language use with their intellectual abilities. Pursuing related issues, several studies of professors' reactions to nonnative students' writing have aimed to establish which L2 errors interfere with comprehension or are most irritating or unacceptable to university faculty members (e.g., Santos, 1988; Vann, Meyer and Lorenz, 1984). Their findings show that not all errors are judged as equally grievous; faculty members vary greatly in their reactions to errors in students' writing, so faculty members' perception of errors is rather relative. In addition, age and academic discipline seem to be important variables influencing the judgment of L2 students' errors in academic writing (Santos, 1988).

Relatively little research has considered what L2 students think about their instructors' feedback, how well they understand it, and whether or how they might employ it when writing subsequent essays. The L2 research

conducted so far has explored only the context of direct ESL instruction, i.e., composition classes for L2 speakers typically preparing for university studies (e.g., Brice, 1995; Ferris, 1995; Hedgcock and Lefkowitz, 1994; Hedgcock and Lefkowitz, 1996; Leki, 1991; Radecki and Swales, 1988; Saito, 1994). I am not aware of a single study that has considered L2 writers' reactions to faculty feedback on their papers written for regular academic courses. The present thesis study, although limited in scope, intends to start filling this gap by documenting one L2 writer's attitudes, reactions and preferences for feedback within the context of content-area university studies.

Teachers' feedback

Research on instructors' responding behaviours to student writing has produced various taxonomies of teacher feedback (Cumming, 1985; Ferris, Penzone, Tade, & Tinti, 1997; Kobayashi, 1991; Saito, 1994; Ziv, 1984), considered its topical focus (Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986), and its effects on students' writing (Saito, 1994; Ziv, 1984).

Several studies have aimed to describe ESL teachers' responding practices in terms of the forms they take. Cumming (1985) identified and defined such techniques as teacher correction, error identification, evaluation, marginal commentary, checklists, oral response, reformulation, and direct instruction. Among the teachers participating in his study error identification appeared to be the most frequently used technique. His taxonomy was adapted by Saito (1994) in her analysis of ESL teachers' preferences for feedback on ESL compositions, which revealed that the participating instructors preferred to employ a combination of error identification, teacher correction and written commentary. Ziv (1984) developed a taxonomy for classifying written

comments only and grouped them in terms of explicitness on both macro- (text) and micro- (sentence/word) levels. She used her model to analyse the effects of teachers' commentary on the writing of the subsequent drafts by college freshmen. Still another type of taxonomy of instructor feedback was offered by Kobayashi (1991) who classified instructors' feedback into evaluative (subjective reactions) and corrective (how a composition is corrected). In his study Kobayashi looked at the responding practices of native and nonnative instructors of English to L2 writing, establishing that native speakers evaluated grammaticality more strictly and content more positively than nonnative speakers did. Also, they made many more corrections than the nonnative speakers did. Ferris et al. (1997) examined a number of corrected papers and generated categories according to a teacher's goals in writing the comment (e.g., aim or intent of the comment: asking for information, making suggestion/request, giving information) and linguistic forms of the comments (syntactic form, presence/absence of hedges, text-specific/generic). They observed differences in these comments with regard to such variables as student, class, and various genres of writing.

The studies that have investigated the focus of teacher feedback, for example, feedback on content vs. feedback on form (Fathman and Whalley, 1990; Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986), yielded interesting results, namely, that no matter whether students received feedback exclusively on form or on content it did help them improve their compositions.

A considerable number of studies have addressed the issue of teacher feedback on L2 writing within the ESL or EFL context (e.g., Cumming, 1985; Fathman and Whalley, 1990; Kobayashi, 1991; Robb, Ross and Shortreed, 1986; Saito, 1994; Zamel, 1985). However, the studies on faculty feedback to L2

writing are not numerous, with the exception of Sorensen (1985) who examined faculty feedback on essays written for regular university courses, and Prior (1991) who considered one professor's responses to L2 writing produced for a graduate course, as well as Allison (1995), Horowitz (1991), Land and Whitley (1989), Reid (1991), Spack (1997) and Zamel (1995) who have signalled the problem of L2 writing evaluation within academic contexts, but did not analyse it empirically. Other studies investigated faculty feedback on students' writing exclusively within the regular ESL context, i.e., they examined faculty responses to L2 student writing which was not discipline-specific, but rather written for ESL writing courses at the university level, i.e., English for Academic Purposes (Kobayashi, 1992; Leki, 1991; Saito, 1994). There is an obvious absence of research on ESL students who are competing academically with students who are native speakers of English. Particularly, there is a need to investigate faculty members' responses to L2 writing within the context of specific academic disciplines. Without such inquiry there is not a basis to establish or address their specific problems in fulfilling concrete written requirements for learning what their professors value or pay attention to when evaluating L2 students' work.

In general, this previous research has shown that teachers have different priorities when they respond to students' writing. Some studies indicate that teachers respond primarily to mechanics, grammar and usage, and vocabulary (Saito, 1994; Spack, 1997; Zamel, 1985); other studies (e.g., Prior, 1991; Sorensen, 1985) show that professors pay more attention to content and organisation than to mechanical errors. Teacher correction, error identification, and written commentary appear to be the most widely used techniques when responding to adult L2 students' writing (Cumming, 1985;

Saito, 1994).

Students' responses to teachers' feedback

Studies of students' reactions to teachers' feedback on their writing have considered three contexts: the first language (L1) context (e.g., Dohrer, 1991; Reed and Burton, 1981; Straub, 1997; Ziv, 1984;), the L2 context (e.g., Brice, 1995; Ferris, 1995; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1996; Leki, 1991; Radecki & Swales, 1988; Saito, 1994; Semke, 1984) and both L1 and L2 contexts (e.g., Cohen, 1987; Cohen 1991; Cohen and Cavalcanti 1990). Table 1 presents an overview of published research on L1 and L2 students' reactions towards teachers' feedback provided on their papers.

In her review of previous studies in the L1 context, Leki (1990) concluded that students reported not paying much attention to teachers' feedback and often did not understand it. In addition, they felt some hostility about teachers' attempts to appropriate their ideas and writing. Straub's (1997) study revealed that students did not mind criticism as such, but they did not like judgmental, authoritative, or harsh comments on their ideas. They were in favour of feedback in the form of advice or explanation which was specific and clear and addressed specific matters in their writing. In general, they wanted to know not only what they had done wrong, but also what they had done right. On the whole, they appreciated feedback on all areas of writing, but they gave priority to content and organisation, rather than grammar and mechanics. As noted by Dohrer (1991), some L1 students appeared to be overwhelmed by the very number of comments on their papers and confused by various techniques of marking, such as error identification, coded feedback, or comments like 'awkward' or 'reword' which gave them little clue as to

Table 1: Previous research on students' responses, reactions, attitudes to and preferences about teacher's feedback: An overview.

STUDY	CONTEXT	METHODOLOGY
Brice, C . (1995, March). ESL writers' reactions to teacher commentary: A case study.	ESL	3-subject case study; think-aloud protocols; interviews; take-home questionnaire.
Cohen, A. D. (1987). Student processing of feedback on their compositions.	EFL/L1	survey
Cohen, A. D. (1991). Feedback on writing: The use of verbal report.	ESL/EFL	6-subject case study using verbal reports; to the rest of respective classes a questionnaire was administered.
Cohen, A. D. & Cavalcanti, M. C. (1990). Feedback on compositions: teacher and student verbal reports.	EFL/L1	9-subject case study using verbal reports; to the rest of participants a questionnaire was administered.
Dohrer, G. (1991). Do teachers' comments on students' papers help?	L1	Interviews and think-aloud protocols
Ferris, D. R. (1995). Student reactions to teacher response in multiple-draft composition classrooms.	ESL	survey
Hedgcock, J. & Lefkowitz, N. (1994). Feedback on feedback: Assessing learning receptivity to teacher response in L2 composing.	ESL/EFL	survey
Hedgcock, J. & Lefkowitz, N. (1996). Some input on input: Two analyses of student response to expert feedback in L2 writing.	EFL/ESL	survey and interview
Leki, I. (1991). The preferences of ESL students for error correction in college-level writing classes.	ESL	survey
Radecki, P. M. & Swales, J. M. (1988). ESL students reaction to written comments on their written work.	ESL	survey
Reed, W. M. & Burton, J. K. (1981). Effective and ineffective evaluation of essays: perception of college freshmen.	L1	survey
Saito, H. (1994). Teachers' practices and students' preferences for feedback on second language writing: A case study of ESL learners.	ESL	survey
Straub, R. (1997). Students' reactions to teacher comments: An exploratory study.	L1	survey
Ziv, N. D. (1984). The effect of teacher comments on the writing of four college freshmen.	L1	4-subject case study - examined students responses to teacher's feedback through comparison of subsequent drafts.

what the teacher actually meant. Dohrer observed that many students would pay most attention to the first annotation on their essays and then read other comments at random or skipping them entirely. Ziv (1984) conducted a 4-subject case study in which she explored how four college freshmen perceived comments she wrote on their papers and how they used these comments in revising their papers. Her analysis indicated that inexperienced revisers appreciated explicit suggestions about how they might go about revising; the more experienced ones preferred less explicit comments on various aspects of their ideas. As to feedback on surface errors, two participants in her study preferred overt corrections; but nonetheless the four of them were able to correct such errors when they were explicitly told what was wrong. Reed and Burton's (1986) study involving freshmen writers at an American university indicated that students preferred their essays to be evaluated for both content and grammar. They resented the idea of receiving only negative comments and did not appreciate implicit annotations.

Previous studies on L2 writers' responses toward teachers' feedback fall into two general categories of inquiry: studies that aimed at establishing students' preferences regarding instructor feedback (Hedgcock and Lefkowitz, 1994; Hedgcock and Lefkowitz, 1996; Leki, 1991; Radecki & Swales, 1988; Saito, 1994) and studies that investigated students' reactions to feedback already received on their writing (Brice, 1995; Cohen, 1987; Cohen 1991; Cohen and Cavalcanti 1990; Ferris, 1995). In the first type of studies researchers were basically interested in what type of feedback students liked in terms of form and substance. Findings have been more or less uniform across the studies. According to Saito (1994), who surveyed students taking intensive ESL course

and those enrolled in ESL writing class for engineering students, and Radecki & Swales (1988) who surveyed the attitudes of students in ESL classes at the University of Michigan, L2 students said they found feedback on grammar most useful. The survey conducted by Leki (1991) indicated that her participants, ESL students enrolled in freshman composition classes, definitely disapproved of instructors' feedback that concentrated exclusively on content and organisation; since it was of great importance for them to produce error-free writing they wanted all their errors to be corrected. Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1994, 1996) reported that many L2 students (especially in foreign language contexts) preferred it when their teachers pointed out their grammatical and mechanical mistakes; teachers' interventions with regard to content development, organisation and style of their writing appeared to be of secondary importance. Although their ESL students' interest in grammar correction was very high, they expressed higher preference for feedback on content and style than did the American students studying other foreign languages. Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1994) attributed this to the fact "that ESL students must produce written products in English not only in their ESL courses, but in *all* their courses -- courses in which writing assignments are not designed to improve students' writing proficiency" (p. 152).

The second type of studies looked at students' perceptions of teacher feedback (i.e., what they think of it) and strategies for handling it (i.e., what they do with it). Cohen (1987) was interested in how much of the teacher's feedback students process and how they go about it, as well as what forms of feedback might be difficult for them to interpret. Among the participants, who came from a variety of language classes and levels (ESL, French, German

and Hebrew), 80% said they attended to teachers' feedback on their papers. They reported attending extensively to teachers' comments regarding grammar and mechanics, but also paid considerable attention to teacher feedback on vocabulary, organisation, and content (in this order of importance). As to the processing of feedback, the majority of students reported 'making a mental note' of the commentary. In the ESL course, students reported attending to almost all the corrections; however, out of 15 students, only four reported using a teacher's feedback to revise their papers. Seventeen percent of the students said they had come across at least one teacher's comment that they did not understand, and they had major problems with such vague comments as: 'this could be clearer', 'needs transition', 'confusing'. Cohen (1991) and Cohen & Cavalcanti (1990) further explored L1 and L2 students' attitudes to and strategies of handling teacher's feedback. Their findings were consistent with those of Cohen (1987), namely, students simply made 'a mental note' of the teacher's commentary when they read over their papers that had been marked. Participants' opinions about the usefulness of feedback received varied according to the orientation and demands of the specific L2 learning context.

Contrary to Cohen's (1987, 1991) and Cohen & Cavalcanti's (1990) findings, Ferris (1995) reported that participants in her study, 155 students in two levels of a university ESL composition program, employed a variety of strategies in responding to their instructor's feedback, such as talking to the instructor, tutor and friends, consulting a grammar book or a dictionary, thinking about the teacher's comment or doing nothing. Also, Brice's (1995) participants seemed to be heavily engaged in reading and responding to their teacher's commentary and reported planning to include it in their revisions

of their writing.

In general, research conducted in the L2/foreign language context has shown that such L2 writers definitely expect feedback on language form, finding it much more important than native speakers do. They also tend to expect teachers to correct all surface language errors in their writing. However, just like L1 students, L2 students seem to prefer clear and detailed feedback. Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990) reported that many L2 students often had problems reading teachers' handwriting; they found some comments confusing and often did not understand various marking symbols employed. All of the participants involved in Brice's (1995) study had difficulty and were frustrated with the symbol system the teacher used to indicate grammar or vocabulary errors, and they expressed a preference for more explicit feedback. This corroborates the findings of Leki's (1991) and Radecki and Swales' (1988) surveys on feedback preferences. Ferris (1995) also reported that students had a variety of problems in understanding their teacher's comments due to specific grammar terms and symbols used, and vague questions about content, as well as because of the instructor's poor handwriting. Moreover, some of these students complained about the feedback being too negative to be helpful. A further point is that some L2 students have also been observed to have strong emotional responses to teachers' feedback especially when it dealt primarily with errors (Semke, 1984) whereas others seem to believe that the "non-native speaker student holds some sort of a licence to make linguistic errors" (Radecki and Swales, 1988, p. 361).

It is necessary to point out that most of the research described above examined students' responses to initial or intermediate draft interventions and took into consideration utilisation of feedback in students' subsequent

drafts of the same piece of writing. This is just one context of composing and very specific for composition classes. Students might have paid more attention to teachers' marking in general in this context because they were expected to correct their drafts and resubmit them. For this reason, the present thesis study focuses on an end-draft context (i.e., papers after they have been written and assigned grades) and examines how expert feedback by university professors (not ESL instructors) is perceived in a regular content-area context, where students do not usually have the opportunity to work on several drafts of their papers or receive expert feedback while they develop their papers. Also, most of these previous studies were mainly surveys that might have actually elicited students' general beliefs rather than their spontaneous behaviours while writing and natural reactions to instructors' feedback, with the exception of studies conducted by Cohen (1991) and Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990) who employed verbal reports, as well as Brice (1995) and Dohrer (1991) who used verbal reports complemented by interviews and/or questionnaires as the method of data collection which yielded quite detailed pictures of students' reactions.

In sum, research conducted so far, on both teachers' feedback to L2 writing and L2 students' reactions to such feedback, has failed to account in any detail for one distinctive category of L2 writers, namely those attending English-medium educational institutions. Researchers have tended to focus only on the context of regular ESL writing classes. As observed by Prior (1991), although many nonnative students, both immigrant and visiting, are enrolled in North American universities, very few studies mention such students. Therefore, there is an obvious need for future inquiry into the responding practices of university faculty members to L2 writing produced for

specific content-related courses and into nonnative university students' perception and processing of such feedback.

The present study

The purpose of this case study is to investigate a nonnative university student's reactions to faculty members' feedback on his essays submitted as a part of regular course requirements. As noted above, there is a considerable body of research on faculty reactions to nonnative students' writing (Allison, 1995; Horowitz, 1986; Johns, 1990; Santos, 1988; Sorensen, 1985; Vann, Mayer, and Lorenz, 1984; Zamel, 1995), but I am not aware of any previous studies investigating nonnative speakers' reactions to feedback given by content area teachers or university professors. The study seems useful not only for L2 education but also for both the participant involved -- allowing him to reflect on his writing and perception of professors' feedback -- and to the faculty, the results as presented here potentially contribute to their understanding of the roles they assume when dealing with the writing of linguistically diverse students. Writing, like teaching, is a very personal experience which involves sharing one's own beliefs, ideas, feelings, and opinions. Its evaluation may have an enormous impact on a student's future performance and the writer's self-image.

In the present project, I decided that a single-subject case study would be a suitable research approach since it allowed for a careful and holistic look at a particular student, providing a unique opportunity for rich insight into the complexity and dynamics of this particular person and context. I found his case intrinsically interesting and complex. I knew beforehand that he was frustrated with faculty responses to his papers and as a result felt generally

demotivated, although the grades assigned on his papers were consistently high. To gain an in-depth understanding of his particular situation, I needed a research design that offered an opportunity to gather an extensive database which would provide access to information that could not be elicited through an experiment or survey, i.e., a naturalistic approach that attended to the real situations he confronted in his writing and learning. Moreover, I needed a way to accommodate emerging relationships and issues and to present them in a revealing manner. The case study method allowed me to provide relatively full and vivid descriptions and to draw directly upon the naturalistic data collected (e.g., through extensive quotations). Also, in my analyses, I was able to use data from various sources to provide complementary perspectives on the same issues. A person as a research subject has values, needs and purposes which he or she is able to articulate. These cannot be adequately captured through a survey or an experiment which must take into account only a few predetermined variables, whereas a case study offers an opportunity to deal with many, if not all, variables present in a single context.

In sum, in planning this study I recognised that an experimental research or a survey would present limited opportunities to explore multiple frames of reference, such as personal, educational or contextual perspectives. As pointed out by Yin (1994) a case study approach “allows an investigation to retain holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (p. 3) because it relies on multiple sources of evidence. In this way, it provides an opportunity to account for the complexity of multiple aspects of the situation under study and enhances our understanding of these.

Research questions

My research questions intended to reflect the distinctive characteristics of the context of the present study (i.e., the instructors' expectations, nature of their feedback) as well as to address central issues pertaining to the student's perception and processing of written feedback he had received on his papers, i. e., his attitudes, expectations, preferences, strategies, and sense of their usefulness.

- (1) What do university instructors state in their course handouts as their expectations about the quality of students' writing? What do they respond to? Do they focus more on content or on form? What form does their feedback take?
- (2) How does a nonnative university student perceive and process faculty feedback on his papers?
 - (a) What areas of writing does he want the professors to address in their comments?
 - (b) How does he attend to and value feedback on the content, organisation, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics of his writing?
- (3) Does he find their feedback useful and, if so, which types does he find most and least helpful? How does he report he might utilise their feedback to improve his subsequent essays?

Assumptions

Writing in a discipline such as history presents an opportunity for students to demonstrate their understanding and mastery of the course content and the broader discipline. Therefore, I initially assumed that

university instructors would primarily respond to the content of the participant's papers and that their feedback would take an interactive form through questions and written commentaries.

Findings in the L1 content-area context (e.g. Dohrer, 1991; Straub, 1997) indicated that native students generally preferred responses to content rather than to other aspects of their writing. Drawing upon the similarity of both contexts (i.e., writing produced in the content-area context) I expected a nonnative university student to be also interested primarily in instructors' feedback on the content of his papers; however, I assumed that his reactions towards feedback on grammar and mechanical errors would be more favourable than a native speaker's might be due to his limited command of the second language, unless such corrections became overwhelming.

I also expected he might react unfavourably to judgmental or authoritative criticism of his ideas. I based this assumption on the results of previous research (Straub, 1997), as well as on my own experiences as a writer in both my L1 and L2.

Chapter 2

METHOD

This chapter describes the design and the context of the present study. First it provides background information about the participant, including reasons why I selected him for the study, and the immediate educational context: courses he attended and writing tasks assigned to him. I then explain the procedures of data collection and analysis I used in the research.

The participant

The participant in the present study, Adrian (the name is fictitious), was a full-time undergraduate history student at a university in Ontario. His main area of study is the history of East-Central Europe. He is a nonnative speaker of English; Polish is his first language. In his home country, Poland, he had four years of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction (2 hours per week) at the secondary school, then 1.5 years of EFL instruction at the university (2 hours per week). After immigrating to Canada in 1992, at the age of 25, he enrolled in an eight-week intensive ESL program (25 hours per week) and was placed at the advanced level. Subsequently, he completed a three-month ESL course preparing him for the required language proficiency test, which included 4 hours of academic writing per week. His language proficiency test score before admission to the university was 5 five points (maximum possible score = 6 points).

One reason I selected Adrian for the present study was his frustration with faculty feedback he received on his papers. He reported to be

demotivated and did not see much sense in putting an effort in future writing assignments. It was not the grades that disappointed or disempowered him (his grades actually ranged from A++ to B-; lower grades resulted mainly from submitting the papers past the deadline), but the nature of the faculty responses to his written work. Adrian did not see his success or failure as measured by the grades he received, but by the professors' reactions towards his writing. In the preliminary questionnaire I gave him (see Appendix A) he rated himself as a good student and his knowledge of the subject-matter as excellent. He believed that his skills in writing essays were good and that he possessed an ability to express himself through writing. He claimed to think a lot about the audience for whom he wrote his papers. Adrian reported that it was very important for him to have as few language errors as possible in his written work because they cloud the clarity of argumentation and might negatively influence a reader's attitude towards him as both a student and a writer. In his opinion, it was also very important for his instructors to find as few language errors as possible in students' writing. He based his assumption on both the feedback he had received from his instructors, which according to him focused extensively on grammar and mechanics, and the handouts distributed by the instructors specifying that error-free essays were expected. Moreover, Adrian did not expect any kind of special treatment due to his being a non-native speaker of English; however he said he would appreciate some understanding from his instructors for some of his grammatical mistakes.

Adrian intends to proceed with his studies at the master's and doctoral levels. His ultimate career goal is to become a university professor and to teach the history of East-Central Europe. He believes he would make a good

professor who could instil in students an appreciation and understanding of history. Adrian has been interested in history since childhood. In the beginning his focus was on European history especially that of Ancient Rome, Germany, Russia, and, of course, Poland; gradually it evolved towards the history of East-Central Europe. He reported to have read hundreds of books and articles on history in general. Indeed, he spends most of his free time reading literature directly and indirectly related to the field of his studies: monographs, biographies, historical documents, such as chronicles and journals as well as their analyses. He has gathered an extensive database consisting of quotations from various publications and has been making annotated bibliographies on a regular basis. Also, Adrian is interested in general literature, sociology, psychology, and science.

Another reason I selected Adrian was the fact that we share the same L1 as well as cultural background, and we have known each other for several years. I believed that this would minimise the possibility of my misunderstanding or misinterpretations of the information I obtained from him. Moreover, I expected this arrangement would enhance his honesty and eliminate inhibitions while performing the various tasks during my data collection.

Adrian performed all tasks conscientiously, took them very seriously, and in general showed great interest in the present study. My only minor complaint could be that he tended to reschedule our appointments too often so the data collection process took much longer than I had initially expected.

The context: courses and writing assignments

The courses Adrian attended ranged from first to third year level

courses and focused on various historical contexts. Their writing assignments included primary source/document studies, book/article(s) reviews, research essays, and historical analyses. Table 2 gives an overview of the courses he attended and types of written assignments in each. The average number of students enrolled in tutorial classes was 20.

Types of writing assignments

My descriptions of the writing tasks below were derived from the actual handouts distributed by the course instructors to their students. Thus, they reflect the instructors' descriptions and criteria. Examples of paper topics are from both the handouts and from Adrian's written papers:

1. Primary source study/Document study: a summary and critical evaluation of the work under consideration within the historical context in terms of its reliability and usefulness as a historical source.

The Journals of Lewis and Clark.

A History of the Expedition to Jerusalem 1095-1127 by Fulcher of Chartres. (Mediaeval chronicle)

2. Book/Article review: a critical review of the book/article within the context of the broader historiographical issues and interpretations discussed in other publications on the subject. This type of writing task discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the book, as well as explores any biases and preconceptions. It offers an evaluation of the author's central arguments and explains how the author develops them (e.g., types of historical sources or evidence used, clarity of style and organisation). It also includes a brief account of personal reactions towards the book/article under consideration. For example:

V.I. Lenin by Dmitri Volkogonov

Table 2: Courses and writing tasks

Course topic	Writing assignment, paper code & length of Adrian's paper	Year of studies	Marked by
History of European Civilisation	book review (P1; 1335 words) document study (P2; 1028 words) historical analysis (P3; 5573 words)	1st	T.A. (teaching assistant)
History of East-Central Europe	historical analysis (P4; 5128 words) historical analysis (P5; 4621 words)	1st	T.A.
European History	research paper (P6; 5520 words)	2nd	T.A.
Mediaeval History	primary source study (P7; 1990 words) primary source study (P10; 2196 words)	2nd	professor
Contemporary Europe	review of articles (P8; 2680 words) review of articles (P9; 2325 words)	2nd	T.A.
Economic History of Europe	research paper (P11; 9614 words) historical analysis (P15; 2424 words)	3rd	professor
History of the Soviet Union	book review (P12; 3118 words)	3rd	professor
History of the U.S.	primary source study (P13; 2517 words)	3rd	T.A.
History of Russia	research paper (P14; 4586 words)	3rd	professor

3. Research paper: a deep analysis of a particular historical issue. As stated in one of the course handouts, "The aim of this essay is to address a relevant historical question by critically reading secondary authorities who have dealt with various aspects of the problem, and then composing an analytical argument that has a clearly defined thesis, a logically progressing structure and sufficient supporting evidence. Sources used should be of a specialised nature (monographs and articles) and not general textbooks or reference works ". For example,

"The Green Revolution" in the Tambor Oblast. Were the peasants' unrests a direct cause of Lenin's political and economic directives and their influence on the rural population of the Tambor region, or the result of the agricultural changes in the heartland of Russia?

The influence of the 'ethnic experiments' conducted by Hans Frank in Eastern Europe in 1941/42 on the decisions and deliberations of the Wansee Conference.

4. Historical analysis: similar to a research essay, but not so detailed and different in scope. This type of writing does not involve such extensive reading; it may be based on general textbooks, lectures, seminars, i.e., general knowledge of the subject. The purpose of this assignment is to enhance students' ability to critically review different approaches and viewpoints on usually broad historical events or developments. For instance,

Why did Portugal and Spain inaugurate the European age of overseas explorations and colonizations; and in so doing, what impact did they have upon both the European and world economies by the mid 16th century?

Analyse the causes and significance of the Stalin-Tito split.

The data

The data for the present study consisted of the following sources: written documents (marked papers; handouts distributed by faculty); questionnaires (preliminary and post-protocol), and think-aloud protocols. I collected 15 of Adrian's papers written for various history courses which had been marked by the faculty. I asked Adrian for those papers that were marked by instructors who were native speakers of English. Ten papers were written during the 1995/96 and 1996/97 academic years; the remaining five came from the 1997/98 winter session (See Table 2). Nine papers were marked by teaching assistants (TAs) and six by professors; the sample seems to adequately represent the context of undergraduate studies at this particular university where professors rarely conduct tutorials or mark papers. In addition, I asked Adrian for handouts distributed by the faculty specifying the purpose and expectations as to the quality of the assigned papers. I administered a preliminary questionnaire during the first session with the participant and prior to the think-aloud sessions. Its purpose was to document Adrian's perception of himself as a writer and a student, how he assessed his knowledge of the subject-matter and intellectual potential, as well as what in his opinion the faculty expected as to the quality of students' writing. Think-aloud protocols documented Adrian's verbal behaviours while attending to faculty feedback received on his papers; each think-aloud session was audiotaped and then transcribed; 5 sessions documented his reactions to 'just-received-back' papers and 10 sessions were retrospective in nature (reflecting back on papers written and marked in previous years). A follow-up questionnaire was administered after each think-aloud session to record Adrian's appreciation of, attitudes to, preferences for, and his opinions about

the overall usefulness of the instructors' feedback on each paper.

Data collection

Different methods of data collection were used in order to obtain a detailed and corroborated picture of Adrian's reactions while attending to the faculty feedback he received.

Preliminary questionnaire

I asked Adrian to fill out a profile questionnaire prior to the main data collection. The items included in the questionnaire were either structured or open-ended. The structured questions required Adrian to either circle a number on the scale from 1 to 5 or put a check mark next to the item that best corresponded to his opinion; in addition, they were followed by a 'comments' section in case he wanted to elaborate on his answers. The open-ended questions placed no constraints on his responses. See Appendix A, which indicates how the items were adapted from Cohen (1987), Leki (1991), Ferris (1995), and Saito (1994).

Think-aloud protocols

I initially trained Adrian in the think-aloud procedure using math problems, following Cumming (1989). Then, I asked him to go through one marked paper at a time and say aloud all his thoughts about the feedback he received on it. I encouraged him to use a language of his preference, i.e., Polish or English, and to act as he normally would when first reading papers marked by his instructors. He was reminded that there were no 'right' or 'wrong' answers and was encouraged to be forthcoming and honest. I

remained in the same room but was unobtrusive since he needed no probing to maintain the flow of his verbalisations. On two occasions, I answered questions he asked to clarify the think-aloud procedure: "You can't decipher the comment for me, can you?" "Do I have to address each and every comment?". The think-aloud sessions were audiotaped. The length of each session varied depending on the length of the paper and the amount of feedback provided. The sessions lasted between 6 to 20 minutes. They were conducted at unequal intervals, not shorter than one week apart, according to Adrian's availability, over a total period of 8 months.

Follow-up questionnaire

The purpose of the follow-up questionnaire was to measure Adrian's appreciation of feedback he received on individual papers, giving him an opportunity to reflect on its usefulness, as well as to establish how much attention he paid to responses dealing with various aspects of his writing and whether he encountered annotations that he had difficulty to understand. Like the preliminary questionnaire, the follow-up questionnaire included a mixture of structured and open-ended items (See Appendix B). Immediately after each think-aloud session I asked Adrian to fill out a copy of this questionnaire, asking him to express (on the scale 1 to 5) his degree of appreciation of the written feedback on the particular paper, report on the amount of attention he paid to annotations about content, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics, and to evaluate their usefulness (Questions 1 to 7); a 'not applicable' response was included to account for the cases where there was no feedback provided in a given category. Question #8 required Adrian to identify feedback he did not understand. Adrian took

approximately 5 minutes to complete the questionnaire at each session.

Data analyses

Written documents

Before analysing Adrian's reactions to the instructors' feedback, I first analysed and described the types of written assignments, and professors' expectations as presented on the basis of the handouts distributed in their courses. Next, for each individual paper I identified, categorised and tabulated all the written responses on the marked papers. Categories were defined prior to this analysis based on Cumming's (1985) and Saito's (1994) taxonomies, as follows:

(1) Teacher correction: the instructor (crosses out an error and) writes in the correct form (this usually includes deletion, provision, substitution of words/phrases/clauses), for example:

the the

Despite earlier agreement in Kosice in 1379, Polish nobility was

about a

not fully unanimous ~~around~~ the idea of Hungarian princess

inheriting the throne.

(2) Marginal commentary: consists of messages (on content, form, etc.) from the instructor (written comments or questions on the margin or between sentences; their length may range from one word to more than one sentence), for example:

What is the purpose of this quote?
Weak transition.

The same solution by all these groups? Clarify this.

In order to make sentences more straight-forward, move the main verb closer to the beginning of the phrase or sentence.

Awkward.

Continue to italicise.

(3) Error identification: circling, underlining, question marks, highlighting, etc., to query a grammatical, lexical, or spelling error or to identify it, for instance:

... some very significant facts [?] implicate that....
 and rivalry over Rhutenian possessions ...

(4) Coded feedback: symbols used to draw students' attention to their mistakes. Usually the students are provided with a list of codes for their reference, for example:

sp.

... dominated by the petite bourgeoisie ...

(5) End comment: a final evaluation of the student's paper. Typically this is a sort of justification for the grade assigned. The length of such comments varied from a few sentences to one page. For instance:

This is an excellent paper which demonstrates a sound understanding of all three articles in question and which offers a thoughtful, well-balanced intelligent analysis. My chief criticism here is that much of the writing contained herein is awkward or unclear. In part, this is because you are writing in your second or third language, but in part it is

also probably the result of last minute haste. In any case, take greater pains to produce smoother and more polished prose. Otherwise keep up the good work.

Excellent! I can find no fault with the content of the paper. There are some small language problems which I am confident will disappear. The appendices and maps are a useful addition.

I initially did the coding myself. Then to verify reliability one third of the data was also categorised by an independent rater, an OISE graduate and currently a French immersion teacher in an elementary school. The interrater agreement was 96%.

Preliminary questionnaire

I analysed the information from the preliminary questionnaire impressionistically to establish Adrian's perception of himself as a student and a writer, self-assessment of his knowledge of the subject-matter studied, standards as to the quality of written assignments, evaluation of the usefulness of the faculty feedback for improving his writing skills, and treatment expected from the faculty (Questions 1 to 4, 7, & 10). Then I analysed questions 8 & 9 to establish in general what he did with the feedback received and how he handled feedback he did not understand.

Think-aloud protocols

I transcribed the think-aloud protocols and coded Adrian's verbal behaviours according to a coding scheme based on Brice (1995). The coding scheme includes four major categories: Reading, Describing, Responding and

Assessing, which are further divided into subcategories, as follows:

(1) Reading

- a. Reads instructor's comment aloud
- b. Reads instructor's comment silently
- c. Reads a portion of his own text aloud
- d. Reads a portion of his own text silently

(2) Describing

- a. Describes a comment/correction he received, e.g.,

Here she changed some words. She replaced 'world-known' with 'world-famous'.

He put a question mark above 'mediaeval stereotype'...

- b. Describes feedback, e.g.,

There are just a few comments here and they refer to punctuation mhm she changed an adjective or something like that, corrected 'a' and 'the'. At the end she wrote that the essay was good.

(3) Responding

- a. Responds to a question, suggestion, request or information provided by the instructor, e.g.,

Instructor's comment: So what is the point?

The point is that those people were not very intelligent. The editor claims that they were so enlightened. I gave a lot of examples earlier from their journals that show that they were not.

- b. Explains what he means in a portion of text, e.g.,

Instructor's comment: This attack on Butler is not convincing.

Czechoslovak border was longer and exposed after the Anschluss.

What I meant here is that it was 1700 km long after the Anschluss and not, as Butler claims - 3500 km. He provided false information.

- c. Explains why he included/did not include particular content, e.g.,

It wasn't- I was not supposed to write a biography of the author, only analyse his article.

- d. Expresses lack of understanding, e.g.,

I'd like to know what exactly is unclear here. The sentence? The paragraph? What I said or what?

- e. Expresses agreement with a comment/ correction, e.g.,

Uhm yeah, actually I could change it this way considering the obsession here with uhm, I don't know, gender equality and stuff like that.

- f. Expresses disagreement with a comment/ correction, e.g.,

He shouldn't have crossed out 'WW II'. Not everybody knows that 'Great Patriotic War' is a Russian name for World War II.

- g. Expresses an emotion (in words), e.g.,

Damn!

He's picking on me! Everywhere 'note' 'note' or "Does this all info names, dates, towns come of the top off your head?" Yes, exactly. They all come of the top off my head. This is so called common knowledge and I expect a tutor to know that! If he doesn't he should shut up and not even mention it!

- h. Questions why a comment has been included in his essay, e.g.,

Why did he write it? What's the purpose? It doesn't refer to anything.

- i. Talks about the grade he has received, e.g.,

He gave me an 'A-'. Not bad.

- j. Expresses preference for specific type of feedback, e.g.,

He could have written something about what-what he liked what he didn't like. He didn't write anything. So I guess it means he liked everything. Well that's great but I would like to know what he liked more what less what was interesting what wasn't right.

- k. Reports to have utilized feedback in the subsequent essays, e.g.,

Here's a comment on where to put the page number about footnotes-technical stuff which is useful because I learned how to do it and I did it this way later on.

- l. Explains writing assignment (requirements, etc.), e.g.,

Uhm this was a very short essay four-page book review.

The annotated bibliography was required.

(4) Assessing

- a. Expresses a judgment about the instructor, e.g.,

He's a very competent person, very competent.
I respect him as a professor.

How can someone be a tutor and have absolutely no idea about the topic?

- b. Expresses a judgment about instructor's comment or feedback, e.g.,

Well, in general there are no substantial commentaries here.
Nothing interesting in the end-comment. Very vague.

I also included an additional 'Other' category to account for Adrian's responses not directly related to processing of feedback, such as questions addressed to me (e.g., "Do I have to address each and every comment?").

Before employing the coding scheme above, first I parsed the data into units according to speech pauses of three or more seconds, following the precedents in previous research by Cumming (1989). Each unit was subjected to multiple coding. To verify the reliability of my coding one-third of the protocol data was coded by an independent rater, an OISE graduate and currently an adult ESL instructor. The comparison showed 89% interrater agreement. The areas of disagreement were mostly related to the distinction between two coding categories: 'describes feedback' and 'expresses a judgment about feedback'.

I analysed the verbal reports both qualitatively and quantitatively. Qualitative analyses aimed at establishing my impression of Adrian's overall perceptions of his instructors' feedback, his affective reactions (agreement or disagreement; emotions expressed verbally and non-verbally, etc.), preferences for and appreciation of specific feedback type, as well as an overall assessment of the quality and usefulness of the feedback received. For the quantitative analyses, first I counted and tabulated instances of particular verbal behaviours during each session; next a total score for each behaviour was calculated to establish an observable pattern of Adrian's behaviours when handling the faculty feedback he received.

In addition, to create a detailed interpretation of the findings from the protocols in terms of relations between the intrinsic characteristics of the instructors' responses and Adrian's reactions to them I classified each instance of instructor written commentary that Adrian addressed in terms of explicitness based on Ziv's (1984) taxonomy, then grouped them into categories of evaluative or corrective feedback according to Kobayashi's (1992) classification (the examples that follow are from my data). Ziv differentiated

between two categories of marginal commentary: explicit and implicit cues. She defined explicit cues as comments that point out a specific error (e.g., "This is a sentence, not a paragraph") or detailed suggestions for revision. Implicit cues were characterised as the ones that draw a student's attention to a problem (e.g., "This paragraph is a bit awkward"), suggested alternatives (e.g., "Can we find a gender-neutral word here?"), or questioned what the student had written (e.g., "Can you speak of modern nationalism in the 18th century?"). Kobayashi (1992) distinguished between corrective feedback where a correction was suggested, provided or implied (e.g., "These notes should cite the sources of your information"), and evaluative feedback giving a subjective or judgmental responses (e.g., "Good summary of his argument"; "Not necessary and bad form to use a footnote for this").

Adrian chose his L1 (Polish) to respond verbally to most of the instructors' feedback received on his essays. The quotations from these data presented in English are my translations from the original Polish. Occasionally he used a mixture of Polish and English, but his utterances in English were seldom longer than a simple sentence. He did not produce many extralinguistic responses except for occasional laughs, sighs, or yawning which did not appear to be significant for the analysis. He often raised his voice when annoyed, angry, frustrated, or displeased with a particular commentary. The average number of utterance segments in each protocol was 18.5; the lowest number of utterance units was 5, the highest, 55.

Follow-up questionnaires

The purpose of the post-protocol questionnaires was to make sure that Adrian reflected consciously on each type of feedback offered on individual

essays in terms of appreciation, usefulness, comprehensibility, and amount of attention paid to each category. I wanted to see the match between what he reported doing or thinking and what he actually did and thought as revealed in his verbal reports.

I tabulated data from the follow-up questionnaires (questions 1 to 7). Mean scores were calculated then analysed quantitatively in order to establish what Adrian reported doing when attending to the instructors' feedback. Question #8 was analysed qualitatively to identify what he reported not understanding in an instructor's feedback, and to elicit examples of such types of feedback.

Corroboration and consistency of the analyses

Information from all sources of data was synthesised to establish the consistency between what the participant reported attending to (questionnaires) and what he actually attended to (think-aloud protocols), to obtain a detailed and corroborated picture of his attitudes to and preferences for feedback in terms of focus, mode and specificity, and his overall perception of feedback usefulness to improve his writing skills and strategies for handling it. Table 3 summarises how different sources of data were analysed with regard to specific issues addressed in the research questions introduced in Chapter 1.

Table 3: Summary of the procedures of data analysis.

Issues addressed in research questions	Type of data and analysis
Faculty expectations about the quality of students' writing.	Qualitative (handouts distributed by the faculty)
Focus and form of instructors' feedback.	Adrian's marked papers: Qualitative (categorisation of each type of feedback); Quantitative (frequency of occurrence of each category).
Adrian's overall perception and processing of instructors' feedback he received on his papers.	All data: Qualitative and impressionistic .
Areas of writing Adrian wanted his instructors to address.	Qualitative (think-aloud protocols and preliminary questionnaire); Quantitative (follow-up questionnaires).
Adrian's appreciation and strategies of handling feedback dealing with content, grammar, vocabulary, organisation and mechanics of his writing.	Qualitative (preliminary questionnaire and think-aloud protocols); Quantitative (follow-up questionnaires).
Adrian's opinions with regard to the usefulness of feedback he received.	Qualitative (think-aloud protocols and preliminary questionnaire); Quantitative (follow-up questionnaires).
Ways in which Adrian utilized or planned to utilise his instructors' feedback when working on subsequent papers.	Qualitative (preliminary questionnaire and think-aloud protocols).

Chapter 3

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the present study, organised around the specific research questions introduced in Chapter 1. The first research question concerned faculty feedback in terms of its form and focus, as well as faculty expectations about the quality of students' writing as stated in their course outlines. The second research question focused on the participant's perception and processing of that feedback with special attention to his preferences with regard to its focus, as well as the degree of appreciation of instructors' responses to the content, grammar, vocabulary, organisation and mechanics of his writing. The third research question regarded participant's opinions as to the overall usefulness of specific types of instructors' feedback, as well as whether and how he might utilise it when writing subsequent papers.

Research question 1: What do university instructors state in their course handouts as their expectations about the quality of students' writing? What do instructors respond to? Do they focus more on content or on form? What form does their feedback take?

My examination of the handouts distributed by the professors to their students revealed that according to them good organisation, logical argumentation, grammatical accuracy, and readability were particularly important components of a good essay. In other words, they said they mainly valued a proper essay structure and accuracy. In a student paper they wanted

to see a good introduction, strong thesis statement, precisely defined paragraphs, no grammar or spelling mistakes and no footnote errors or omissions (e.g., “essays which contain, in the opinion of the instructor, an excessive number of spelling and grammatical errors, or an insufficient number of footnotes, will be penalised accordingly” excerpt from one of the handouts). They expected students to stick to proper academic format and to the assigned length (e.g., “there will be a penalty for straying outside these limits”).

Only some instructors provided more detailed handouts on how to cope with writing essays and offered some writing tips (e.g., “In the body of the essay, arrange the points of your argument so that the strongest is closest to the end, for maximum effect. Make sure that each paragraph contains one idea. Briefly summarise the arguments before concluding”; “Grammar and readability count; good ideas will be lost in bad writing”; “Make an outline to divide your argument into sections which flow logically and coherently”). Nevertheless, the information provided by the professors was very general and mainly stressed grammar and mechanics. Only one of the instructors made an effort to provide examples of how to write a good thesis statement, effective introduction and conclusion.

Through examination of Adrian’s marked papers I identified four types of responses to student writing: teacher correction, marginal commentary, error identification, and coded feedback. In addition, all instructors provided an end-comment evaluating the paper in general. All instructors offered a comprehensive type of feedback, however they differed significantly in the overall amount of feedback given, as well as in the amount of focus placed on certain aspects of Adrian’s writing. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of

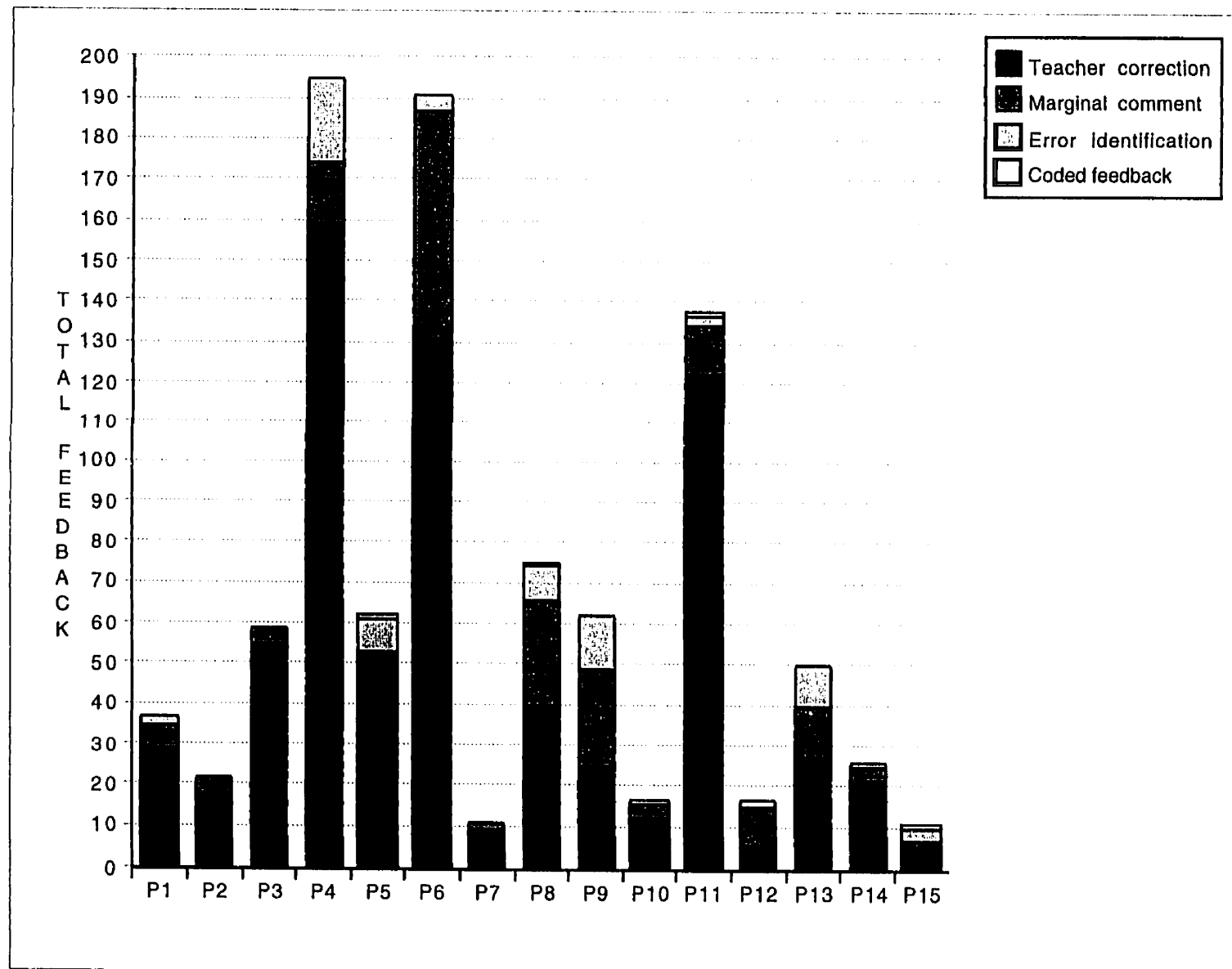


Figure 1: Distribution of feedback categories on individual papers.

feedback categories on individual papers. It shows the total amount of feedback and the proportion of specific feedback category provided on each paper. For example, the instructor marking paper 4 (P4) mostly employed teacher corrections (81.5%) complemented by error identifications (10.8%), and marginal comments (7.7%). As Figure 1 shows, there was considerable variability in the extent of the instructors' feedback from paper to paper.

Overall, teacher correction was by far the most prevalent mode of response to Adrian's writing, as is shown in Figure 2, accounting for over three quarters of the instructors' written responses. In contrast, marginal commentary accounted for less than a quarter of the total feedback provided.

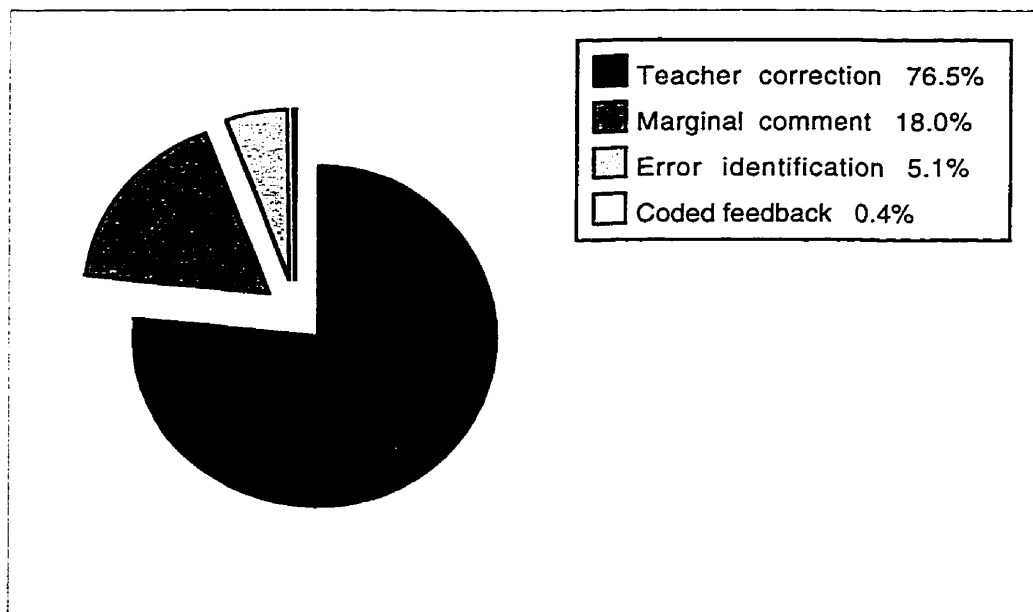


Figure 2: Distribution of instructors' responses (mean percentages).

Teacher correction was usually offered in conjunction with marginal comments. In general, the instructors' feedback focused primarily on grammar and mechanics rather than on content, and their responses rarely

took an interactive form (such as questions). Rather, they mostly took a prescriptive form, such as directives or declarative statements (e.g., “You should mention the gradual Polonization of the Lithuanian elite”; “This should have followed your discussion of these two movements”; “Clarify this!”). My examination of the marginal commentaries revealed that even this type of feedback concentrated more on grammar, mechanics, and organisation than on content. In general, most of the marginal comments referred to the language form (grammar, syntax, spelling, and punctuation), for example, “Put the punctuation before the footnote number” and format of the papers (footnotes, paragraphing, bibliography), for example, “This should definitely be one paragraph”.

My comparison of the instructors’ responses to content versus grammar, mechanics and organisation on individual papers (see Figure 3 and Appendix C) showed that the percentage of responses to content in individual papers ranged from 0% to 36.8%, which was a little over 1/3 of all responses. Surprisingly, some instructors’ chose not to respond to content at all, except in their end comments. My analysis of the written comments that Adrian addressed in his verbal reports in terms of their explicitness indicated that 61.6% of the comments were explicit in nature, out of which 44.9% were classified as corrective feedback and 16.9% as evaluative. With regard to implicit comments 24.7% were evaluative and 13.5% corrective in nature. In sum, Adrian, while reading the responses to his marked papers, mostly attended to explicit, corrective feedback from his instructors.

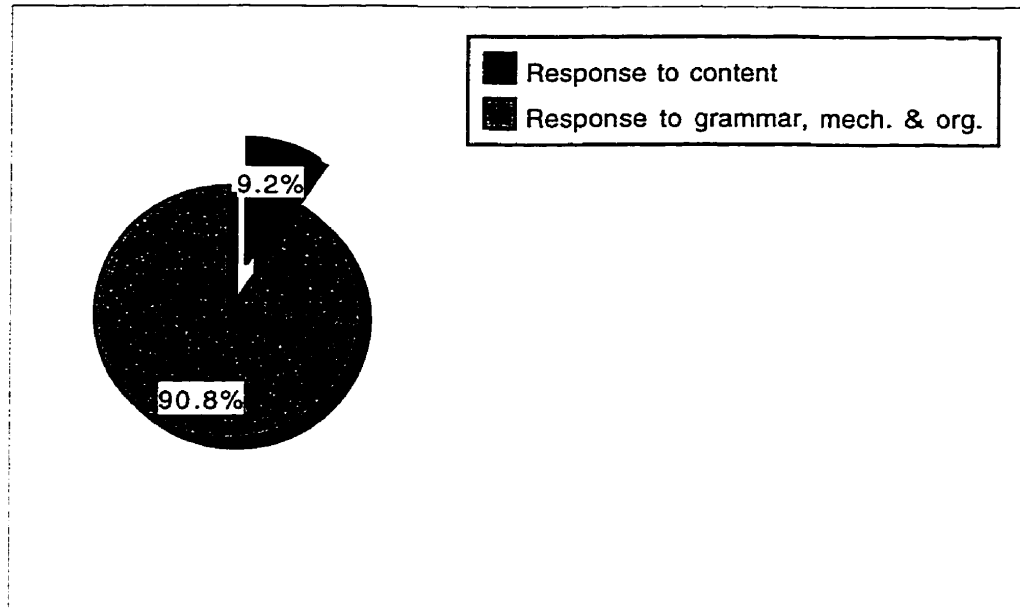


Figure 3: Comparison of comments on content vs. comments on grammar, mechanics and organisation (mean percentages).

A final evaluation comment appeared to be a standard procedure employed by all instructors. With two exceptions, where end-comments dealt exclusively with content, the remainder accounted for both content and language use. However, the emphasis differed in each case. Some instructors concentrated more on linguistic aspects, whereas others commented more on the quality of content. The overwhelming majority of them were very general and could be interchanged from one essay to another, for example:

A well done essay based on a solid reading of the sources; interesting well-balanced and well presented. The essay is relatively well written though there are some awkward passages which make for difficult reading. This needs to be worked on. I do not have any major criticisms, but in a few places I believe that greater clarification is required. Nevertheless, a very good essay.

A most excellent essay, for which I have few criticisms. Very well written, too, all the more commendable for a non-native speaker of English.

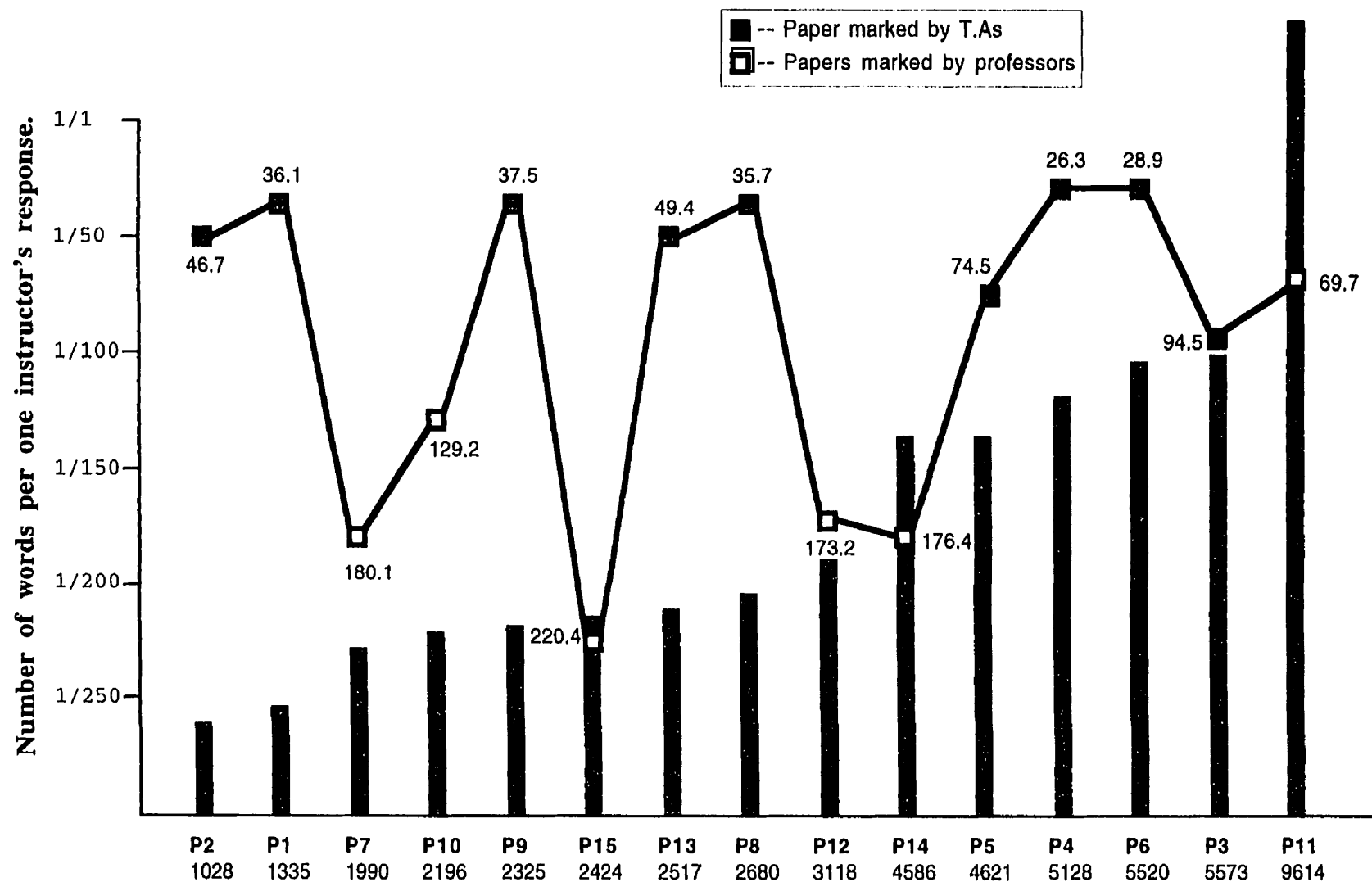
I also wanted to see whether there were any relations between the total amount of feedback and the length of papers. The data displayed in Figure 4 indicates that there was no particular, consistent relation between the length of papers and the amount of feedback supplied by the instructors. Grey vertical columns in Figure 4 represent the length of each paper; the black irregular line indicates the average number of words per one instructor response. For example, for P15 (2424 words) the proportion was 1 response per 220.4 words; for P11 (9614 words) there were 69.7 words per 1 response. In addition, this analysis revealed that in general the TAs provided more feedback on Adrian's papers than did the professors.

Research question 2: How does a nonnative university student perceive and process faculty feedback on his essays?

(a) What areas of writing does he want the professors to address in their comments?

(b) How does he attend to and value feedback on the content, organisation, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics of his writing?

Figure 5 illustrates Adrian's overall verbal behaviour during his think-aloud protocols while attending to the feedback he received from his instructors. The 'reading' category accounts for instances of his reading an instructor's comments or portions of his own text; 'describing' refers to occasions when he described feedback received or paraphrased instructors' comments or his own text; 'responding' refers to a variety of verbal behaviours when attending to feedback (e.g., answering instructors' comments, explaining what he had written or meant in a portion of his own text, agreeing or disagreeing, expressing emotions in words, etc.); 'assessing'



The number below each paper code indicates the total amount of words in each assignment.

Figure 4: Comparison of paper length (number of words) and amount of feedback provided on each (1 response per X number of words).

reflects time spent on the evaluation of the feedback and instructors, and the “other” category describes verbal behaviours not related to Adrian’s processing of written feedback, such as questions asked of the researcher. Examples for each category were provided in Chapter 2.

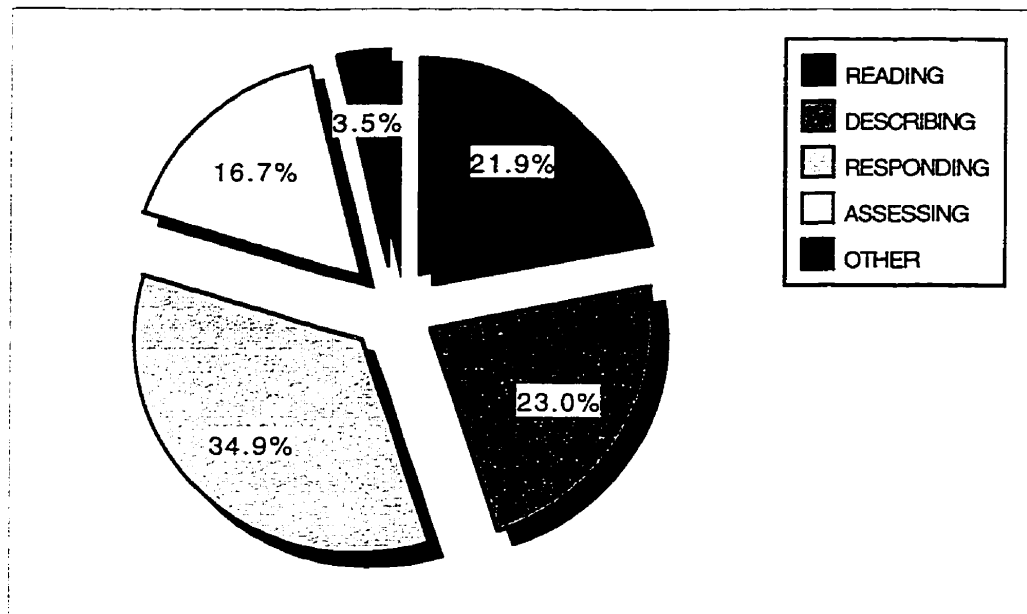


Figure 5: Breakdown of Adrian’s verbal behaviours (in response to all papers)

In general, my impression was that Adrian concentrated intently on reading and responding to the feedback on his papers. He would meticulously struggle to decipher comments that were difficult to read due to particular instructors’ poor handwriting and would patiently try to extricate meaning from them. Except for a few instances, Adrian had no major problems understanding the annotations on his essays unless they were illegible. Those few instances were symbols such as question- and checkmarks which he was not sure how to interpret or to what they referred. There was one instance of

coded feedback that dealt with a syntactic problem which Adrian did not understand at first, namely, “R-O” for run-on-sentence, but he eventually referred to the list of symbols and abbreviations the professor had provided earlier. Adrian did not have problems understanding either implicit or explicit annotations. However, he was often perplexed or annoyed by vague comments, such as ‘unclear’, or ‘awkward’:

“Awkward” (instructor comment) what’s awkward?
He’s awkward! (Protocol #6)

I’d like to know what exactly is unclear here. The sentence?
The paragraph? What I said or what? (Protocol #4)

What is this question mark? I don’t understand this
question mark! What does he mean by this question
mark?! (Protocol #13)

On the ‘just-received-back’ essays, Adrian would look at the grade first then read the end-comment before examining closer the instructor’s feedback within the body of the paper. See Appendix D for an example of one full transcribed protocol.

During the retrospective sessions, Adrian tended to explain the nature of the writing assignment first (i.e., to me) and then proceeded with more detailed examination of particular annotations. Very often, he would start a session by flipping through the pages and giving an overview of the feedback received before attending to individual comments, for example:

O.K. uhm this was a very short essay four-page book
review uhm and as usual there’s nothing here.
I’m examining the essay form the beginning to the end
and-and she corrected some ‘a’ and ‘the’ and other

things like that. There are two comments and nothing else and the end-comment is in one sentence. She wrote: 'good, well-written and thoughtful'. She didn't pay any attention to some of my ideas I was really hoping she would, e.g., what I wrote about mentality. (Protocol#2).

This behaviour suggests that the think-aloud protocols were, to some extent, generated as an explanatory conversation with me, rather than solely representing Adrian's usual behaviour when attending to instructors' feedback.

A typical pattern of Adrian's verbal behaviour emerged over the protocols: he paid little attention to or totally ignored feedback on grammar and mechanics and practically 'hunted' for comments on his ideas. He verbally acknowledged feedback on surface language features, but often dismissed these as irrelevant or useless:

There's something about grammar here, but I'm not going to question it because I don't know much about it. (Protocol#13)

Some grammar corrections here doesn't matter. (Protocol#14)

Two grammar errors corrected, punctuation, eeeeh. Who cares? (Protocol#15)

Here he corrected 3 or 4 grammar mistakes which I don't give a damn about. If I have to be honest I won't remember this anyway. (Protocol#15)

In other words, Adrian simply observed the existence of this kind of feedback, saying, for instance, "there's 'a' supplied here .. 'the' crossed out..", but he would not address or analyse them in any specific way. Adrian's only distinctive reaction was his occasional agreement with corrections: "O.K. I know I have problems with articles ..." When evaluating the feedback,

Adrian repeatedly expressed his disappointment and frustration with the fact that the instructors attended extensively to grammar instead of concentrating more on the ideas presented:

This is nothing -- nothing absolutely nothing.
I get my essay back and there's only a grade, nothing
on the content, only some grammar corrections. (Protocol #2)

He concentrated too much on grammar, there's
almost nothing on the content! (Protocol #5)

Adrian felt that sometimes some of the instructors got so involved in editing or correcting the surface errors that they seemed to lose track of the development of ideas and argumentation:

Instructor's Comment: When did this take place?

The problem is when someone tries to correct all
the grammatical mistakes he loses track of the narration.
I explained everything in the previous paragraphs: the wars
dates and so on. His obsession to correct all 'a' and 'the'-he-
he lost track of what I'm saying in my essay so it means he's
not interested in the content but in grammatical accuracy. (Protocol#6)

Corrections involving lexical choices generated more interest from Adrian than those dealing with grammar. On a couple of occasions, Adrian admitted to having had problems finding words that would exactly convey what he intended to say. For example, in one of the papers, the professor replaced Adrian's phrase "conquering city bazaars" with "capturing the civic markets" :

“Capturing civic markets” of Flanders. Capturing. It sounds like English now. That’s my- I guess I do a lot of direct translations from Polish and they don’t mean what I wanted to say. (Protocol #11)

Also, Adrian voiced some appreciation for comments on the format of a paper. On two occasions during the think-aloud protocols he overtly expressed his appreciation for such comments and reported to have used the information when writing subsequent essays:

Here’s a comment on where to put the page number, about footnotes-technical stuff which is useful because I learned how to do it and I did it this way later on (Protocol#1)

As already mentioned, Adrian showed an enormous interest in comments on the substantive content of his papers. He spent 78.8% of the protocol time reading (or describing) and responding to them in great detail (answering instructors’ questions, explaining, giving information, agreeing or disagreeing, etc.), for example:

Instructor’s comment: Some of your footnotes contain info which perhaps should be attributed to a source.

No, I don’t agree here because the information included in my footnotes is common knowledge on the topic, for example I footnoted “Peace of Karlovitz” explaining who took part in it and this information doesn’t have to be referenced. Everybody knows who took part in the Peace of Karlovitz! (Protocol#2)

Oh, yeah. Here I should have written “Dnieper”. My mistake. He was right to correct it. (Protocol#14)

Adrian reacted very emotionally to some comments, especially to those provided by TAs, which in his opinion were often biased, authoritative,

harsh, misplaced, countered his ideas or showed lack of expertise in the subject-area on the part of the instructor. For instance:

Instructor's comment: The objective wasn't simply to safe-guard the eastern parts of the Kingdom.

I'm very 'grateful' for this info (ironic), but if he had something to say then maybe on what ground does he say it?(raised voice) Because what... he's a tutor so he knows better and I'm just a student so I'm stupid?(angry) Well that's not an argument for me. What he says here has confirmation only in communist textbooks on Polish history and those published in the Soviet Union. (Protocol#4)

Anger did not seem to cloud his reasoning, however, because on many occasions Adrian would explain and extensively support his point of view. The comments which evoked strong emotional reactions on his part often led to Adrian expressing judgments, mostly unfavourable, about the instructors who wrote them. For example:

Instructor's comment: Can you speak of modern nationalism in the 18th century?

How can he even ask that?(angry) Doesn't he- Damn! O.K. In history, the outbreak of the French Revolution is commonly associated with the birth of modern nationalism. The Revolution took place in 1789. 1789! So it is 18th century! It's all logical. It wouldn't hurt to think a little for a change! (Protocol #6)

It is worth noting here that the analysis presented above of instructors' comments that Adrian addressed in his responses revealed that 41.6% of them were evaluative in nature.

Adrian reacted much more favourably to comments presented as questions and suggestions, rather than directives or blunt disagreement with

his ideas. He was appreciative of comments which showed an instructor's interest in the actual ideas presented in the paper and credited him for his contribution. For example, Adrian reacted very favourably to the following comment, where the professor not only acknowledged and appreciated his contribution, but also initiated a discussion of the same development but in a geographical area other than discussed in Adrian's paper. Adrian felt this comment treated him as an equal intellectual partner in the written discussion:

Your speculations about low mortalities from the plague are certainly well-worth considering and may indeed supply the real answer to this vexing problem. Though how we can also explain the low mortality from the plague in Milan and the Flemish cities in the 1350s is more problematic. (Paper#11)

It is evident throughout the data that Adrian reacted more favourably to feedback offered by the professors than to feedback offered by tutors. Also, he expressed many opinions, both positive and negative about the instructors in general; however, the unfavourable ones were addressed exclusively to TAs. Adrian was frustrated not only with the focus and mode of their feedback, but with the quality of information included in the TAs comments. In his opinion, some of the TAs showed a lack of knowledge of the field; Adrian resented being evaluated by someone who was less competent than he was in the discipline, for instance:

How can someone be a tutor and have absolutely no idea about the topic? Total ignorance! I think that before someone gets a job as a tutor, he or she should be administered an IQ test. And those intellectually challenged

should be assigned to cleaning the johns at the university, or they should open a business. (Protocol #4)

Instructor's comment: This was one of the reasons why the Lithuanian gentry supported the union of 1569. Lithuanian gentry was not as active as Polish szlachta. For example, they did not have representation in the sejmiki.

First of all there was never a gentry in Lithuania, but nobility! They didn't have representation in the sejmiki because there were no sejmiki in Lithuania. I'd like to know how he came to the conclusion that they supported the union so much? He probably read a book containing some banalities and that's the result. It's not even worth talking about. He has absolutely no idea! (Protocol #4)

For this reason, it is not surprising that Adrian spent a considerable amount of protocol time assessing feedback received in general, often questioning its purpose and usefulness. He often came back to one and the same issue more than once. That is, on the whole (except for one notable instance described above), Adrian felt that in most cases his effort to contribute intellectually through his writing had not been appreciated, or at least had gone unnoticed or uncredited by the instructors:

There's nothing about the work I put in this essay, my original perspective; not even a mention of my intellectual contribution. (Protocol #3)

Indeed, in general Adrian did not find the instructors' feedback useful because it focused too much on surface errors and insufficiently responded to content. Adrian did not find this very insightful or educational, as can be observed in the following response:

It's simply pathetic! I don't want to be mean but I'm afraid I might have gotten more intelligent feedback from my car

mechanic. It's a shame for the university. This guy is doing his Ph.D. and someone allowed him to teach and he doesn't know the first thing about the topic. (Protocol #6)

When Adrian gave overviews of his feedback and/or evaluated it, his appreciation of teacher feedback on particular essays (or lack of thereof), as well as his preferences for specific types of feedback were particularly conspicuous:

He could have written something about what-what he liked what he didn't like. He didn't write anything. So I guess it means he liked everything. Well that's great but I would like to know what he liked more what less what was interesting what wasn't right... (Protocol #15)

Instructor's comment: I do not have major or substantive criticisms but in a few places I believe that greater clarification/detail is required.

If he has those criticisms in a few places why didn't he indicate them in the text? Why bother saying it? It doesn't tell me anything. (Protocol#5)

The data from the follow-up questionnaires confirmed that in general Adrian did not like the feedback he had received on his essays, not finding it useful. For particular categories of feedback, Adrian reported to have paid considerable amount of attention to feedback on content, very little attention to feedback on organisation, mechanics and vocabulary, and no attention at all to feedback on grammar, which further corroborate the findings from the verbal protocols (see Table 4 which shows mean scores for questions 1 to 7). In addition, he reported to have experienced major problems with instructors' handwriting on more than one occasion, and he just reported one instance

Table 4: Responses to 15 marked papers. Post-protocol questionnaire (mean scores; maximum =5).

Questionnaire question	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>
1. How much did you like your instructor's feedback on this particular essay?	2.3	1.2
2. How useful did you find your instructor's feedback on this essay?	1.7	1.1
3. How much attention did you pay to the instructor's feedback on the content/ideas of your essay?	3.4	1.0
4. How much attention did you pay to the instructor's feedback involving organisation?	2.3	1.1
5. How much attention did you pay to the instructor's feedback involving grammar?	1.5	0.7
6. How much attention did you pay to the instructor's feedback involving vocabulary?	2.3	1.1
7. How much attention did you pay to the instructor's feedback involving mechanics?	2.0	1

when he did not understand specific grammar terminology (Question 8).

Research question 3: Does he find their feedback useful and, if so, which types does he find most and least helpful? How does he report he might utilise their feedback to improve his subsequent essays?

The data from all sources indicate that in general Adrian did not find his instructors' feedback useful. For example, in the preliminary questionnaire Adrian stated he did not think that this feedback helped him much. His overall impression was that the instructors failed to analyse the content of his essays and instead concentrated, according to him, on secondary aspects such as surface errors, length of paragraphs or how to make footnotes. Since Adrian felt he did not have many problems with these aspects of his writing, he said he did not find this kind of feedback very helpful. The think-aloud protocols further document this finding, since only on two occasions did Adrian mention having found particular comments useful, and he reported utilising them in subsequent papers. Furthermore, the analysis of Adrian's responses to question 2 of the follow-up questionnaires, which aimed to measure his perception of the usefulness of his instructors' feedback he received on individual papers, also indicates that he did not find the feedback useful (see Table 4).

Consequently, because Adrian did not find the instructors' feedback useful, in his verbal reports he did not generally report utilising it. Also, in the preliminary questionnaire Adrian said that frequently he did nothing with the feedback received. In addition, in the same questionnaire he reported sometimes making a mental note or referring to previous essays, but

rarely asking instructors for explanations or consulting reference materials. Since the think-aloud protocols document just one instance of Adrian's consulting reference material, i.e., a professor's list explaining how the errors were coded, and only two instances of referring to previous essays, Adrian's strategies of handling the feedback (i.e., doing nothing with it) appear to be consistent across these two sources of data. There is also a consistency in Adrian's handling the feedback he could not understand. In such situations, in the preliminary questionnaire, he reported getting angry at first and then trying to figure out its meaning. When he failed to accomplish that he would usually decide to ignore the feedback. The verbal reports reveal that Adrian put a considerable effort into trying to make some sense of very vague comments (and they were often a source of frustration for him); however when it proved impossible he would dismiss them believing that it must have been unimportant to the instructor because he or she had not put much effort into trying to express him or herself clearly.

Corroboration of multiple data sources

Comparison of results from all sources of data indicated that there was a consistency between what Adrian reported attending to (in the questionnaires) and what he actually attended to (in the think-aloud protocols). However, there was some discrepancy between the amount of attention he reported paying to feedback on content and the actual amount of attention he paid to it. In the post-protocol questionnaires Adrian claimed to pay a considerable amount of attention to this kind of feedback, whereas the analysis of data from verbal reports indicated that he attended to comments about content a great deal. The analyses presented in this chapter also indicate

a slight mismatch between Adrian's expectations and preferences about his instructors' feedback and the actual feedback received on his papers. Adrian wanted and expected feedback primarily on his ideas, whereas the instructors tended to concentrate more on other aspects of his writing, namely, surface language features, the style and format of his papers.

Summary of findings

1. Adrian's instructors expected well-structured and error-free essays (as specified in their course handouts). In their responses to Adrian's papers they accounted for both content and text-related aspects, but tended to focus more on the latter. They used a mixture of various responding techniques: teacher correction, written commentary, error identification, and coded feedback. Teacher correction and written comments were identified as the most popular combination.
2. Adrian displayed a variety of verbal behaviours when attending to the instructors' feedback, such as reading, describing, responding, and assessing, which can be perceived as typical for a person interacting with a written text. Adrian's responses, from all sources of data, revealed that he wanted and expected feedback primarily on his ideas; the marking of other aspects of his writing were of secondary (e.g., vocabulary and organisation) or no importance at all (e.g., grammar and mechanics) to him.
3. Adrian did not appreciate and did not find the feedback useful; consequently he did not report planning to utilise it when working on subsequent writing assignments.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION

This chapter first discusses the findings of the present study with regard to my initial assumptions introduced in Chapter 1 then relates them to previous research in L1 and L2 contexts. Then I discuss the value of a case study approach and address the issues of generalizability, reliability, and validity of the findings from the present study. The chapter ends by suggesting implications for history instructors, nonnative students attending content courses, and for further research.

My initial assumptions that the history instructors would concentrate more on the content than on grammar, mechanics and organisation, and that their feedback would take an interactive form through questions and commentaries primarily on content, were not supported by the analyses of the data I collected. The analyses instead confirmed Horowitz's (1986) claim that university instructors tend to pay extensive attention to the linguistic aspects of L2 students' text, such as sentence-level grammar, use of discourse markers, spelling, and punctuation. This view is also in concert with Zamel's (1985) observations of responses to writing in an L1 setting, which revealed that even composition teachers attended to surface level features focusing on problems of mechanics, usage, and style.

On the other hand, these findings stand in opposition to the results obtained by Sorensen (1985), Prior (1991), and Allison (1995). Sorensen (1985), who analysed written comments on students papers as a part of her students'

needs analysis to determine what the faculty tended to comment on, found that the faculty considered logical development of ideas to be more important than grammatical accuracy:

Since I wanted to check the instructor's attention to both grammatical mistakes and logical flaws, my analysis of the reports was concerned with identifying two types of problems: those related to grammar and those related to logical argumentation. What is significant is that the comments which the instructor made on the students' work generally did not occur where grammatical errors occurred, but were related principally to information gaps in the students' presentation of their arguments (p. 63).

Similarly, Prior (1991), who observed the responding practices of one professor to writing assignments produced over the duration of a graduate course by both native and nonnative students, observed that the professor responded "somewhat differently" to the writing of L2 students than to that of the L1 students; however, the focus of his responses was primarily on the topical content. It is worth pointing out, though, that the comments analysed by Sorensen and Prior, respectively, were provided by one professor only. Finally, Allison (1995) claimed that professors first of all valued the content and coherence of arguments in academic writing: They emphasised content and thinking skills rather than linguistic accuracy and did not appear to be affected by cross-cultural differences. Those faculty did not separate content and language, but the issues of coherence, originality, and critical reasoning were of significant importance to them.

Taking into consideration the findings of the present study and those from previous research, neither the responding practices of the university

instructors nor their expectations as to the quality of writing submitted by L2 writers can be described as uniform. The results of the present study imply that both content and accuracy count for the history instructors. However, what they considered in their overall evaluation is far from clear. Although Adrian received more feedback on text-related issues (basically in the form of teacher corrections), I assume that his instructors considered the quality of the content of his papers an important factor since the grades he was assigned were quite high, ranging from A++ to B-. One of his essays had 159 error corrections and was still graded as 'A', which implies that either the quality of the content was considered foremost or the errors were not considered too offensive, or both. The only identifiable criterion that I could observe employed while grading his papers was whether the papers were submitted on time (the actual penalties for failing to meet the deadline ranged from 1 to 5% per day depending on the course). I did not find the end-comments provided at the end of each of Adrian's papers very helpful either in establishing the instructors' evaluation criteria. The majority of them were vague ("well-written essay" or "I don't have any major criticisms") so do not actually provide any consistent clues as to what the instructors generally considered in their final evaluations.

My assumption regarding L2 student's responses to instructor feedback -- that the nonnative university student would react in a similar way to L1 students towards the feedback received on his essays -- was partially supported by the findings of this study. In terms of focus, Adrian was primarily interested in instructors' responses to the content of his papers, which is in line with findings in the L1 context (Straub, 1996; Dohrer, 1991), however, he did not react very favourably to feedback on surface features. Furthermore,

this finding stands in opposition to the results of several studies conducted in the regular ESL context which indicated that L2 students wanted and expected all their errors to be corrected, and an instructor's focus on the content of their writing was of secondary importance (Cohen, 1987; Leki, 1991; Radecki & Swales, 1988; Saito, 1994). Adrian perceived feedback related to vocabulary and the organisation of his ideas more favourably than feedback on grammar, nevertheless, it was still of secondary importance. During the think-aloud protocols, Adrian repeatedly expressed his disappointment or frustration with the fact that the instructors attended extensively to grammar instead of concentrating more on the ideas he had presented. As predicted, his lack of appreciation of feedback on language form manifested itself especially in those cases when quantity of such feedback became quite overwhelming for him. Excessive amounts of such feedback were essentially a turn-off for him, which probably explains why he tended to ignore them.

Adrian's reactions imply that he views essay-writing as a form of communication with his instructors which gives him a chance to demonstrate mastery and understanding of the course content and offers an opportunity to present his own ideas and opinions. He appreciated and valued comments that reflected the instructors' involvement in what he said and which engaged him in an exchange of ideas related to a particular issue under consideration. As I had expected, in general Adrian was not against criticism; he wanted to know both what he did well and what he did wrong. Nevertheless, he looked unfavourably at authoritative comments referring to the content of his papers which countered his ideas and tried to impose the instructor's views on the topic. On the other hand, if the instructor came across as caring and thoughtful, Adrian's reactions were much more

favourable, even when he disagreed with the particular written comment.

Taking into account the mismatch between Adrian's expectations and preferences about specific feedback (focus on content) and the actual feedback he received on his papers (more attention to language form than to content), as well as his overall dissatisfaction with the faculty responses, it does not appear surprising that Adrian did not find the feedback on his papers useful and not even once indicated to plan to use it when writing subsequent essays.

Value of a case study approach

I found the case study approach to be an appropriate, useful, and revealing research strategy. Unlike surveys and experimental designs which necessarily deal with limited and predetermined sets of variables, a case study presents an advantage to account, from a holistic perspective, for particular characteristics of research participants as well as for multiple aspects of the immediate context. It is oriented toward the discovery of the 'new' rather than verification of predetermined hypotheses. Its major value lies in the opportunity to use various sources of data and employ both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. The area I was investigating had scarcely been studied in previous research, so worth analysing from this naturalistic, in-depth perspective.

In the present study I used different sources of evidence (e.g., written documents, think-aloud protocols, and questionnaires) and I analysed the data both qualitatively and quantitatively. Corroboration of complementary data sources and methods of analysis enabled me to develop converging lines of inquiry and to confirm my impressions of specific findings. In this way I was also able to enhance the validity of my findings. To enhance the

reliability of my study, I made extensive efforts to provide in this thesis detailed descriptions of the participant, the context, the procedures of data collection, coding, and analysis. Also, to verify the reliability of my coding I arranged for coding checks by independent interraters. Consequently, I believe that my study could easily be replicated in a similar context with other L2 university students.

A single-subject case study obviously raises a question about the generalizability of its findings. The experience gained in the present study provided information on feedback offered by the instructors in one department of history and one nonnative student's reactions to such feedback. The results imply what these instructors pay attention to, but it is difficult to generalise and treat their feedback as a predictor of faculty expectations about the quality of historical papers. Also, the student's reactions can be seen as suggestive and not necessarily typical. As indicated earlier, I selected him for the research because he was unique. Therefore, the findings of the present study must be seen as suggestive, but not conclusive. Nevertheless, the findings documented do add usefully to the existing research on L2 students' reactions to their instructors' feedback. The value of the present study lies in the fact that unlike previous research, which examined students' reactions to teacher feedback within regular ESL composition courses, it explored a unique pedagogical context, so far unaccounted for by existing, published research. In particular, I have documented a nonnative university student's perception of instructors' feedback provided on the actual writing assignments produced for regular content-oriented university courses over the period of several years. Moreover, the results of this study significantly differ from those obtained in

previous research in the ESL context, namely, the participant in my study wanted and expected instructors' feedback to focus on the content of his papers and not on language form.

Due to its exploratory character, the present study offers a theoretical framework for future inquiry and can be seen as hypotheses generating. For example, I came to the following interpretations worth pursuing in future studies: instructors' previous experience and exposure to L2 writers may influence both the form and focus of their written responses; the pedagogical context, proficiency in L2, and the degree of mastery of writing skills may have a direct influence on L2 students' perceptions, as well as expectations and preferences about their instructors' feedback; additionally, with regard to content-area instruction, the nature of the discipline for which the papers are written, as well as L2 students' overall disciplinary literacy may be important factors influencing their perceptions and processing of instructors' feedback.

Implications

The findings of the present study have implications for professors and TAs conducting history courses, nonnative students enrolled in such courses and for future research. Firstly, the results of the present study indicated that the actual feedback provided by instructors on the participant's papers was not congruent with the student's expectations and preferences about it. This mismatch suggests that instructors may find it necessary to reevaluate their responding practices on a regular basis taking into account linguistically diverse students and what they think and do with their written feedback. In this way university instructors may be able to respond to these students' writing more helpfully. New professors and TAs, on the other hand,

may want to participate in orientation training to familiarise themselves with various marking techniques and evaluation criteria at their universities. Furthermore, as this study has shown, authoritative and undiplomatic responses led to strong emotional reactions on the part of the student. This finding suggests that instructors should also pay specific attention to the modality of their written comments to avoid potential detrimental effects on students' motivation, attitudes towards instruction and instructors, and their self-esteem in general.

Secondly, the findings of the present study have implications for nonnative students attending discipline-specific courses such as history. Students should reflect on the usefulness of the feedback they receive on their papers to get a clear sense of their individual needs and expectations. In case their needs are not met, instead of building up their frustrations and resentment (as was the case of the participant in this study), they may want to approach their instructors and voice their concerns, requesting specific attention to certain areas of their writing. By doing so they may be able to negotiate the preferred type of feedback, and consequently be able to benefit more productively from it. Also, to achieve their career goals the students might need to demonstrate native-like proficiency in English. Therefore, it should be in their best interests to pay attention to their instructors' feedback dealing with linguistic aspects of their writing in order to continually improve their English.

Finally, many questions deserve further research. Just to name a few: Are there differences in reactions to instructors' feedback among L2 students from different L1 backgrounds? Do faculty respond to L2 writing in a different way than to L1 writing? Is there a relationship between L2 students'

proficiency in English and their reactions to the correction of linguistic errors? Despite the value of in-depth case studies, to address these issues more generally, future research will have to consider larger numbers of L2 students from different L1 backgrounds. Variables such as the academic discipline pursued, proficiency in English, proficiency in writing, and the degree of mastery of the course content should be considered in future inquiry. A comparison group of L1 students attending the same courses and fulfilling the same writing requirements would provide an opportunity to compare instructors' responses to nonnative students with those offered to native students. Obtaining more information than I did about the particular instructors and the context of their courses would also be helpful in understanding more fully the dynamics of faculty responses and students' perception and utilisation of it: for example, their years of experience, exposure to L2 students, training, if any, how to mark academic papers, and their criteria for evaluation.

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Appendix A

Preliminary questionnaire

1. How would you rate yourself as a student?

Excellent __

Good __

Fair __

Poor __

COMMENTS:

2. How would you rate your knowledge of the subject you are studying?

Excellent __

Good __

Fair __

Poor __

COMMENTS:

3. How would you rate your skills in writing essays?

Excellent __

Good __

Fair __

Poor __

COMMENTS:

4. How important is it to you to have as few language errors as possible in your written work?

1
not at all

2
not important

3
somewhat
important

4
important

5
very much

COMMENTS:

5. How important is it to your professors for you to have as few errors in English as possible?

1	2	3	4	5
not at all				very much

COMMENTS:

6. When writing your essays, how much do you think about the audience you are writing it for, i.e., your professors/TAs?

1	2	3	4	5
not at all				very much

COMMENTS:

7. Do you think you require special treatment from your professors since you are a nonnative speaker of English? Explain why/why not.

8. What do you usually do after you read your professor's feedback?

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|-----------|
| • Make a mental note | Frequently ___ Sometimes___ | Rarely ___ | Never ___ |
| • Ask for professor explanation | Frequently ___ Sometimes___ | Rarely ___ | Never ___ |
| • Refer back to previous essays | Frequently ___ Sometimes___ | Rarely ___ | Never ___ |
| • Consult reference material | Frequently ___ Sometimes___ | Rarely ___ | Never ___ |
| • Do nothing | Frequently ___ Sometimes___ | Rarely ___ | Never ___ |

9. What do you do about feedback you don't understand?

10. Do you feel that your professors' feedback helps you improve your future essays?

Note: question 1 was adapted from Cohen, 1987; questions 4-5 from Leki, 1991; question 8 from Saito, 1994; questions 9 and 10 from Ferris, 1995.

Appendix B

Follow-up questionnaire

1. How much did you like your instructor's feedback on this particular paper?

1	2	3	4	5
not at all				very much

2. How useful did you find your instructor's feedback on this paper?

1	2	3	4	5
not at all				very much

3. How much attention did you pay to the instructor's feedback on the content/ideas of your paper?

1	2	3	4	5
none				a lot

NOT APPLICABLE _____

4. How much attention did you pay to the instructor's feedback involving organisation?

1	2	3	4	5
none				a lot

NOT APPLICABLE _____

5. How much attention did you pay to the instructor's feedback involving grammar?

1	2	3	4	5
none				a lot

NOT APPLICABLE _____

6. How much attention did you pay to the instructor's feedback involving vocabulary?

1	2	3	4	5
none				a lot

NOT APPLICABLE _____

7. How much attention did you pay to the instructor's feedback involving mechanics (i.e. punctuation, spelling, etc.)?

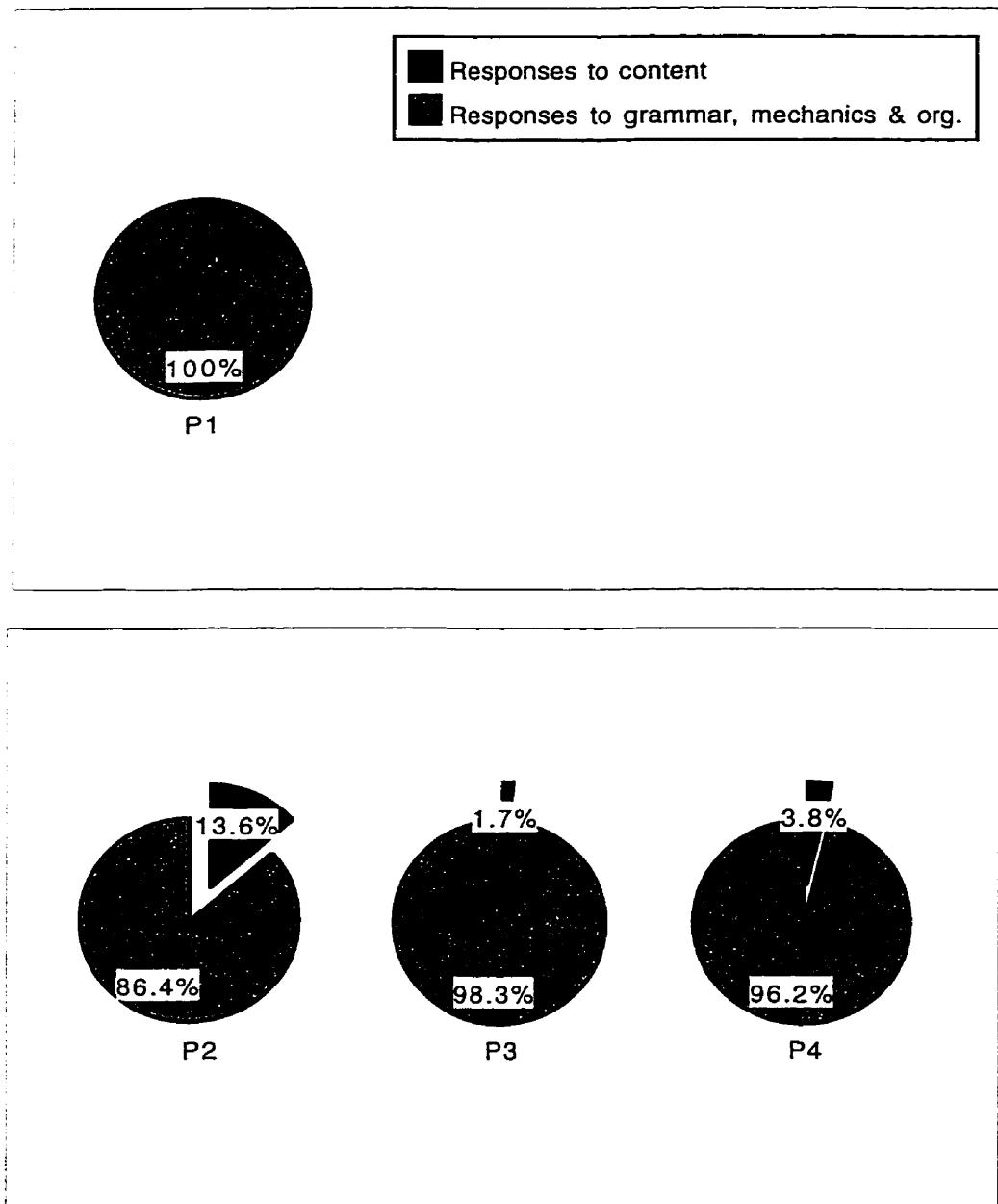
1	2	3	4	5
none				a lot

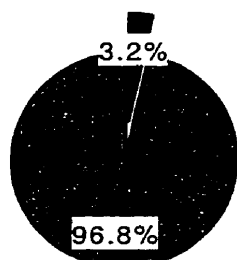
NOT APPLICABLE _____

8. Was there any feedback that you didn't understand? If so, give examples.

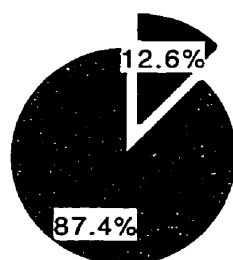
APPENDIX C: Comparison of responses to content vs. responses to grammar, mechanics, & organization on individual papers.

The following figures compare the amount of feedback to content versus grammar, mechanics and organisation provided *within* the body of each paper. There were no responses to the content of Papers 1 or 15 within the body of the paper, however, both instructors addressed content-related issues in their end-comments.

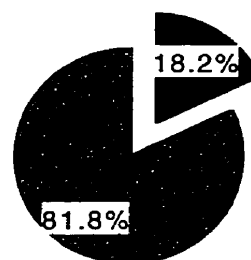




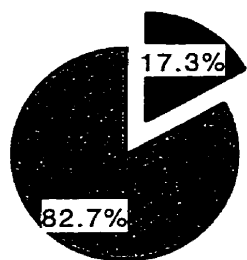
P5



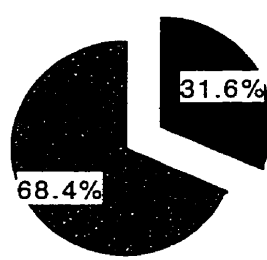
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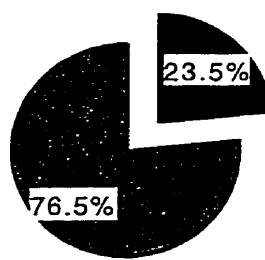
P7



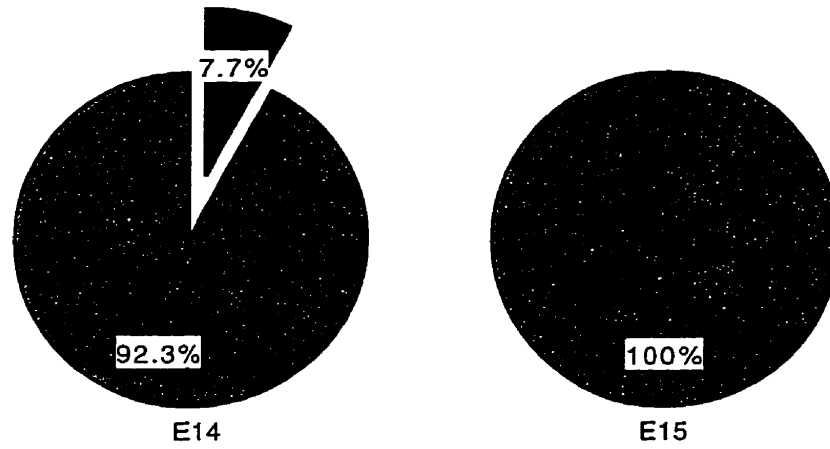
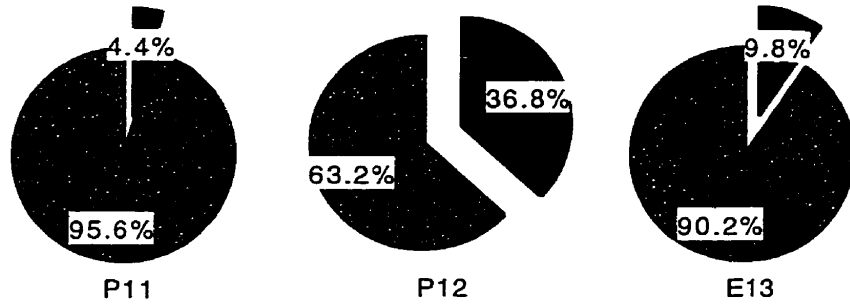
P8



P9



P10



APPENDIX D: A sample, full translated and transcribed think aloud protocol, #14.

NOTE: Spaces indicate speech pauses of 3 or more seconds; instructor's comments are in italics.

Let's see the grade first- oh, God so much scribbling I'm not sure that I'll be able to decipher it uhm *my compliments on a fine piece of research based on the eeeee... extensive - probably or something like that - of a good list of books - aaaaa- your focus on the -on the mines? -evolution? -of a mines evolution? - of Cossack administration and on the indi- indicta- Jesus ! that's something else change makes good sense hmm the only -only something I don't know I miss is the looooood socio-economic something that supported events you discuss you still have the usual? difficulties with articles aaaaaa etc that is a passing problem.*

OK. First of all it would be a good idea if he worked on his handwriting or he could have printed it. That's what computers are for if someone has bad handwriting.

Aah in general I'm satisfied with his response. He put a lot of work into it. The comment is positive. But because - probably because I can hardly decipher it it seems chaotic, but it's OK.

He could have written one or two sentences what he thought about those developments. I would be interested in his point of view.

mmm let's see what's within the essay

ahm he corrected some grammatical errors in a few places. Nothing serious. Again here some more corrections. Oh, here's something sensible *on -damn! on the protection - <inaudible>*

Damn! You cannot decipher it for me, can you? OK....

mmmmmm *one side? against Tartar Muslims and .something* -<inaudible> is it about -*protection of the Ukrainian peasants'* ?<reads a portion of his own text silently> OK. I could add this sentence, but it didn't refer to- in general that's right I presented it from too narrow a perspective. OK. I agree.

Something's supposed to be awkward here mmmmm <reads his own text silently>. Yeah, it is in fact a bit awkward. I agree.

mmmm oh yeah, I should have written "Dnieper" here. My mistake. He was very right to correct it. Very right very right. <flips pages>

Of the Sech - I can't decipher it at all! His handwriting is- Jesus!<reads the comment muttering to himself>. Here he substituted 'be' with a word I have no idea-

Nothing here. Lots of checkmarks - oh, my God! <reads the comment muttering to himself> 'the' or maybe not 'the'. Jesus! It's absolutely illegible.

<flips pages> Absolutely nothing on the following pages <keeps flipping the pages>

Again a sentence that is supposedly awkward. Do I feel like reading it?

hmm <reads a portion of his own text silently> Yes. Indeed it is awkward.

OK. He marked those sentences *awkward* that were really awkward. Mmm no comments about my appendix, and my appendix was interesting.....

aaa Lots of checkmarks next to the books listed in the annotated bibliography. The annotated bibliography was required. There are so many mistakes in it. Mainly 'the' ahm.

Maybe it's true .

<reads comment silently> In general there are no substantial comments about my essay. One short comment that my essay was quite OK. His point of view is missing - one or two sentences about- I already said that before...

Uhm he checked it well. No stupid grammar rules or thing like that. What he found awkward was really awkward. Probably there were many more awkward things but he didn't mark anything else. Uhm his handwriting could have been more legible, or he could have printed at least the end-comment. Some instructors do that. I don't have much more to say..

I'm not thinking anything anymore (laughs)

In general it's O.K.