Building HDR Student Writing Capacity: A systematic model of feedback

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What can work when teaching HDR writing?

What are the roles of the student, supervisor and LA and how can they work together to achieve better student writing outcomes?
HDR contact Learning Centres for individual help with a wide range of problems in thesis writing.

As academic literacy advisors we are interested in:

- What kind of problems occur at the levels of the whole text, the individual chapter, the paragraph, or the sentence?
- How can we give sustained and systematic feedback so that the student can gain insights into how language functions in a disciplinary context?

Can student writing be rapidly enhanced and improved by cycles of systematic feedback from both the Learning Advisor and Supervisor?
Two major approaches to teaching academic writing,

1. Academic Literacies and, neatly sum up the former as having ‘a concern for practices in context’

2. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) has ‘a concern for texts in context’ Coffin & Donohue (2012 p.72)

While the present paper examines student/supervisor practices in relation to feedback to some extent, the main focus is on the student’s text and the development of a systematic approach to feedback on that text.

To do this, an LA needs to share a common language about language
The aim is to examine the effectiveness of a cycle of feedback negotiated in consultation with the student, the supervisor and the literacy advisor.

A case study was carried out on feedback on a student’s draft thesis text using an adapted version of the SFL-based 3x3 framework (Humphrey, Martin, Dreyfus & Mahboob, 2010).

This paper is based on the dissertation for my Masters Applied Linguistics.
Feedback perceived as the domain of the supervisor. However not always effective for the development of the student as a writer. If an academic literacy advisor is involved then the potential is for multiple partnerships.

- **For the student** there is a blending of expertise of learning about content and learning about how language is used to construe content.
- **For the supervisor** there are opportunities for deeper insights into the difficulties students face with their writing.
- **For the literacy advisor** there are insights into how language is used in a disciplinary context.

The potential is a richer feedback cycle with benefits all round.
The cycle of feedback

Figure 1. The cycle of feedback.

Key F1 is feedback on Text draft 1 between the participants
Key F2 is feedback on Text draft 1 between the participants
Key F3 is feedback on Text draft 1 between the participants
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turn</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T6</td>
<td>ST</td>
<td>Yes it might be better if my first draft goes to the [Literacy Advisor] Learning Centre One advantage of this is to remove many grammatical mistakes.</td>
<td>Grammatical mistakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T27</td>
<td>ST</td>
<td>Mostly about the writing … Sometimes I use non-academic sentences I’m not a native speaker of English but I would like to be perfect in my writing</td>
<td>Non academic sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T29</td>
<td>ST</td>
<td>Once I gave my writing to my neighbor a high school teacher. Ok She found some mistakes and I thought it was perfect after that and I submitted it to my supervisor but there is still a lot of mistakes with sentence and paragraph! Even for native speakers they cannot see mistakes</td>
<td>Sentences and paragraphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn</td>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>Transcript</td>
<td>Theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T5</td>
<td>SU</td>
<td>I knew before he applied officially that he was going to have a problem with English. So I talked with him about this when he was admitted to the program. I almost immediately sent him to the Learning Centre for some training in oral and written English.</td>
<td>Problems with English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T18</td>
<td>SU</td>
<td>With this particular student we don’t take distinct roles. The second supervisor and I agree on the main outlines in terms of general expression and literacy. And we try to help him as much as possible. We’re not here to teach English. We’re here to work with a student to develop a thesis. We should be able to assume it can be adequately expressed in English.</td>
<td>General expression and literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T20</td>
<td>SU</td>
<td>The problem being the inadequate English expression interferes with the line of argument. The student is not alone in having problems with logical argument but when his thoughts cannot be expressed clearly that is an extra barrier that gets in the way of going from A to B to C to a conclusion.</td>
<td>Inadequate English expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T22</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>The main problem as far as the actual writing is concerned is a lack of logical thought. Partly this is a lack of English expression and partly because in Indonesian there are ways of going around the point rather than getting to the point...</td>
<td>Problems with logical writing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A educational application of SFL and the Sydney School is the 3x3 framework.

This provides a theoretically informed and systematically constructed framework for use in teaching academic literacy skills to students (Mahboob et al. 2010).
### Areas for the focus of feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metafunction</th>
<th>1 Genre: Whole text structure</th>
<th>2 Discourse Semantics: Paragraph/across clauses</th>
<th>3 Lexicogrammar: Within clause</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| A Ideational | i) Does beginning to end structure build knowledge relevant to discipline and purpose?  
   ii) Does language construct technical specialized and formal knowledge of the field? | i) Is information extended across sections moving from general to specific?  
   ii) What taxonomic relations are constructed? | i) Are the noun groups correctly formed (nominal group structure)? |
| B Interpersonal | i) Does the text present arguments in authoritative ways? | i) *Is the subject matter evaluated with resources of appraisal?*  
   • Attitude  
   • Engagement  
   • Graduation | i) Is source material incorporated into text through quoting paraphrasing and summarizing? |
| C Textual | i) Is the content of the thesis previewed in the introduction? | i) Do topic sentences indicate the method of development of the paragraph? | i) Does choice of Theme aid text development?  
   ii) Is grammatical metaphor used to rework processes, qualities and logical relations? |
The taxonomy and topology of feedback

FEEDBACK TAXONOMY
Areas 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 of feedback from 3x3

CORRECTION
- Electronic
  - TrackChanges
- Coded Word doc

COMMENT
- Electronic
  - TrackChanges
- Coded Word doc

Face-to-face

EXPLICITNESS
Topological perspective
CORRECTION/Electronic feedback

- Given using either TrackChanges or a coded Word document.
- This type of feedback included grammar, word choice, nominal group structure or word order.
- If the text was coded it was for various features such as noun group structure and nominalization.

CORRECTION/Face-to-face

- Feedback involved the same areas but served to extend the specific examples of electronic feedback to the whole chapter.
COMMENT/Electronic feedback

- TrackChanges to give feedback at the level of whole text, paragraph and lexicogrammar. In this type of feedback comments were made to indicate a possible revision of text, but it was up to the student to include the revision.

COMMENT/Face-to-face

- Feedback involved all levels of feedback so that the LA could determine how well comments were understood and if the student could use the comments to make revisions in other parts of the text.
1. Write **general statements** about the theme of your research to provide the reader with a setting and a context for the problem.

Try:

Worldwide the link between mankind and the environment is very strong. The environment greatly affects people’s lives directly or indirectly since it is the source of food shelter and the essential resources for maintaining life. The link requires the maintenance of a safe and healthy environment in order for people to have an adequate life and livelihood\(^1\). Many environmental changes will affect people’s enjoyment of their environment\(^2\). Human activity is a key factor in determining the current environmental conditions and the environmental legacy for future generations\(^3\). A safe and healthy environment has come to be viewed as a basic need that is the right of all people and one which if violated will lead to negative consequences\(\ldots\). People cannot live properly in an environment that does not provide adequate conditions for health and safety. Poor environmental conditions caused by **human developmental activities**, such as air, water and noise pollution can often interfere with the ability to exercise peoples rights\(^5\) to a safe and healthy environment.
The quality of human life is affected by at least three important factors, economic, environment and social justice. Principle 3 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development of 1992 shows the connection of economic development, environmental conservation and human rights protection. It states that:

“The right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations”.

The relationship can be recognized and expressed by the concept of sustainable development which enables people to fulfill their needs to manage and maintain their environment and provides opportunities to participate in every decision making process.
Revised text

The quality of human life is affected by three important factors. The factors are: economic development, environmental protection and social justice as stated in Principle 3 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development of 1992. The principal shows the connection of the three factors by stating:

“The right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations”.

This relationship can be recognized and expressed by the concept of sustainable development. This enables people to fulfill their needs to manage and maintain their environment and provides opportunities to participate in every decision making process.
Feedback 3

The focus of this feedback is to use the language of evaluation to increase the critical voice of your writing.

Look at the extract from page 7 (CHAPTER 1 - THESIS 2 OKTOBER 2013.docx) in this feedback several new terms will be used. The terms are summarized in Diagram 1.

Several environmental calamities in the respective countries showed the weak adoption and implementation of the regional instrument. The often repeated causes of cross-boundary haze pollution that occurs repeatedly in Indonesia as a result of caused by burning forest burning can be used as an obvious exemplifies how the right to a safe and healthy environment has been violated. In June 2013, the smokes from uncontrolled burning of plantations in Pekanbaru, Indonesia not only affected Indonesia, but also the neighboring countries of Malaysia and Singapore and parts of Thailand. Hundreds of residents, especially children and the elderly had to be evacuated to safer places, until waiting for the haze to diminished. This situation forced evacuation not only violates human rights in the field of environment, but also provides significant evidence of violations in other fields of human rights. It poses particular impacts on the associated with the economy including particularly the material losses suffered by the affected community, commercial businesses and educational sector. Other destructive environmental events occurred in Malaysia and the Philippines which related to environmental rights violations including: (i) flooding that killed at least six people and forced more than 1,200 people to be evacuated in Terengganu and Kelantan, Malaysia in January 2013; and (ii) flooding and landslide in the Philippines that killed at least two children and destroyed more than 30 houses in July 2013, while more than 500,000 dwellers were forced to flee their homes and live in temporary shelters.
Extract 7

Key to code

Yellow = noun group participant 1
Red = Finite verb/process
Green = noun group participant 2
Grammatical metaphor = Different word function
Underlined = Head noun

Sentence 1

Original

However, since the Refugee Convention of 1951 sets stringent limitations in the terms of the definition of refugee, it may be very difficult for the people who are suffering from environmental disasters to seek refugee status under this convention.

Coded

However, since the Refugee Convention of 1951 sets stringent limitations in the terms of the definition of refugee, it may be very difficult for the people who are suffering from environmental disasters to seek refugee status under this convention.

Re-coded – reducing clauses, packing nominal groups, and grammatical metaphor

However, stringent limitations in the definition of refugee in the Refugee Convention of 1951 may cause great difficulty for the people suffering from environmental disasters to seek refugee status.

Final

However, stringent limitations in the definition of refugee in the Refugee Convention of 1951 may cause great difficulty for the people suffering from environmental disasters to seek refugee status.
Superimposed on this taxonomy of correction and comment was a topological perspective on the degree of explicitness of feedback, as shown by the red line.

Very explicit CORRECTION feedback (at the + end of the cline) was given electronically. This indicated the need for and provided an actual correction in for example, grammar, word choice or word order.

Less explicit CORRECTION feedback tended to occur in the face-to-face meeting to identify similar areas for correction. This then allowed the student to make multiple revisions on the same teaching point.

Electronic COMMENT (towards the negative end of the cline) was used to suggest to the student a revision in Areas 1-5. Face-to-face COMMENT (at the least explicit or negative end of the continuum) was used to follow up comments made electronically and broaden the discussion of the feedback areas.
The student was initially motivated by grammatical correctness

Acknowledged much greater struggle involved understanding the multiple choices available to ‘write like an expert’

Allowed a rich and detailed discussion using a metalanguage to explain what kind of revision could be applied to a text and continue this with the supervisor