

Tutoring Analysis and Reflection Paper

Student's Name

Name of Institution

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Learning to write properly in a second language is an extremely complicated task. It is even more complex by virtue of insufficient proficiency in the language, first language literacy, differences in culture and rhetorical approach to the text. Personally I was not sure that I could cope with that, but I admired the courage of taking such a difficult task. The anxiety that I had experienced when I had tackled academic writing in a second language enabled me to get a deeper understanding of my tutee's difficulties and feelings. In this paper, I will analyze my tutee's strengths and address some of her problems.

At our first meeting, I fell under the impression of her as of a very sociable and enthusiastic person. She always talks and writes freely in English, without worrying about the word choice or grammar. Her main focus is on getting the meaning across. She told me many times when I corrected her, "It is not my fault. Learning English is so hard" or "English grammar is crazy". She goes at learning English boldly, and she is neither shy nor afraid of her mistakes.

She is from a large city in China. She finished her formal education there and moved to the U.S. to get her master's degree and continue her life here. She doesn't have siblings, and her parents pay for her education and living. During our meeting, she described her past experience of learning English in China. Her English classes were extremely poor, since the teachers were not fluent in English. Word memorization was a norm there. She said she had never been asked to make up her own sentences. In addition, she made another important observation; the text structure in Chinese was almost the same as the English writing structure, in particular the four-paragraph essay structures that comprise writing hooks, thesis statements, details, and conclusions. These similarities continue to influence her writing in English and give her writing more strength, as she does not have to get used to a completely different rhetorical structure.

Most of her writing problems at this point are mainly related to the lower level writing skills such as vocabulary and grammar. The higher-level writing skills are not the main issues with her writing now because she has sufficient knowledge of the text structure, text organization, and idea development, though not at the professional level.

She showed certain creativity and confidence in structuring her writing; this is her strength transferred from her first language literacy. She adds good supporting details, reasoning, and examples.

Currently, she is studying at the American language institute. She started from level one up to level four, which she is repeating this semester. She seems to be always complaining about the amount of homework she has to do. It includes writing essays, giving presentations, and doing grammar exercises every week. Strange though it may sound, she does not call up these practices after she writes them down. Studying an intensive English program usually implies a great amount of work. Teachers give the students too many things to do trying to help them catch up to the university level in a short amount of time. Therefore, my tutee is trying to catch up with this fast learning process, but this method makes her overwhelmed.

Her attitude to her teachers is very positive. She has good relationships with them, and they are trying to encourage her as much as they can. Her valuation of her English language abilities as compared to those of her classmates is not very high. She has told me that during the class presentation she can keep speaking English for ever, but her classmates say very little and get better grades. She attributes that to her bad grammar. She has the same feeling at her grammar class. At one of the sessions, she brought the grammar test, which she failed, and another student paper, that was graded A, and we went over them. It seemed that she understood the roles but was not very ably.

In her writing class, she especially enjoys the part of the class, when at the beginning the teacher asks the students to write a reflection journal responding to a general question written on the board. Every time she fills the page, and the teacher marks it done without checking it. However, she hates the second part of the class when they start writing their essays and the teacher walks around the students and checks everyone's paper; hers is all in red ink. I saw one of those papers; the teacher corrected all the mistakes and provided a corrective feedback.

During our sessions, I usually ask her to read her paper aloud and stop her after each sentence, in case it contains errors. Sometimes, she is able to identify and correct her errors herself, when it comes to grammar issues such as fragments, run-on sentences, or subject-verb agreement. However, she needs help with her vocabulary and word choice. I was surprised that she did not know such basic words as education and courage, and I had to explain them to her. As she has not acquired a good stock of vocabulary to express her ideas, she relies mainly on two methods. First, she uses the same vocabulary and phrases of the prompt again and again. Second, she always has her electronic dictionary with her to use. However, it does not always give her the right word that makes sense in her text. It happens that when she finishes her writing, she cannot read it and understand its meaning. That is why I do not consider that it is enough merely to introduce the correct words to her; she can put the word in the paper, forget it and keep making the same mistake.

According to Paltridge, I decided to focus on one or two problems at every session. I started with the most frequent mistakes, mostly vocabulary ones. When I see that an important word is missing in her writing being unknown to her, I try to explain it, present examples of its usage in different situations, and ask her to give me some examples of hers. By doing that, I am trying to expose her to the most frequently used words, and help her be familiar with them. Therefore, I work on that until I make sure that she has understood and

learned the new vocabulary for that day. The weakness of this method is that it takes a long time to show its effectiveness and benefits, which is not applicable to our limited sessions. My tutee does not seem to be satisfied with working on a few issues only each time, as she expects her paper to be completely corrected before she submits it to her teacher the following day.

After six tutoring sessions, my tutee has realized what most of her writing problems are. Now she is able to revise her paper and identify most of her mistakes independently the same way we do that together. Reading her paper out aloud will help her become an independent writer.

One of the weaknesses of our tutoring sessions is that they do not help much in improving her vocabulary, as she needs different vocabulary at every session depending on her essay for that day. Acquiring vocabulary is a slow process that needs a lot of exposure and independent learning. Moreover, it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the vocabulary handouts and exercise sheet that I gave her, since it takes more time to determine whether they helped her with her writing. To be proficient, she will need to know the forms, meaning, and usage of all those words (Paltridge, 2007, p. 99).

Our first three sessions showed a considerable improvement in learning the brainstorming and outlining procedures. Having gone over those procedures, she always follows the same structure in her own writing. Following the process approach helps her organize her ideas and develop her writing.

At the sessions with my tutee, I used different kinds of corrective feedback suggested in Ellis article and Paltridge book, chapter 7. Besides, I observed how my tutee feels about every of them and gets benefits from different kinds of her teacher's feedback. When the teacher writes the correct form on her draft, she copies it without questioning; but she is not

able to identify the same mistake later in her paper, if it is not marked by the teacher. The same thing happens in our sessions. When I make corrections in the oral form, she writes them down without any questioning or analyzing. She does not understand why either the teacher or I have made that comments, but she assumes that her teacher or tutor always know everything better than she does. However, when her teacher uses indirect feedback, indicating the errors with symbols, she has to ask herself tough questions and think about corrections. The same thing happens when I ask her to find her error in a particular sentence; then she is usually able to spot her mistake and fix it. What is more, if she cannot find her mistakes, it is a good opportunity to explain them to her. On the whole, these observations were done within a relatively short time and they are not focused on the long-term benefits of different types of feedback.