The CATESOL Journal

REBEKAH SIDMAN-TAVEAU
Cañada College
KATYA KARATHANOS-AGUILAR
San José State University

Academic Writing for Graduate-Level English as a Second Language Students: Experiences in Education

Graduate-level ESL students in Education are future multicultural educators and promising role models for our diverse K-12 students. However, many of these students struggle with academic English and, in particular, writing. Yet little research or program development addresses the specific writing-support needs of this group. This article shares curriculum development for an Academic Writing Seminar serving linguistically diverse graduate students in Education. It reports on a study of the student backgrounds, writing experiences, writing self-efficacy, and instructional feedback preferences. Most participants had low writing self-efficacy and an eagerness to receive detailed feedback on grammar and mechanics in their writing. Problems in their writing were similar to common issues in college writing, but the participants expressed a distinct willingness to share their work for peer editing and conferences. Further research is needed on ways to mobilize such strengths and provide targeted writing support for ESL graduate students in Education.

Graduate-level English as a second language (ESL) students in Education are an understudied but increasingly important population in our California educational system. These students are future educators and important diverse role models for our K-12 students, many of whom are underrepresented minorities (URM) and English learners. It is essential that, as future teachers for our K-12 students, these graduate students possess strong English language skills. However, many of them struggle with academic English and writing in particular. Few programs exist to address the writing issues of ESL graduate students in Education, and little research has been conducted in this area.

Background and Significance

California's Diverse Population From K-12 to Higher Education

Schools in the state of California serve a student population of significant demographic and linguistic diversity. More than 43.1% of California's K-12 students speak a primary language other than English (representing 60 different primary languages), and 22.7% of these students are classified as English learners (ELs) (California Department of Education, 2014). Our universities are equally diverse. Culturally and/or linguistically diverse students constitute half of the student population in the California State Universities (CSU, 2008), presenting both special opportunities for teaching and learning and challenges. One challenge is that of pursuing a higher education in a second language and, in particular, of performing well on academic writing in a second language. According to the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2010), almost 60% of students entering college in the US and 68% of students entering the California State University (CSU) system are required to take remedial English courses. Historically, a large percentage of these students have been nonnative speakers of English (Howell, 2011; Scarcella, 2003).

Given the linguistic diversity in our CSU system, it is logical that a number of students who enroll in CSU professional preparation programs in the field of education are also English as a second language speakers (hereafter referred to as ESLS), and many of these ESLS struggle with academic writing. Because the CSU system does not include ESL status in demographic information collected on students in the College of Education (hereafter referred to as COE), it is difficult to estimate exactly how many ESLS enroll in professional education programs overall in the state of California. However, results from a faculty survey suggested that ESLS comprise anywhere from 15%-25% of students enrolled in COE courses at the location in this study (Karathanos & Mena, 2009).

In our COE, graduate-level ESL students represent a range of backgrounds. The majority identify themselves as having Spanish, Chinese, and Vietnamese native language backgrounds. Some of these ESLS are recent immigrants to the US. Others are indigenous language minorities, born and raised in the US, and Generation 1.5 students, born abroad but educated in US K-12 schools (Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999). These ESLS often struggle with grammatical, semantic, syntactical, pragmatic, and/or other language issues in their writing. This struggle is problematic because they need to use academic writing in their preparation and professional work. Many of these graduate students will earn their credential to teach in our diverse K-12 schools in California. More specifically, they will be certified with an English lan-

guage (EL) authorization signifying their mastery of second-language acquisition principles and their ability to promote English academic language development among multilingual students, including ELs. As instructors, they will teach discipline-specific writing skills as well as general writing skills. They will also be writing models for their students. Thus, it is imperative that we support graduate-level ESL students in their writing development.

Lack of Programs to Support Graduate-Level ESL

Unfortunately, support for graduate-level ESL tends to be limited. While programs have been established to support secondary-level ESLS in their transition from high school to institutions of higher education (IHE) (Alamprese, 2004), limited attention has been given to how to support upper-division or graduate-level ESLS who struggle with the academic language demands of their college or university disciplinary courses. Research indicates that many ESL students frequently struggle with academic language skills, including writing, throughout their postsecondary schooling and beyond (Taceli, 2004). As ESL students "... emerge as members of their fields through upper-division and graduate courses, they also continue to emerge as writers—often in ways unique to their cultural and linguistic backgrounds and educational and other social experiences" (CCCC, 2009, para. 3). Yet because of a paucity of research and professional-development opportunities in this area, IHE instructors often lack the knowledge and skills to provide appropriate writing support for these EL students (Cox, 2011; Johns, 2001).

Lack of Research on ESL Students at the Graduate Level

Although much research addresses the experiences of ESL students in composition courses, few studies have focused on the writing experiences of ESLS in graduate-level content courses. Scholars call for more research on ways to support these students and note a need for more qualitative research investigating the backgrounds of these ESLS, their writing histories and experiences, strengths and weaknesses, and preferred ways of learning (CCCC, 2009; Cox, 2011; Johns, 2001).

An action research project, previously conducted in the COE at the CSU where this study occurred, revealed data consistent with the professional literature indicating more attention is needed to better support ESL student writers in graduate-level courses. For example, a survey of 32 faculty members in the COE showed that while faculty thought they were able to support ESLS with their academic writing in their content courses to some extent, faculty also thought that

they faced a number of barriers to providing these students sufficient instructional support. Examples of barriers that faculty identified included a lack of strategies, resources, and models for providing effective feedback on student writing as well as not having enough time to address patterns of writing errors with individuals or small groups of students. More specifically, faculty members reported a need for research-based strategies and resources that could help them provide academic writing support to ESLS and native English-speaking students, as well as other students who struggle with academic writing (Karathanos & Mena, 2009). Likewise, results of a survey administered to 202 COE students, of whom approximately 40% were ESL students, indicated that students felt the need for more support from faculty in improving their academic writing skills (Karathanos & Mena, 2009, 2014). For instance, while 79% of ESL students reported that they thought they needed to work on improving their academic writing skills, only 45% reported that their instructors had ever discussed with students how to improve their writing. ESL student responses to the survey also revealed their desire for more faculty feedback. More specifically, ESL students desired more comments about their writing throughout their papers, more models of effective writing, and more detailed explanations of faculty feedback on their writing (ideally during in-person meetings with the faculty member).

The Academic Writing Seminar (AWS) described in this article is designed to address such ESL writing instruction and instructional feedback needs. This article, which details a study on the writing experiences and writing support needs of linguistically diverse graduate students, also addresses the gap in the literature on writing support for graduate-level ESL students.

The Academic Writing Seminar

In 2012, the authors designed the Academic Writing Seminar (AWS), a course for credential and master's students in our COE. In Spring 2013, this seminar was established as a regular tuition-free no-credit course. A key goal of the course is to support URMs and ESL students (including Generation 1.5 students, recent immigrants, and international students).[1 2] To attract Generation 1.5 students (hereafter referred to as Gen. 1.5) and other nonnative speakers of English who do not fit or may not identify with the ESL label, we offer the course to all graduate-level students in the COE. Students who do not pass their writing placement exam are required to take the AWS. Others are referred by their professors or join through self-referral. The course description is as follows:

The AWS is designed to support credential, certificate, and masters candidates in their academic and professional writing. The course takes an inquiry-based approach with class sessions structured around student questions and issues emerging in student writing for other course assignments and professional writing activities. Students will receive support in the writing process and explicit instruction on the conventions of academic writing via class sessions, regular individual conferences, and online dialogue. They will learn how to

- plan and edit their writing.
- identify different genres in academic writing.
- apply academic writing style, organization, grammar, mechanics, and citation format.
- develop general and discipline-specific academic vocabulary.
- read academic writing rhetorically to bring further knowledge to their writing and research.

The AWS is funded through the Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI) project at the CSU, which aims to improve writing skills and graduation rates. This funding enables several special conditions. One, we offer the AWS tuition-free so that low-income students can enroll in the course without financial hardship. Two, we place a pedagogically sound cap of 20 students in the course (the typical enrollment cap in our COE is 36 students). Research has shown that students in smaller classes are more deeply engaged in their course work and develop their writing skills more than students in larger classes (CCCC, 2009; Horning, 2007). Three, we are able to conduct research resulting in evidence-based curriculum development for the AWS.

Introduction to the Study

The study was conducted during the Spring 2013, Fall 2013, and Spring 2014 semesters in the COE at our CSU. The participants in the study were credential and master's students enrolled in the AWS. We conducted research on participant backgrounds, writing experiences, writing self-efficacy in writing, instructional feedback preferences, and emerging themes. Our research questions were:

1. What are the demographic, educational, and linguistic backgrounds of graduate-level COE students enrolled in the AWS?

2. What are the academic writing histories (e.g., writing-specific course, tests taken) and current academic writing struggles of these graduate students?
3. What are the students' levels of self-efficacy in academic writing?
4. What teaching/feedback approaches do the students find most beneficial in further developing their academic writing skills?
5. For questions, 1-4, what differences, if any, are apparent between nonnative speakers of English and native English speakers?

Methods

To address our research questions, we employed qualitative and quantitative measures and engaged in an instructor/researcher partnership. The partnership entailed one author teaching the AWS and the other as the primary researcher for the pilot study. These roles were reversed for a subsequent study in Fall 2013 and Spring 2014. The purpose of alternating roles was to gain emic and etic perspectives on the data (Patton, 1990). While the teacher implemented the instruction and provided important contextual insights and an insider view, the researcher facilitated the data collection and other research responsibilities while offering essential checkpoints for the analysis and interpretation of data.

Our instruments include a Background/Writing Experiences Survey, direct observation, course documents, and student work. We also documented student-initiated writing questions or topics of interest. In addition, we administered a survey on student self-efficacy in writing and participant feedback preferences. We analyzed data descriptively and inferentially. For example, we computed responses on demographic survey items and Likert-scale items measuring feedback preferences and levels of self-efficacy. We examined and coded open-ended survey items and other qualitative data sources for emerging themes. After establishing provisional data categories, we reexamined and refined the categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Participants

At the beginning of the Spring 2013, Fall 2013, and Spring 2014 semesters, 24-28 students (male and female) enrolled or joined the waiting lists for the course. However, in the two weeks before each semester, 5-14 students dropped the course. These students communicated that they had schedule conflicts or that they were going to be too busy with course or professional work to be able to take

the AWS. During the early part of each semester, some students also found themselves too busy to continue the course. Nevertheless, over the three semesters, 33 participants stayed enrolled for the entire semester and completed the study. Twelve of these participants had been required to complete the course, and the others enrolled voluntarily.

Results and Discussion of Background/Writing Experience Survey

To learn more about these participants and be able to tailor the course to meet their individual and collective needs, we administered the Background/Writing Experience Survey (see Appendix A). This survey includes 20 items (with open- and closed-ended questions) related to student demographic, educational, and linguistic backgrounds, writing histories, and writing challenges. The following sections discuss the results of this survey in the order of the 20 items.

Diverse Participant Backgrounds

Twenty-seven participants in the study were female, and six participants were male. Participant ages ranged from early 20s to mid-50s with the majority in the 23-32 range. Twenty-two of the participants, including five Gen. 1.5 students, graduated from US high schools. Eleven participants graduated from schools abroad. Eighteen participants indicated that English was not their first or primary language. This included one speaker each of Arabic, Hindi and Punjabi, Hindi and Telugu, Laotian, Persian, Portuguese, Tagalog, Urdu, and Vietnamese; two speakers each of Japanese, Korean, and Spanish; and three speakers of Chinese. These multilingual participants indicated that they began learning/speaking English at various ages: two at ages 1-3, four at ages 4-5, five at ages 6-10, six at ages 11-17, and one at 18-plus years. Also, one participant from Saipan spoke Chamorro and English from birth.

For the purposes of this study, 11 participants who indicated that English was not their first language, that they had learned English after age 3, and that they had come to the US after high school were designated nonnative speakers of English (hereafter referred to as NNS). One exception was a multilingual student who indicated that she began learning English at 1-3 years but that English was not her first language. She said she felt more comfortable with Hindi and Telugu than with English. Her issues with writing were also very similar to those of NNSs. Thus, we kept her NNS designation, even though she could be classified as bilingual. The NNS participants, including this student, came to the US at ages 17-30 (with the majority in their 20s). We further designated our participants who learned English and another language simultaneously before age 4 as bilingual. The three

bilingual participants reported speaking English from birth as well as Laotian, Arabic, or Chamorro at home. The Chamorro speaker was born in Saipan and moved to California in high school. She identified with the Gen. 1.5 students' experience, but because she spoke English and Chamorro from birth, we kept her bilingual designation. We designated five participants who were born abroad, speak a language other than English as their primary language but were US educated (in elementary and/or high school), as Gen. 1.5 students. Finally, we designated participants who grew up in the US speaking only English as "native English speakers" (hereafter referred to as NS). Figure 1 indicates the number of participants in each category and the language (s) they speak.

	Multilingual students			***Native speakers of English***
Definitions	**Generation 1.5** Participants who were born abroad and speak a language other than English as their primary language but were US educated (in elementary and or high school).	**Nonnative speakers of English** Participants who indicated that English was not their first language, that they had learned English after age 3, and that they had come to the US after high school.	**Bilinguals** Participants who learned English and another language simultaneously before age 4.	Participants who grew up in the US speaking English only.
Abbreviations	Gen. 1.5	NNS	Bilingual	NS
Numbers	5	11	3	14
Languages	Korean and English (2) Spanish and English (2) Vietnamese and English	Chinese (3) Hindi and Punjabi Hindi and Telugu Japanese (2) Persian Portuguese Tagalog Urdu	Arabic and English Chamorro and English Laotian and English	All English monolinguals

Figure 1. Participant designations.

Twenty-five participants said they spoke English the majority of time outside class. However, one Spanish speaker, one Persian speaker, and one Hindi/Telugu speaker reported speaking English 25%-50% of the time, and three Chinese speakers said they used/spoke English less than 25%. Nonetheless, all of the participants were enrolled in the COE master's or credential programs that were preparing them to work in the US educational system. Fourteen participants were enrolled in a Single Subject Credential Program in Secondary Education, 10 in Elementary Education, six in Counselor Education, one in Educational Leadership, one in Special Education, and one in Communication Disorders.

The participants had varying degrees of experience with writing courses before the AWS. The NS participants and the NNSs who had graduated from US high schools and colleges had taken the required lower-division composition courses in the CSUs (English 1A and B), or the equivalent, and upper-division undergraduate writing courses within their major department. In contrast, several NNSs said they had not taken writing courses in English and a couple of NNSs indicated that they had taken only the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) preparation courses.[3]

Unlike undergraduate students who, when required to enroll in remedial writing courses, often resist, the participants in this study recognized their need to work on academic writing, even when no professor had indicated their need, and they were not required to take the course.[4] Some participants from each group specified that their college/university instructors had *not* indicated that they needed "to work on improving their academic writing skills," but all participants said they felt the need to do so (questions 10-11).

Instructional Feedback and Participant Self-Assessment

For questions 12-13 of our Background/Writing Experience Survey, we asked participants to "check ONE item only" to indicate in which area instructors most often give positive or constructive feedback on their writing.[5] Most participants indicated that their instructors provide *positive* feedback most on "content/ideas" and *constructive* (or corrective) feedback most on "grammar" and then organization.

Similarly, for question 14, participants were asked to rate areas that they thought they most needed to improve in their academic writing. Ten participants, including seven NNSs and the Chamorro speaker, chose "grammar" first and seven, including two NNSs, chose "organization" first. Three NNSs chose "mechanics." Four participants, including one NNS, one bilingual student, and two NSs, checked

"writing process," and only one NNS selected "vocabulary" and one NNS selected "content" as the most difficult.[6]

Discussion of Patterns in Participant Writing

The participant self-assessments partially correlated with patterns in their writing. Most participants demonstrated difficulty with mechanics and grammar. Like many college students (Connors & Lunsford, 1993), our participants had trouble with missing commas and semicolon usage. The most common areas of difficulty in NNS writing were similar to "common EL errors" found in EL/ESL writing at the high school and college level: *articles*, *singular and plurals, subject-verb agreement, verb tense*, and *word form*, (Scarcella, 2003). Several NSs and NNSs also had trouble with *parallel structure* and *misplaced modifiers.* Redundancy was another common issue. All of the participants had difficulties with precise *word choice* and *academic* vocabulary, the area most participants had not mentioned in their self-assessments. Additionally, most participants either demonstrated or expressed difficulties with organization at the paragraph or, for thesis writers, at the global level. Interestingly, the participants were notably engaged in learning about paragraph organization. After one class session on paragraph organization, the students voted to do a second session on the topic. In their evaluations of the course, participants noted the usefulness of these two sessions, and two students said it was the first time they had studied paragraph organization. These organizational, semantic, mechanical, and grammatical difficulties may have negatively affected participant writing self-efficacy. We explain the connection in the following discussion of results.

Results and Discussion of Writing Self-Efficacy Survey

To learn more about participant feelings of competence, or self-efficacy, in writing, we administered the Writing/Instructional Feedback Survey (see Appendix B, p. 1). The survey contains 10 statements about different areas of writing and asks students to circle a response on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree* (e.g., "I am an effective writer."). We used the following numerical coding: 1 = *strongly disagree;* 2 = *disagree;* 3 = *undecided;* 4 = *agree;* 5 = *strongly agree*). Thus, the lower the number, the less confident/effective students felt in areas of their writing, while the higher the number, the more confident/effective they felt. The following section discusses participant answers to statements 1-10 and highlights some of the differences between the responses of NS and multilingual (NNS, Gen. 1.5, and bilingual) participants.

On the one hand, eight participants (five NNSs and three Gen.

1.5s) originating from the countries of Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam might have had cultural conceptions of self-efficacy that could have caused them to express lower levels on the survey than their Western classmates did. On the other hand, our findings indicate that while some Asian participants did have low self-efficacy ratings in writing, the self-ratings of these Asian participants were not necessarily the lowest in the study, and their low ratings were not on all 10 of the self-efficacy questions. Student educational background and status as Gen. 1.5 seemed to be a more significant factor than ethnicity.

The average overall score on the self-efficacy survey was 31.5 out of 50. The NS participants had the highest average score at 35. The NNS participants had a lower average at 33. Most interestingly, the three bilingual students had a much lower average of 28, and the five Gen. 1.5 participants had the lowest average of 27.2. All of the bilingual students, and all but one of the Gen. 1.5 participants (who had a score of 32), had self-efficacy scores below average.

It seems counterintuitive that the bilingual and Gen. 1.5 students, who have a command of two languages, would have a lower sense of competence in writing than the NNS and monolingual students in the study. Notwithstanding, in our experience, Gen. 1.5 students often feel insecure about their writing in college because they have missed academic work in their first language and do not yet have enough experience with academic writing in English. Longtime status between different cultural and linguistic systems can be humbling. Perhaps this was the case for some of our graduate-level Gen. 1.5 participants.

Two Gen. 1.5 students (of Korean and Mexican origins), one bilingual student, and one Japanese student reported the lowest overall self-efficacy scores in our study (20, 25, 24, 21 respectively). The low writing self-efficacy of the bilingual and the two Gen. 1.5 participants did not correspond to their actual writing competency, which was relatively high. Similarly, a third Korean American Gen. 1.5 student had a relatively low score of 29, but she demonstrated high writing proficiency. The three Gen. 1.5 students and one bilingual student seemed to have especially humble assessments of their writing abilities given their demonstrated strengths in writing and in comparison to other groups of participants such as the NSs and NNSs of English. In contrast, the highest overall self-efficacy scores of 46, 42, 41, and 41 were from two monolingual NSs, a Chinese student, and a Taiwanese student. Although some of our colleagues have asked if our Asian participants had lower levels of self-efficacy, this did not seem to be the case.

Other factors, such as education level, length of residence as well as age of arrival in the US, and individual writing experiences may

have influenced participant reports. For example, the Chinese and Taiwanese students with the high self-efficacy scores were MA students with strong educational backgrounds in their home countries. At the same time, the Gen. 1.5 and bilingual participants with the lowest self-efficacy scores were enrolled in credential programs and had completed their high school and college degrees in their second language in the US. It is possible that their early entrance in US schools affected their sense of competence in writing. Perhaps the long-term challenge of writing in a second language affected their confidence. Overall, though, responses to the survey varied within the different groups of students, and it appears that many factors were entailed in these responses. For example, experiences with teacher feedback on writing also seemed to affect their self-efficacy reports. Figure 2 illustrates the patterns we discuss in the following section.

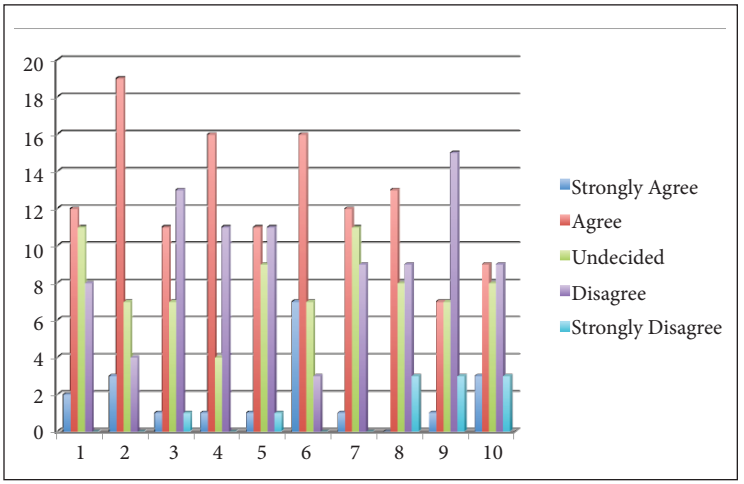

Figure 2. Self-efficacy survey responses.

For statement 1 of our self-efficacy survey, we asked participants to circle a response to the sentence, "I am an effective writer." Most NNSs circled undecided or disagreed, and most NSs agreed or strongly agreed; however, the responses varied within these groups. More specifically, two NSs strongly agreed, and five multilingual students and seven NSs agreed. Six NNSs, two Gen. 1.5 students, and three NSs were undecided. Three Gen. 1.5 students, three NNSs, one NS, and one bilingual disagreed. The bilingual and NS participants who disagreed also had some of the lowest writing self-efficacy scores overall. One said a teacher had critiqued her paper in front of an entire class,

and the other said that her teacher had compared her university work to that of a "fourth-grade student." It appears that these experiences had a lasting negative impact on their writing self-efficacy. Nonetheless, even these students did not report low self-efficacy in all areas.

For statement 2, the majority of the participants, including the Gen. 1.5 and bilingual participants, expressed confidence in their knowledge about the writing process, probably because the survey was given after a workshop on writing process. Nineteen of the participants agreed and three strongly agreed that they were "knowledgeable about the steps and stages experienced writers go through as they write" (statement 2). Nevertheless, the participants were not necessarily confident about their ability to apply that knowledge. Only 11 participants, mostly the NSs, agreed and one NS strongly agreed with statement 3, "I am confident about my own writing processes." Twelve mostly multilingual participants disagreed. One Gen. 1.5 student disagreed and one strongly disagreed. Seven other mostly multilingual participants were undecided. Most participants, especially the multilingual ones, had low confidence in their actual writing process.

The participants expressed a variety of feelings about their ability to self-edit and almost half were uncomfortable critiquing other students' writing. In response to statement 4, "I am able to recognize errors in my own writing," six NNSs and five NSs disagreed, and four NSs and one bilingual were undecided. However, 16 participants agreed, and one NS strongly agreed. Most participants expressed more insecurity about editing *other* student papers than editing their own. In response to statement 5, "I am confident when asked to critique another person's writing," three Gen. 1.5 students, two bilinguals, two NNSs, and four NSs disagreed. Nine mostly NNS participants were undecided, and one NNS from Japan strongly disagreed. Only 11 participants agreed. One bilingual strongly agreed. Several NNSs said they were uncomfortable editing other students' work because they did not always know what was correct. When something sounded wrong, they often did not know why or how to explain it.

Surprisingly, however, nine multilingual participants and seven NSs agreed, and four NNSs and three NSs strongly agreed with statement 6, "I am comfortable sharing what I write." Only two Gen. 1.5 students and one bilingual disagreed, and seven participants, including two bilinguals, were undecided. Although most participants indicated that they were not confident about their ability to *edit* their own and their peers' work, the majority did indicate that they were comfortable *sharing* their written work. This attitude was also demonstrated as participants willingly brought work to the AWS classes and openly received peer feedback.

However, in response to statement 7, "I am confident in my ability to effectively organize and develop my ideas when I write," most multilingual participants as well as three NSs expressed low self-efficacy. Nine participants, including seven multilingual students, disagreed and 11 mostly multilingual participants were undecided. Only six multilingual students agreed (six NSs also agreed, one NS strongly agreed). Perhaps the "undecided" participants were unsure about their ability, had not thought about the topic, or felt their ability depended on the writing task. Similarly, most participants expressed low confidence in response to statement 8, "I am confident in my ability to clearly express my ideas when I write." Nine participants (including four multilingual students) disagreed with the statement; three NNSs strongly disagreed, and eight participants from the different groups were undecided. Nonetheless, 13 participants, including six NNSs, agreed; perhaps they thought their writing challenges were more technical than content based.

Most participants expressed a lack of self-efficacy in grammar and mechanics. The lowest self-efficacy scores were in this area. In response to statement 9, "My writing is generally strong in grammar and mechanics," 15 participants (including nine multilingual students) disagreed, and seven (including three multilingual) participants circled undecided. Three NNSs strongly disagreed. Only seven NSs agreed, and one NS (who was a writing tutor) strongly agreed. These responses correlate with participant behavior in the seminar. Participants expressed strong interest in grammar and mechanics classes, requested additional grammar sessions, asked for feedback on "grammar" during peer editing and conferences, and did optional grammar exercises online.[7]

Student responses to the self-efficacy survey also suggest that most participants were insecure about their use of vocabulary in writing. In response to statement 10, "I am confident in my ability to use appropriate and precise vocabulary in my writing," nine mostly NNS participants disagreed. Eight participants were undecided, and one NS and two Gen. 1.5 participants strongly disagreed. These responses correlate with participant self-assessments of writing difficulties in the background survey, on which many participants rated vocabulary as the second or third most difficult point in writing. Correspondingly, while teaching the AWS, we often found word-choice errors or a lack of academic language in students' written work. During conferences and peer editing, participants also mentioned and demonstrated this struggle with academic language.

In summary, many participants in the study expressed low self-efficacy in their overall writing effectiveness, and the Gen. 1.5 and bi-

lingual participants had the lowest self-efficacy scores overall. Most participants expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to apply what they knew about the writing process. Most also communicated mixed levels of confidence in their ability to clearly express ideas in writing, to organize their writing, and to use appropriate and precise vocabulary. Participants in all categories reported low confidence in their ability to edit their work and even less confidence in their ability to critique the work of others. NNSs and NSs alike said that they felt unsure about critiquing other students' work because they often did not know how to explain what was wrong. This feeling seemed to be connected to participant low self-efficacy in grammar and mechanics. The multilingual students and about half the NSs had the lowest self-efficacy in this area. Not knowing grammar and mechanics rules made it more difficult to edit their own and their peers' writing. In contrast, most participants were comfortable sharing their work with others, and they displayed a readiness to receive feedback on their writing.[8]

Results and Discussion of Instructional Feedback Survey

To learn more about participant instructional feedback preferences and writing experiences overall, we administered page 2 of the Writing/Instructional Feedback Survey (see Appendix B). Page 2 includes four open questions and one multiple-choice question. The following section discusses participant response in the order of questions 1-5.

Participant responses to the first two open questions in the survey suggest a preference for specific and direct feedback. In response to question 1, "What specific things have instructors done when giving feedback on your academic writing that have been helpful for you?" most participants indicated that specific feedback is helpful, and, in particular, several participants suggested that detailed grammatical feedback is most useful. One of these students said it was helpful when "teachers explained grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure." The most common suggestion on how the participants "wish their instructors would change or improve their comments" was to be specific and direct (question 2). One NS said, "Give me specific feedback in grammar punctuation, vocabulary, genre, sentence structure - This is the only way I will learn and improve." Another NS wrote, "Point out my mistakes and give me suggestion how I can improve it. Sometimes, I know my mistakes but don't know how to change." Similarly, one student complained that more than a couple of professors had handed back papers with no comments. This desire for specific and direct

feedback aligns with previous research on the feedback preferences of multilingual writers (Karathanos & Mena, 2009).

For question 3, "What do you typically do when you do not understand your instructor's comments?" most participants said they would ask their teacher via office hours, email, or during class. Notwithstanding, some NNSs seemed hesitant to seek clarification. One NNS said, "I will let it go because I am shy to ask," and another NNS said he felt bad asking. Also, several NSs indicated that if the teacher feedback was not clear, accessible, timely, or if the teacher were not approachable, the student would "not follow up," would "disregard the comments," or might "ignore them." Furthermore, several speakers of non-Western languages indicated that they often had trouble reading teacher handwriting, especially if in cursive.

For our question 4, the NSs and NNSs expressed different conceptions of the best way to provide grammatical feedback on writing. Twenty participants, including mostly NSs and longtime US residents, selected "Circle/highlight my errors and tell me what type of error it is." However, four NNSs, one NS, and one Gen. 1.5 selected "Correct all my errors for me," and four NNSs selected "Circle/highlight my errors, but don't correct them for me." The NS and longtime US (bilingual and Gen. 1.5) residents may have been more familiar than the NNSs with the research-based practice of classifying errors for students, but all participants seemed to appreciate extensive feedback. No one selected "Don't correct my grammar. Let me try to correct errors myself," and only one student, a Gen. 1.5 Korean American, selected "Only correct the most serious errors."[9] Overall, these responses correspond with student comments during peer editing and conferences; most students requested "feedback on everything."

For question 5, we asked our participants, "What services, provided by …, are you aware of that could help you improve your writing skills?[10] Have you ever utilized any of these services? Why or why not?" In our background survey, we had also asked students to indicate the types of support they had received for their writing and English language development. The list included "Attended college/university writing center" as well as "received tutoring" (see Appendix A). The Writing Center at our CSU provides free one-on-one tutoring by appointment for all enrolled students. It also offers workshops and instructional handouts. Its goal is to help students improve their writing skills for university classes and professional writing.

The majority of the participants said they were aware of the Writing Center and CSU tutoring services, but 12 participants, including nine multilingual students, said they did not use the services (questions 5a-b). One student said, "They are not helpful for educational

writing (lesson plans, summary)." Other reasons students listed for not using the services were time, location, and "not appropriate for graduate level writing." One Gen. 1.5 participant said she tried but "it did not work for me." However, 20 participants did say they used the Writing Center for "help with papers," "to get help editing," and "to improve writing skills." Also, in the Spring 2014 semester, one participant mentioned using the new tutoring center in our COE.

In summary, our participants expressed a desire for direct and specific feedback on their writing, especially on grammar. They were generally comfortable asking for help when they did not understand a comment, but some NNSs were hesitant to trouble teachers for feedback, and some NSs used feedback selectively. Also, a dozen participants did not frequent the writing or tutoring centers; they relied primarily on their professors, the AWS, and themselves.

Limitations

The quantitative results of this study need to be interpreted cautiously as the study involved a small sample of students. The small sample size limits the conclusions we can make. It should also be noted that the qualitative results of this exploratory study may not be broadly generalizable because the conditions of a small tuition-free mostly volunteer class are unique. Because of these conditions, we were not able to obtain consistent pre-, mid-, postwriting samples that would provide data for case studies. Nonetheless, this study has generated a set of interesting questions and areas for further research.

Conclusion

Although it was necessary to open the AWS to all graduate COE students because it would be difficult to otherwise enroll Gen. 1.5 students and URMs who do not identify with or match the ESL label, the majority of our participants were multilingual. For the most part, our NNS participants had less prior experience with writing courses in English than the NSs did, and a few reported speaking English only 50% or less of the time outside of class. However, all of the students recognized their need to work on writing, even if their professors had not indicated that need. With the exception of some writing for the Performance Assessment of California Teachers (PACT) and thesis writing challenges, our graduate-level participants had writing difficulties similar to those of college students. They had trouble with typical grammatical and mechanical issues. Most participants also seemed to need help with basic paragraph organization, and all of them struggled with academic vocabulary. These issues, coupled with the challenges of editing, for which many thought they lacked grammatical

knowledge, seem to have contributed to their overall low self-efficacy in writing. These study results raise the question of how best to support sophisticated multilingual students who lack basic writing skills and confidence needed for high levels of academic writing.

Interestingly, the Gen. 1.5 and bilingual participants in this study had the lowest self-efficacy, even when their writing was relatively strong. Also, low self-efficacy was not reserved for NNSs. One NS and one bilingual, who had had negative experiences with teacher feedback on their writing, had the lowest self-efficacy rates overall. In contrast, two NNS MA students from Taiwan and China had some of the highest self-efficacy scores, possibly because of their higher education and strong background in their first language. The high self-efficacy ratings of these two NNSs contrasted with the low ratings of the Gen. 1.5 students, and not all of the low ratings corresponded with demonstrated writing abilities. These results raise important questions: What contributes to the low writing self-efficacy of Gen. 1.5 students such as the ones in this study? What can be done to address long-term low self-efficacy in writing and self-efficacy assessments that underestimate actual abilities?

Alternatively, it is important to ask how we can mobilize the specific strengths of linguistically diverse graduate students. The participants in this study displayed positive dispositions toward learning. The majority willingly shared their work for peer editing and teacher-student conferences. They communicated strong interest in learning about writing conventions and a desire for detailed feedback, especially grammatical feedback, on their writing. Further research is needed on ways to mobilize these dispositions to support linguistically diverse graduate-level students in their writing development. Evaluative research is also needed to gauge the effectiveness of the curriculum in writing-support courses such as the Academic Writing Seminar in this study. It is especially important to know which approaches will contribute most effectively to the writing progress of linguistically diverse students in Colleges of Education because they are future educators and promising role models for our diverse K-12 students.

Authors

Rebekah Sidman-Taveau is an associate professor in the ESL Department at Cañada College. Previously, she was a lecturer at San José State University, where she taught academic writing, linguistics, and second language literacy. Her interests include ESL writing, second language acquisition, instructional technology, and constructivist-based methodologies such as Project Based Learning.

Katya Karathanos-Aguilar is an associate professor in the Secondary Education Department at San José State University, where she teaches foundations and supervision courses. Her research and professional activities focus on issues of equity and social justice and the academic language needs of English learners at the secondary and postsecondary levels.

Notes

[1]In the CSUs, the term "URM" refers to "African-American/Black, non-Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska native, and Hispanic/Latino students" (CSU, 2010).

[2]The course was modeled after the teaching and curriculum development of Dr. Katherine Davies-Samway, who had successfully taught a similar course in the COE before her retirement.

[3]TOEFL-preparation courses often include test-taking strategies and study of specific reading, grammar, listening, and speaking content on the exam as well as study and practice of text-based response and short, timed personal-experience essays.

[4]Our experience teaching remedial writing correlates with research indicating that undergraduate students in the US are often resistant when they are placed in remedial writing courses (Scarcella, 2003).

[5]Two NSs and one NNS selected more than one item. We had to eliminate their answers.

[6]Several participants skipped the question or did not complete the rating.

[7]For some students, "grammar" seemed to be a bucket term to refer to any mechanical or grammatical errors as well as academic word-choice issues.

[8]This attitude seems to differ from that of younger students. In the authors' experience, precollege and undergraduate students are often hesitant to share their work.

[9]One NS skipped the question.

[10]University name deleted to protect anonymity.

References

Alamprese, J. A. (2004). Approaches to ABE transition to postsecondary education. *Focus on Basics, 6*(D), 26-27. Retrieved from http://gseweb.harvard.edu/ncsall/fob/2004/alamprese.html

California Department of Education. (2014). Facts about English learners in California - CalEdFacts. *CalEdFacts.* Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education Educational Demographics Office. Retrieved from http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/cefelfacts.asp

California State University, The. (2008). *The California State University fact book.* Retrieved from http://www.calstate.edu/PA/2008Facts/facts2008.pdf

Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). (2009). Statement on second language writing and writers. Retrieved from http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/secondlangwriting

Connors, R., & Lunsford, A. (1993). Teachers' rhetorical comments on student papers. *CCC, 44,* 200-223.

Cox, M. (2011). WAC: Closing doors or opening doors for second language writers? *Across the Disciplines, 8*(4). Retrieved from http://wac.colostate.edu/atd/ell/cox.cfm

Harklau, L., Losey, K. M., & Siegal, M. (Eds.) (1999). *Generation 1.5 meets college composition: Issues in the teaching of writing to U.S.-educated learners of ESL.* Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Horning, A. (2007). The definitive article on class size. *WPA: Writing Program Administration, 31*(1-2), 11-34. Retrieved from http://wpacouncil.org/archives/31n1-2/31n1-2horning.pdf

Howell, J. (2011). What influences students' need for remediation in college? Evidence from California. *The Journal of Higher Education, 82*(3), 292-318.

Johns, A. M. (2001). ESL students and WAC programs: Varied populations and diverse needs. In S. H. McLeod, E. Miraglia, M. Soven, & C. Thaiss (Eds.), *WAC for the new millennium: Strategies for continuing writing-across-the-curriculum programs* (pp. 141-164). Urbana, IL: NCTE. Retrieved from http://wac.colostate.edu/books/millennium/

Karathanos, K., & Mena, D. D. (2009). Enhancing the academic writing skills of ELL future educators: A faculty action research project. In K. D. Samway, K. Karathanos, D. D. Mena, & D. A. Whitenack (Eds.). *English learners in higher education: Strategies for supporting students across academic disciplines* (pp. 1-13). San Jose, CA: San José State University.

Karathanos, K., & Mena, D. D. (2014). Exploring the experiences of linguistically diverse College of Education student writers. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice, 11*(3). Retrieved from http://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol11/iss3/9

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and the Southern Regional Education Board. (2010). *Beyond the rhetoric, improving college readiness through coherent state policy.* Retrieved from http://www.highereducation.org

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.
Scarcella, R. (2003). *Accelerating academic English: A focus on the English learner.* Oakland, CA: Regents of the University of California.
Taceli, M. (2004). ODWIN: A program rooted in history. *Focus on Basics, 6*(D), 14-16. Retrieved from http://gseweb.harvard.edu/ncsall/fob/2004/taceli.html

Appendix A
Background/Writing Experiences Survey

We are asking you to complete this survey in order to learn a little about your background and previous language and writing experiences. Your complete and honest responses will help your instructor do a better job of serving you and your peers in this course. Your participation is appreciated!

Name _____

1. What is your gender?
   ___Male ___Female

2. What is your age?
   ___ 18-22 ___ 23-27 ___ 28-32 ___ 33-37 ___ 38-42
   ___ 43-47 ___ 48-52 ___ 52-56 ___ 57+

3. What is your racial/ethnic background?
   ___White, non-Hispanic ___ Asian
   ___ American Indian/Alaska Native ___ Latino or Hispanic
   ___ Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander ___African American
   ___Multi-racial/ethnic (Please specify.) _____
   ___Other (Please specify.) _____

4. Were you born in the U.S.?
   a. ___Yes ___No
   b. If no, what country were you born in? _____
   c. If born outside the U.S., how old were you when you moved to the U.S.? _____

5. Did you graduate from a U.S. high school?
   ___Yes ___No

6. Was English the first/primary language spoken in your home?
   ___ Yes ___No

7. What was the primary language spoken in your home when you were a young child? (Please choose one).
___ English (only)
___ English and another language
___ Spanish
___ Chinese (any dialect)
___ Vietnamese
___ Tagalog (or other Filipino language)
___ Japanese
___ Hmong
___ Arabic
___ Korean
___ Other (please specify) _____
___ Two or more languages *other than English* (please specify languages) _____

8. At what age did you begin learning/speaking English?
___ From birth
___ 1-3 years old
___ 4-5 years old
___ 6-10 years old
___ 11-17 years old
___ 18+ years old
___ Other (please explain) _____

9. Outside of school, what percentage of the time do you use English?
___ less than 25%
___ 25-50%
___ 51-75%
___ 76-100%

10. Have any of your college/university instructors ever indicated to you that you need to work on improving your academic writing skills (e.g., organization, vocabulary, grammar, etc.)?
___Yes ___No

11. Do you feel that you need to work on improving your academic writing skills?
___Yes ___No

12. What do instructors generally provide positive feedback about *most* on your written assignments? (Please check ONE item only).
___ Content/ideas
___ Grammar/mechanics (e.g., punctuation/spelling/verb tense)
___ Organization
___ Other (Please specify.) _____
___ Vocabulary

13. What do instructors generally provide constructive (or corrective) feedback about *most* on your written assignments? (Please check ONE item only).
___ Content/ideas
___ Grammar (parts of speech, sentence structure, etc.)

___ Organization
___ Mechanics (punctuation, capitalization, spelling, etc.)
___ Vocabulary
___ Other (Please specify.) _____

14. Please rate the following areas of difficulty you have with your writing (with #1 being the area you most need to improve and #2 being the second area you most need to improve).
___ Content/ideas
___ Grammar (parts of speech, sentence structure, etc.)
___ Organization
___ Mechanics (punctuation, capitalization, spelling, etc.)
___ Vocabulary
___ Writing process (e.g. planning, time management, etc.)
___ Other (Please specify.) _____
___ I don't feel that I need to improve in any area.

15. Have you taken any writing/English language courses at … ?* Please check all that apply.
___ Undergraduate writing/English language course/s
___ Graduate-level writing/English language course/s
___ ESL/TESOL course/s
___ Other, please specify _____

For question 15 above, please provide a general description of each of the courses you have taken.

_____
_____
_____

16. Have you taken any writing/English language courses at colleges/universities other than … ? Please check all that apply.
___Undergraduate writing/English language course/s
___Graduate-level writing/English language course/s
___ ESL/TESOL course/s
___ Other, please specify _____

For question 16 above, please provide a general description of each of the courses you have taken.

_____
_____
_____

*Name of university deleted throughout survey to protect anonymity.

17. During your college/university studies, have you received support (other than course work) for your writing/English language development? Please check all that apply.
___ Attended college/university writing center
___ Attended college/university workshops
___ Received tutoring
___ Utilized online resources
___ Other, please specify _____

For question 17 above, please provide a general description of each of the types of support you have received.

_____
_____
_____

18. My current department of study is: (Please check one.)
___Communication Disorders ___Counselor Education
___Educational Leadership ___Elementary Education
___Secondary Education ___Special Education
___Child and Adolescent Development
___Other, please specify. _____

19. My year in the program is: (Please check one.)
___Freshman ___1st year credential/master's program
___Sophomore ___2nd year credential/master's program
___Junior ___3rd year credential/master's program
___Senior ___Other, please specify. _____

20. a. If currently enrolled in a credential or master's program, did you complete your bachelor's degree at … ?
___Yes ___No

b. If no, where did you complete your bachelor's degree? (Please indicate name of institution.) _____

Additional comments related to degree completion:

Thank you again for completing this survey.

Appendix B
Writing/Instructional Feedback Experiences Survey

Page 1
We are asking you to complete this survey in order to learn more about previous writing and instructional feedback experiences you have had and how you feel about those experiences. Your complete and honest responses will help your instructor do a better job of serving you and your peers in this course.

Name _____

Please circle <u>one</u> response for each item below.

1. I am an effective writer.
   Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. I am knowledgeable about the steps and stages experienced writers go through as they write.
   Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. I am confident about my own writing processes (planning, editing, revising).
   Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. I am able to recognize errors in my own writing.
   Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. I am confident when asked to critique another person's writing.
   Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. I feel comfortable sharing what I write.
   Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. I am confident in my ability to effectively organize and develop my ideas when I write
   Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. I am confident in my ability to clearly express my ideas when I write.
   Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. My writing is generally strong in grammar and mechanics (e.g., punctuation, article use, verb tense).
   Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. I am confident in my ability to use appropriate and precise vocabulary in my writing.
    Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

Page 2

Please take a few moments to respond to the following items about your experiences receiving instructional feedback on your academic writing in previous and current college/university courses.

1. What specific things have instructors done when giving feedback on your academic writing that have been helpful for you? _____
   _____

2. In what ways do you wish your instructors would change or improve their comments? _____
   _____

3. What do you typically do when you do not understand your instructor's comments? _____
   _____

4. In your opinion, what is the best way for instructors to give you feedback about grammatical errors in your writing? Please check ONE item only.
   ___ Don't correct my grammar. Let me try to correct errors myself.
   ___ Only correct the most serious errors.
   ___ Circle/highlight my errors, but don't correct them for me.
   ___ Circle/highlight my errors and tell me what type of error it is (verb tense, word choice, etc.).
   ___ Correct all my errors for me.

5. a. What services, provided by …, are you aware of that could help you improve your writing skills? _____
   _____
   b. Have you ever utilized any of these services? _____
   Why or why not?_____

Thank you for your participation!