WHEN "EDITING" BECOMES "EDUCATING" IN ESL TUTORING SESSIONS

Young-Kyung Min
University of Colorado - Boulder
young.min@colorado.edu

Introduction

ESL writing is complex because it involves both a language acquisition process and a composing process. Although the development of good language skills is essential for ESL writers, the importance of guiding them in their language acquisition process is not clearly reflected in writing center pedagogy and tutor training (Leki; Myers; Nowacki; Powers; Williams & Severino). Writing center pedagogy tends to prioritize higher order concerns over lower order concerns by separating writing issues from language issues. This separation is problematic for ESL writers because ESL writing can never be broken down neatly into writing issues and language issues (Blau and Hall; Cogie et al.; Myers; Powers).

In order to develop more culturally responsive tutoring practices for ESL writers, I argue that we must reflect on the good intentions behind the "No-Editing" policy at many writing centers. The idea of "editing" tends to be criticized at writing centers; it projects an image of the tutor holding the red pen and correcting all the grammatical mistakes for the writer while the writer simply observes. This practice is against the philosophy of the writing center, which is to produce better writers, not better writing (North 438). The "No-Editing" policy should be re-examined when it comes to ESL tutoring sessions because ESL writers are "not engaged merely in "editing" but in learning a new language," and their errors are persistent evidence of normal second language learning and processing, *not* some failure on the part of students (Myers, "Reassessing" 52). It is crucial to guide ESL students in their language acquisition process because it is "indeed the linguistic component (vocabulary and syntax) as much or more than what is considered the writing (rhetorical) component that ESL students need most" (ibid).

In order to provide more effective guidance in ESL students' language acquisition process, I argue that we should combine instruction in grammar with vocabulary. As much as it is problematic to separate writing issues from language issues, the separation of grammar from vocabulary is also problematic. In most writing centers, tutors are trained to guide students to recognize how the grammatical aspects of their writing change depending on the audience, purpose, genre, and topic of the assignment. The so-called "rhetorical grammar approach" (Kolln and Gray) may not work effectively for ESL writers simply because, in order to discuss writing at the rhetorical level, the writer must have the language to be able to do so. I argue that it is a lexical grammar approach that combines instruction in grammar with vocabulary—rather than a strict rhetorical grammar approach—that can more effectively assist ESL writers in their language acquisition process.

This paper discusses practical strategies that tutors can use to facilitate ESL writers' language acquisition process at writing centers by employing a lexical grammar approach that combines instruction in grammar with vocabulary. It illustrates how to move a sentence-level tutoring process from an *editor*-dynamic to an *educator*-dynamic, which can ultimately enhance ESL students' *self-editing* skills. The target audience that this approach aims to assist includes both international and Generation 1.5 students. The term "1.5" is a designator that points out the in-between identities of immigrant students even if they are fourth or fifth generation in terms of the immigrant histories of their families. They are the so-called "ear learners" (Reid), having grown up speaking and listening to English. Although they are familiar with some aspects of American culture and language, they often struggle with sentence structure since they have not been trained in the formal rules of the English language. Thus, the lexical grammar approach explained in this paper can be useful for Generation 1.5 students as well.

Lexical Grammar: Beyond a Grammar and Vocabulary Dichotomy

Research has continuously shown that some aspects of language that have been dealt with under grammar in the area of second language (L2) acquisition are actually lexical in nature (Myers; Nakamaru; Nation). Language is a grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar (Lewis). It is thus inappropriate to divide a language into grammar and vocabulary (Folse; McCarthy and O'Dell). Lexis plays a much more prominent role in the student's second language learning because "lexical learning drives grammatical learning" (Tschirner 120). Developing

students' vocabulary skills ultimately facilitates richer listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities (Hennings; Hinkel; Laufer and Yano).

The significance of enhancing ESL students' awareness of the fundamental interdependence between grammar and lexis is widely recognized in the field of TESOL (Carter; Folse; McCarthy and O'Dell; Nation). However, very little research looks into how writing center tutors can facilitate ESL students' language acquisition process by guiding them to become more aware of the fundamental connection between lexis and grammar. Although tutors actually work on lexical issues in their sessions with ESL writers, they often characterize their feedback on L2 writers' papers as "grammar" and "content" (Nakamaru). Tutors do not need to spend a lot of time to develop strategies to increase students' awareness of their errors because "most student errors are actually lexical, and if they don't have the appropriate word or lexical phrase, no editing will provide it. A great many tangles in 'syntax' are a result of circumlocutions—vocabulary problems, not grammar problems" (Myers, "Reassessing" 58).

Thus, it is important to help ESL students become more aware of the interconnection between lexis and grammar. By combining instruction in grammar with vocabulary, tutors can more effectively guide students to learn how semantically similar words have different syntactic and pragmatic usages. In this regard, it is essential to help students learn the collocational partnerships of words. As the word parts "co" and "location" suggest, a collocation is a word or phrase that is frequently used near the target word. The three conditions for learners to be able to say they know a word are: which words it is usually associated with (lexical collocation); what grammatical characteristics it has (grammatical collocation); and how it is pronounced and spelled (McCarthy). The most important aspect of knowing a word is its collocational partnerships (Carter; Folse; McCarthy and O'Dell; Myers; Nation). Learning chunks and groups of words that go together is a very effective way to expand a student's vocabulary power (ibid.). In essence, a student's communicative competence goes hand in hand with vocabulary competence, and vocabulary competence goes hand in hand with collocational competence.

Dictionary Potential and Dictionary Training

One of the most essential resources to help students enhance their knowledge of the collocational partnerships of words is the monolingual English dictionary. Numerous studies indicate that increasing recognition of the importance of explicit vocabulary training in second language (L2) learning should be accompanied by a greater awareness of the dictionary's potential (Cogie et al.; Linville). Monolingual dictionaries can help learners develop a more solid awareness of the collocational partnerships of words since meaning and other information are provided in the same language as the target word (Knight; Luppescu & Day). Bilingual dictionaries do help learners quickly grasp the meanings of words, especially for words that are difficult to translate into English. The immediate semantic association between the L2 word and the L1 word can help learners reinforce the meanings of words and retain them in long-term memory. However, the constant use of a bilingual dictionary holds learners back from developing both a feel or intuition for words and the skill of paraphrasing to make up for words they do not know. Using bilingual dictionaries as the only reference source may hinder students from developing a sufficient writing vocabulary because, as noted earlier, bilingual dictionaries focus on the translations of words rather than usages. Let me explain this point further through the following common ESL writing errors:

- The management team consists with John, Mary, and Benjamin.
- The United Nations is made up with more than 200 individual nations.
- The human body comprises of billions of tiny cells.
- The house is comprised two bedrooms, one kitchen, one bathroom, and one living room.

ESL students tend to make these errors in writing because they directly translate from their native languages to English using bilingual dictionaries. The syntactic and pragmatic differences between words that have similar meanings are not clearly explained in most bilingual dictionaries. In other words, the collocational partnerships of "consist," "comprise," "constitute," and "make up" are not readily available. When students see that "consist" has the same meaning as "comprise," "constitute," and "make up" in their bilingual dictionaries, they use these words interchangeably. Thus, it is crucial for ESL students to learn the collocational partnerships of words by using monolingual English dictionaries.

Encoding/Production Dictionary

Based on my experience of learning English as a foreign language and teaching ESL writing courses for over 18 years, a very useful resource that can help L2 writers effectively learn the collocational partnerships of words is an "encoding" dictionary, also known as a

"production" dictionary. It is a monolingual dictionary, but it is not a typical dictionary. As the name "encoding" suggests, in the encoding dictionary words are organized (systematically grouped together) by *meaning* not by alphabetical order. It shows how semantically similar words have different syntactic and pragmatic usages. The dictionary can promote a deeper level of processing words and can more effectively help learners increase their knowledge of collocational partnerships by comparing differences in word usages based on specific examples. The most common encoding/production dictionary available on the market is *the Longman Language Activator: Helps You Write and Speak Natural English*. The following is an example from the dictionary for the entry "consist of/be made of":

> Consist of: Bolognaise sauce consists of minced beef, onion, tomatoes, mushrooms, garlic and seasoning. / Lorna's whole wardrobe consisted of jeans, tee shirts and sweaters. / The senior management team consists of John, Betty, and Ken. / He mixed a special drink, consisting of gin, vodka, and cherry brandy.
>
> Be made of: The candlesticks are made of brass. / She mixed a batter made of flour, eggs and water. / What's this carpet made of?
>
> Be made up of: The US government is made up of two legislative assemblies – Congress and the Senate. / The United Nations is made up of more than 200 individual nations. / The jury was mostly made up of women.
>
> Be composed of: The earth's atmosphere is composed mainly of nitrogen, oxygen, and carbon dioxide. / The human body is composed of billions of tiny cells.
>
> Comprise: The house comprises 2 bedrooms, a kitchen, and a living room. / The city's population comprises mainly Asians and Europeans.

As illustrated in the examples, the encoding/production dictionary can promote a deeper level of processing words by presenting how semantically similar words have different syntactic and pragmatic usages, a feature missing from dictionaries designed for native speakers. By comparing differences in word usages with specific examples, students can more effectively increase their knowledge of collocational partnerships. Students can learn the fundamental connection between grammar and vocabulary. They can also learn that they do not need

to depend solely on grammar books; they can enhance their grammatical knowledge through the dictionary. As the name *Longman Language Activator: Helps You Write and Speak Natural English* suggests, the dictionary can expand learners' reading (receptive) vocabulary to a more accurate writing (productive) vocabulary. It is crucial that vocabulary is learned not only receptively but also productively for the learner's academic literacy development (Folse; Nation).

This kind of encoding/production dictionary can also be a useful resource for ESL tutoring sessions at writing centers. It is not easy for ESL students to understand why the expression "is consisted of" is not grammatically correct when "is comprised of" and "is made up of" are (e.g. "The human body is comprised of billions of tiny cells" and "The human body is made up of billions of tiny cells"). Thus, instead of simply crossing out "is" when tutors see the sentence "The human body is consisted of billions of tiny cells" in an ESL student's paper, they should guide the student to learn the grammatical collocations of the word "consist" by comparing its syntactic and pragmatic differences with words that that have similar meaning such as "comprise," "compose," and "make up." Tutors should provide further guidance when ESL writers still have difficulty understanding the syntactic and pragmatic differences between the words by presenting specific examples such as the following:

- Water consists of Hydrogen and Oxygen.
- Water is made up of Hydrogen and Oxygen.
- Water is comprised of Hydrogen and Oxygen.
- Water comprises Hydrogen and Oxygen.

This way, students can see more clearly the syntactic and pragmatic differences of the expressions "consist of," "be made up of," "be comprised of," and "comprise." The process of helping ESL students learn how semantically similar words have different syntactic and pragmatic usages can ultimately help them develop *self-editing* strategies. As tutors lead students to develop their self-editing strategies by utilizing this type of dictionary, they become "educators" rather than just "editors." As the very word suggests, "editing" is a short-term fix, but "educating" is a long term process. Guiding students to develop self-editing skills is essential for fulfilling the mission of a writing center: to help students become better writers. Thus, in order to turn an "editing" moment into an "educating" moment, it is *crucial* that tutors be equipped with a good knowledge of how the English language works and to recognize the depth of the sentence level problems involved in the second language acquisition process.

Editing vs. Educating

The strategy of organizing words in a systematic manner and reviewing them at regular intervals is very important for both word retention and facilitation of the student's later production (Folse; Matsuda; McCarthy). Thus, as students learn collocational partnerships of words, tutors should foster their *systematic reflection* on their language acquisition process by guiding them to recognize the patterns of errors in their papers, to correct them, and to document them. Many ESL students may feel quite embarrassed about errors in their writing and want to clean up all the errors that their instructors or writing center tutors point out. They correct simple errors, such as awkward sentence construction or word choices, and then they put away their paper. However, students may make the same mistakes over and over again if they just put away their paper after inserting other people's feedback. Often, students do not even realize that they make the same mistake over and over. If they are not aware of the problem, they won't be able to fix it.

Thus, in order to help them become better writers, tutors should cultivate students' ability to learn from the revision process and to more fully incorporate their reflective thinking into their writing process. As students reflect on their most frequent errors with guidance from tutors, they become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses as writers. And if the feedback they receive guides them to identify and document their errors under the guidance of a tutor, they can also develop *self-editing skills*. Research has shown that ESL students can become proficient self-editors if they are provided with the necessary guidance and training (Cogie et al.; Ferris; Linville). Students can also realize that visiting the writing center is *not* just a one-time event. As noted earlier, "editing" is a short-term fix, but "educating" is a long term process. Thus, it is important for tutors to foster students' systematic reflection on their language acquisition process.

A pedagogical strategy that tutors can use to effectively cultivate students' systematic reflection on their language acquisition process is to guide them to keep a vocabulary journal. Numerous studies indicate that reviewing vocabulary at regular intervals is a very effective technique for learners to develop a *feel* for their learned vocabulary and to enhance their learning of English (Carter; Roberts). Learners acquire new lexical items by meeting them at least seven times (Huizenga & Huizenga), and a minimum of 12 exposures to a word is needed for them to develop solid vocabulary knowledge of it (Meara). And overall, it takes at least seven years to acquire an academic vocabulary (Collier).

A vocabulary journal is more than just an error log or a feedback log. A vocabulary journal is a space where students can practice words and expand their meaning while they are acquiring new vocabulary. In their journals, students identify the patterns of errors in their papers, correct them, and document them by including personal examples (anecdotes, memories, or feelings) that can help them develop a feel for the target word and retrieve the word later. In order to increase their ability to use and retain the word, students should include a synonym or antonym of the word in their vocabulary journals (Nation). They should also document various pieces of information about the target word such as lexical and grammatical patterns, register, pronunciation, part of speech (e.g. noun, verb, adjective), etc. Keeping a vocabulary journal ultimately helps them develop receptive (reading) vocabulary into productive (writing) vocabulary. It can prevent students from being preoccupied with grammatical rules: they become more aware of the interdependence between lexis and grammar. Keeping a vocabulary journal can also help facilitate students' metalinguistic awareness, which is crucial for their second language development.

Writing Center Tutors as Language Informants

The main difference between the native and non-native student conferences at writing centers is the increased emphasis on the tutor's role as "an informant in the second language conference" (Powers 45). The concept of "informant"—rather than "facilitator" or "collaborator"—indicates the importance of providing clear, effective guidance for ESL writers. It points out that a more direct approach (rather than a dialectic approach) and a hands-on approach (rather than a hands-off approach) is needed when it comes to assisting ESL writers in their language acquisition process. The writing center tutor in an ESL session should not simply be "a living human body who is willing to sit patiently and help the student spend time with her paper" (Brooks 2). It is well known that the so-called minimalist approach is not effective when it comes to ESL tutoring sessions (Bruce and Rafoth; Cooper). In order to become an effective *informant* for ESL writers, tutors should take a more active approach—an approach that can have a long-term influence on their language acquisition and composing processes.

In reality, good grammar is often included as part of the intended outcomes for many writing courses. The Writing Program Administration Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition clearly states the control of grammar and syntax as part of the intended outcomes. However, the teaching of grammar as a

primary focus of writing instruction is often perceived as "diminishing the importance of other levels of discourse" (Myers, "ReMembering" 610). Grammar teaching has a "negligible" and "harmful effect on writing" because it takes time away from other important rhetorical aspects of writing (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer 37-38), and the knowledge of grammar is too complex for teachers and students to teach and learn (Hartwell). Indeed, many writing center tutors find that they are not "familiar enough with linguistic concepts to be able to answer ESL students' questions" (Rafoth 213). Tutors do not make earnest efforts to improve their understanding of how the English language works because "English is made up of random rules and no real explanation is possible or that grammar is logical" (ibid). Tracing a decline in the Conference on College Composition and Communication sessions on "language" Susan MacDonald states in her article "the Erasure of Language" that "our difficulties in consistently naming and categorizing our relation to language study are signs of a p*rofessional weakness*" (619). She argues:

> We have spent too much time on fruitless, reductive arguments and straw men and not enough time either on basic understanding of the English language or on sorting out, evaluating, and revisiting the arguments that have ended in the current impasse and the neglect of language. (618)

Encouraging tutors to improve their understanding of how the English language works will benefit not only our ESL writers but also the professional discussions we have in writing centers, English departments, and on campus. With the number of international and immigrant students on university campuses rapidly growing, it is crucial for writing center tutors to have a good understanding of pedagogic grammar—grammar as "a set of teachable and learnable rules that are informed by usage-based descriptive grammars" (Matsuda 151). Various types of pedagogic grammar books are available on the market, but the pedagogic grammar books that I recommend for tutors are Michael Swan's *Practical English Usage* (2005), Azar and Hagen's *Understanding and Using English Grammar* (2009), Scott Thornbuy's *How to Teach Grammar* (2000), and Celce-Murcia, Freeman, and Williams's *The Grammar Book: An ESL/EFL Teacher's Course* (1999).

Conclusion

The demographics of US institutions of higher education have greatly changed over the last four decades with an increasing enrollment of international and immigrant students in writing courses and their subsequent usage of writing centers across the nation.

Given the rapidly growing number of L2 students on university campuses, it is increasingly important for writing centers to develop effective tutoring strategies for ESL students' second language acquisition process. In order to develop more culturally responsive tutoring practices for ESL writers at writing centers, I argue that we must reflect on the *good intentions* behind the "No-Editing" policy and recognize the unrealistic expectations for language learning and academic literacy development embedded in it.

The writing center is a meeting point between languages, literacies, cultures, and learning styles. Institutionally, the writing center is a meeting point between the English Department and the Linguistics Department on campus. It is indeed the "contact zone" (Pratt) on campus. When writing center pedagogy prioritizes higher order concerns over lower order concerns by separating language issues from writing issues (as if a "Language Skills Center" should be established to address only "lower order concerns"), the writing center is no longer the contact zone. The "No-Editing" policy reinforces the division of labor between ESL writing teachers and composition teachers, and the institutional boundary that separates the English Department from the Linguistics Department.

These days, the new term "multiliteracy center" is used to re-define the work of the writing center as a multimodal activity in the oral, written, visual, and auditory dimensions (Trimbur 29). In order for a writing center to become a multiliteracy center in a true sense, it is crucial to embrace the *actual needs* of ESL writers by providing assistance in the oral, written, visual, and auditory dimensions. A writing center cannot become a true multiliteracy center, if it evades the responsibility to guide students in their language acquisition process by separating language issues from writing issues; ESL writers' language acquisition process is an integral part of their composing process.

In this paper, I have discussed practical strategies that tutors can use to move a sentence-level tutoring process from an *editor*-dynamic to an *educator*-dynamic. In order to facilitate ESL writers' language acquisition process at writing centers, tutors should employ a lexical grammar approach that combines instruction in grammar with vocabulary. Thus, writing center administrators should provide the needed training in lexical grammar for their tutors to enhance tutors' basic understanding of how the English language works. As illustrated in the paper, in order to turn an "editing" moment into an "educating" moment in ESL sessions, it is essential for tutors to have a good knowledge of the pedagogical grammar of English as a second/foreign language.

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