



## Feedback in Second Language Writing. Contexts and issues (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)

**Ken Hyland & Fiona Hyland (eds.)**

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Given the growing number of studies dedicated to feedback in second language writing in the last two decades, Ken Hyland and Fiona Hyland felt it was time for a second edition of the edited volume which was first published in 2006. Only four of the original chapters have been maintained, in an updated form, and ten new chapters have been added.

A substantial body of research is dedicated to studying the effects of written corrective feedback on L2 writers' accuracy (for a meta-analysis, see Kang & Han, 2015), but as Hyland and Hyland point out, these studies place too much emphasis on cognitive factors such as input, output and noticing, ignoring the fact that feedback is always delivered in context, as part of a relationship between students and teachers. For this reason, most of the studies discussed in this volume investigate feedback within a sociocultural framework, while cognitive aspects are not ignored.

It is important to clarify, as Ken Hyland does in the preface, that this publication considers feedback in a broad sense, and is not only concerned with written corrective feedback aimed at improving L2 students' accuracy. In fact, the book encompasses feedback on all aspects of writing (e.g. disciplinary discourse, coherence), provided by both peers and teachers, in different modes (e.g. online forums, writing conferences) and contexts. Each contribution ends with a number of implications for classroom practice. Even though some of the chapters deal with aspects of feedback which can be more easily generalised to different teaching contexts, such as the chapters by Bitchener and Ferris and Kurzer, or the chapter on collaborative writing by Storch, most chapters are clearly situated within an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) context and would be most informative for teachers working with undergraduate and graduate students at the university level.

As explained in the Introduction (Chapter 1), the book is divided into four sections: "sociocultural dimensions" (3 chapters), "delivery and focus

dimensions” (4 chapters), “interpersonal and interactional dimensions” (4 chapters), and “student participation dimensions” (3 chapters).

The first two chapters in section 1 deal with sociocultural factors of peer feedback. In Chapter 2, Villamil and Guerrero apply sociocultural theory to an investigation of ESL learners’ peer feedback practices. In a series of studies carried out at a Puerto Rican university, students were recorded while they commented on each other’s drafts. The researchers identified a range of patterns which they found to be more or less conducive to learning from peer feedback, such as “recruiting interest in the task”, “modeling solutions”, or “psychological differentiation” (pp. 33-35). According to the authors, teachers can train their students to use such strategies. They also warn teachers and researchers about the importance of taking into account students’ sociocultural backgrounds, a matter which is the focus of the next chapter.

In Chapter 3, Hu starts out by explaining that culture has become a loaded term and that some researchers believe we should abandon the concept altogether. However, Hu believes that culture needs to be reconceptualised as a multilayered concept. Of particular interest to teachers is Hu’s study on how teachers can create a microcultural environment in which students learn to see the benefits of peer feedback, even though their macroculture predisposes them to prefer teacher feedback.

Chapter 4 closes the section on sociocultural issues with a study by Tardy on appropriation. While appropriation used to be viewed as one-directional, with teachers appropriating students’ texts, Tardy recommends dialogical appropriation, in which teachers and students can influence each other. She provides examples from studies about the relationship between dissertation supervisors and graduate or postgraduate students.

Section 2 on delivery and focus dimensions of feedback is opened by a theoretical chapter on how theories of SLA can inform and direct written corrective feedback research, written by John Bitchener. This is then followed by a synthesis of the most recent studies on the effectiveness of written corrective feedback (Ferris and Kurzer).

In Chapter 5, Bitchener proposes several theoretical models, which require further empirical testing, in order to explain the different processes that are needed for learners to notice written corrective feedback and put it to use in subsequent drafts or writing assignments. He also discusses the role of individual differences, such as working memory, long term memory and attitudes to feedback.

In Chapter 6, Ferris and Kurzer explain that the question whether feedback helps L2 writers can now be answered positively, while questions concerning the most effective type of feedback or the impact of individual differences are still in need of further research. The authors also focus on a lesser known method of giving written feedback, called “dynamic written corrective feedback”.

Chapter 7 by Stevenson and Phakiti focuses on feedback delivered by computers, which they call “automatic writing evaluation (AWE)”. While most AWE systems have been designed for L1 writers, they are also increasingly used in L2 contexts. Even though the feedback provided by AWE systems is not always accurate or easy to understand, the researchers believe it can be useful if it is seen as an additional tool to be used alongside teacher feedback.

In Chapter 8, Storch explains how collaborative writing tasks function as peer feedback activities that are in many ways superior to more traditional ways of organising peer feedback. However, she also warns teachers to think carefully about the possible impact of social factors on the success or failure of collaborative writing activities.

Section 3 focuses on the interpersonal and interactive dimension of feedback, an issue which is understudied. In Chapter 9, Hyland and Hyland discuss a case study of two EAP writing teachers and six of their students at a university in New Zealand. The authors show for instance how teachers often tone down criticism, for instance by using hedges. The authors add that, while students tend to appreciate positive comments, there is also a danger that feedback which is too indirect is misunderstood by students.

In Chapter 10, Hewings and Coffin present three case studies on interaction and peer feedback on an online forum for Master’s students. The authors conclude that the tutor needs to be clearly present in the forum to guide and model the interactions between students, while at the same time avoiding to take a dominant role. If these conditions are met, the authors believe forums can be a useful medium for providing peer feedback.

Chapters 11 and 12 deal with issues which mainly concern graduate students and supervisors of PhD or Master’s theses. Starfield addresses the underresearched topic of the feedback supervisors give on students’ dissertations. While ideally supervisors should assist students in familiarizing themselves with disciplinary discourse, in practice they may lack appropriate training to provide feedback effectively. Paltridge then addresses the topic of feedback provided by reviewers on submissions to academic journals. After

comparing comments on native and non-native speaker authors' manuscripts, he concluded that the reviewers did not seem to treat non-native speaker authors very differently, and that other issues than language may be more important in the decision to accept or reject a manuscript.

The final section deals with students' engagement with feedback. Han and Hyland show how both social and cognitive factors have an impact on students' degree of engagement, giving examples from a case study of two EFL students at a Chinese university. In the next chapter, Hyland argues that feedback on writing contains a number of implicit messages about teachers' attitudes to the importance of writing and feedback. Interviews with undergraduate students at different faculties in Hong Kong revealed that the feedback students received, often a mark and some general comments, made students feel that language was not that important for expressing course contents. The final chapter by Yim and Warschauer uses a case study of a group of high school students with an immigration background in California to show how "synchronous collaborative writing" in Google Docs can create an ideal environment for more and less proficient learners to scaffold each other and provide each other with peer feedback. They also warn teachers that the use of new technologies such as social media for peer feedback can only be effective if teachers provide the right amount of training and guidance to their students.

Thus, the second edition of "Feedback in Second Language Writing" touches upon a wide range of important issues, many of which are in need of further research. The book reminds us that social, affective and contextual factors affecting feedback are too often neglected. Both researchers and teachers can benefit from the valuable insights it offers.

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## References

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