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SUGGESTIONS IN WRITING CENTER TUTORIALS

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters
of Arts in English as a Second Language

Hamline University

St. Paul, Minnesota

May, 2017

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To my parents, thank you for all the sacrifices you have made throughout my life so that I could have the opportunity for a good education. I owe this one to the both of you.

Dad, from young I have watched you sit in your reading chair, always something in hand. You not only reminded me to read, you modeled reading as a way of life. I attribute my love for reading to you.

Mom, thank you for pushing me to learn multiple languages. My fascination with languages and linguistics is thanks to you.

“If God brings you to it, He will bring you through it.”

-Author Unknown

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

I grew up in Malaysia, and many people are surprised when I say that I grew up speaking English as my first language. Despite having spoken English my entire life, I consider myself a non-native speaker of American English. Because of that, I ran into many communication breakdowns during my first year in the United States, and have continued to in the years since. I distinctly remember one time some housemates were heading out to a skating rink, and when I investigated, one responded with “You can come....*if you want.*” I did not pick up the way she said “If you want” or her body language in time to realize that “You can come if you want” was not the same as an excited “Would you like to come with us?” In other words, she was not really extending an invitation, but indirectly rejecting my participation, which I did not realize until her body language later in the day said more. The real meaning behind what people say can be hidden under layers of subtleties, or it can be crystal clear. I later learned that this had to do with the way people use language to mean different things, and there is an entire field of study dedicated to understanding the intent of people’s speech based on their contexts, called pragmatics (Yule, 1996).

Pragmatics, Suggestions, and Writing Center Practices

An Overview of Pragmatics

The field of pragmatics, broadly defined, is “the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader)” (Yule, 1996, p. 3). Hence, it is more interested in “what people mean by their utterances than

what the words or phrases in those utterances might mean by themselves” (Yule, 1996, p. 3). According to Yule, to understand what people truly mean by what they say, one must consider the context of the utterance such as the interlocutor(s), medium of communication, the occasion, the location, and the timing of communication. Additionally, the choice the speaker makes between what is said or unsaid also contributes to the intent of the speaker. Finally, the study of pragmatics also concerns itself with the physical, social, or conceptual distance between the speaker and the listener.

Speech Acts

Within the field of pragmatics is the study of speech acts, which are “actions performed via utterances” (Yule, 1996, p. 47). For example, a person is ordering a drink at a coffee shop, and says “I would like a cup of hot soy mocha.” That is an example of a *request*. The barista rings up her bill and says “Would you like to donate 50 cents to the Children’s Foundation today?” That is an example of an *invitation*. She proceeds to retrieve her drink and finds that it did not meet her expectations, so she says “The milk was steamed too long that it went flat and the coffee is burnt.” She just performed the act of *complaint*. The barista *apologizes* by saying “I’m so sorry” followed by “let me make that right.” The latter is an example of a *promise*. Finally, she notices that the barista is the only person running the cash register and preparing the drinks, and there are a few people waiting in line, so she says “Your manager should consider hiring another staff for this shift.” She just made a *suggestion*. These examples of utterances and their circumstances are called *speech events*. The same speech event could be used for different speech acts. For instance, “should we go out for pizza tonight?” could

simultaneously be a request, an invitation, or a suggestion.

Direct and Indirect Speech

The incident with my American roommate was my first brush with indirect speech that I can remember. In the years following, I have learned to read between the lines, but that does not mean I am not sometimes surprised by the way people say things differently to reach the same goal, or that I have myself become adept at speaking the way Minnesotans would. Recently, my Minnesotan born and bred husband and I were having dinner when I handed him some cash. He gave it back to me. Since we were having dinner and I did not want to get up again, I placed it on the dining table next to me, to which he said “Do you have some place to put that?” I was surprised by the way he asked that question because he obviously knew that I have a place to put cash.

However, given my eight years in Minnesota, I was able to figure out that he was really saying he preferred that I put that cash somewhere else immediately, instead of leaving it on the dining table. He was indirectly making a request. If the tables were turned, I probably would have said “Would you mind putting that in your wallet?”, which would still be slightly more indirect and more polite than “Please put that in your wallet!”

When it comes to suggestions, I have noticed a major difference in the way people from my home culture in Malaysia make suggestions, and the way people in Minnesota make suggestions. Back home, I have often been told by family and friends, very frankly and directly, “You’ve gained weight. You need to lose weight” on more than one occasion. On the other hand, I have heard family and friends of my Minnesotan husband suggest that he needs to lose weight by making statements that range in directness, such as an extremely indirect “Hey maybe you should get a scale” to a slightly

more direct “Whoa, gaining some sympathy weight I see. Better start hitting the gym!”

Writing Center Work

My struggle with direct and indirect speech leaks into other areas of my life too. I have been a writing consultant at a university in Minnesota for a little over a year, working with both undergraduate and graduate students, as well as native and non-native speakers of English. The non-native speakers (NNS) include both those who grew up in America and have spoken English as a second language (ESL) for most of their life, and those who are here in America as international students and are less fluent in English. The relational dynamics of each session is different depending on the student’s first language, degree-seeking status, and gender.

As a writing consultant, I am trained to be indirect in my approach with students’ writing, and to resist making direct suggestions. The goal is for students to take ownership over their own work and arrive at their own writing. Nonetheless, the nature of writing center tutorials requires tutors to make criticisms and suggestions about student writing. In fact, students expect it of tutors. However, they must also balance that with writing center goals of helping develop confident and independent student writers (Mackiewicz, 2005). If students feel humiliated or embarrassed by suggestions and criticisms made by a writing tutor, their self-esteem as proficient writers may be jeopardized. In an effort to protect the confidence of students as writers, tutors sometimes eschew clarity for politeness, or politeness for clarity (Mackiewicz & Riley, 2002). They do so by making indirect suggestions that reduce the clarity of the suggestions, or by hedging their suggestions to increase politeness.

I recall an incident at the writing center where I was working with a native

English speaker (NS), a graduate student in the law school. I noticed a grammatical error that was repeated throughout the paper we were working on, and trying to be indirect about it, discussed the grammatical rule with her. She took it as an offense to her intelligence that I was explaining a grammar rule, and left angry. I was taken aback by that interaction, for I have often done the same with non-native English speakers (NNS) and, as far as I am aware, they appreciated my explanations. It could be that non-native speakers who are learning the language are more receptive to grammar lessons than native speakers, but it could also be the manner in which I made the suggestion. Was it that I was too indirect in my approach with the native speaker that she was not sure of the intentions behind my comments, or was I too direct that I appeared rude?

There has also been research, which I will cover in Chapter 2, that suggests that indirect speech acts are more difficult for non-native speakers to comprehend (Baker & Bricker, 2010; Mackiewicz & Riley 2002; Riley & Mackiewicz, 2003), non-native speakers are more likely to misuse speech acts (Banarjee & Carrell, 1988; Martinez-Flor, 2005), and non-native speakers are more likely to be recipients of direct speech acts (Thonus, 1999a; Williams, 2004). Because of that, I have often wondered about the level of directness in my suggestions with both native English speakers and non-native English speakers. Do I make more direct suggestions with NNS compared to NS? Do I reduce hedging with NNS compared to NS? Does either hedging or directness affect the clarity or politeness of my suggestions? To find answers to these questions, I audio-recorded and analyzed four writing center consultation sessions with two NNS and two NS. Following that, I invited the students back for a stimulated recall interview, focusing on the suggestions made during the consultation sessions.

Role and Background of the Researcher

As previously mentioned, I am currently a part-time writing center consultant at a Midwestern university. Prior to this, I was a full-time English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor at a private college in Malaysia. I grew up in Malaysia and have spoken the Malaysian variety of English as my first language my entire life, and Malaysian English has many differences from American English (Pillai, 2008; Rahim & Manan, 2014). Furthermore, growing up in a different country with its cultural differences influences the way people use language to convey meaning. Hence, I can be considered a NNS of American English. Additionally, I have also spoken Malay and Cantonese as second languages, both of which have influenced the way I communicate. Nevertheless, I have been pursuing higher education in Minnesota for eight years, and in many ways have acclimated to the culture here. I am curious to discover if, in writing tutorials, I am more influenced by my home culture that is more direct in its speech, or if I am more influenced by the years I have spent in Minnesota and by my writing center training to be more indirect.

In this study, I was both a participant in the study, and the researcher. I conducted the tutorials that were recorded, conducted all the follow-up interviews, as well as analyzed and reported all the data collected from this study. As a result, researcher bias in this study is inevitable. Because I know my intent when making a suggestion, I may have been biased in my analysis of what constitutes a suggestion and what does not. Finally, the knowledge that I am consulting may have skewed how students interacted with me during the consultation. These biases have to be taken into consideration when analyzing the data. Despite the shortcomings of being both a participant and the researcher, this

study has the benefit of informing me, as a writing consultant, of ways that I can improve as a writing consultant. Such research is termed action research, where researchers “inquire into how they can improve what they are doing” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2014, p. 14).

Research Questions

- 1) Do I make more direct or indirect suggestions during writing center consultations?
- 2) Do I make more hedged or unhedged suggestions during writing center consultations?
- 3) Is there a difference in the frequency of direct and indirect suggestions when working with native speakers compared to non-native speakers?
- 4) Is there a difference in the frequency of hedged and unhedged suggestions when working with native speakers compared to non-native speakers?
- 5) What are the syntactic forms of the suggestions I make?
- 6) What are students’ perceptions of suggestions that I make?

Chapter Overviews

In this chapter, I discussed my experiences of being from another country and speaking a different variety of English, as well as my experiences as a writing tutor that provided the basis for this study. I also briefly discussed key concepts that are important for this study: writing center work, pragmatics, suggestions, and direct and indirect speech. In addition, I reported my background as the researcher, and acknowledged potential biases that I brought to this study. In Chapter Two, I will review the literature on writing center pedagogy and suggestions. Next, I will describe the methods used to collect and analyze data to answer my research questions in Chapter Three. In Chapter Four, I will report the results from my data collection. Finally, I will discuss the results

and implications of it for writing center work and future research.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Chapter Overview

This study was designed to examine the kinds of suggestions made by a NNS tutor during writing center tutorials, and students' responses to the suggestions. Data was collected through four audio-recorded tutorials and subsequent stimulated recall interviews with students. In this chapter, an overview of the debate regarding writing center philosophy that drives writing center pedagogy will be provided. Next, there will be a discussion of literature on suggestions, including the different definitions of suggestions, research on non-native speakers and suggestions, and suggestions at the writing center. Finally, I will present the gap in research that makes my research valuable, and present my research questions.

Writing Center Pedagogy

The role of the writing center has often been debated, both by those working in the writing center, those outside the writing center but who have a stake in writing center work (such as students using the writing center's services, administrators funding the center, or faculty in the English department), and those who have no stake in the writing center. In North's (1984/2011) "The Idea of a Writing Center," the author illustrated several inaccurate opinions of writing centers that have been expressed by members of the academic community. Some opinions include the writing center being a place for "those with special problems in composition" (p. 46), or one academician declaring he would not recommend a student to the writing center "unless there were something like

twenty-five errors per page” (p. 46), or for students who “are not skilled enough to deal with mechanical problems” (p. 47), or that the writing center exists “to give first aid to students who seemed unable to function within the traditional paradigm” (p. 48). North, however, argues that the writing center should 1) be viewed as a process and 2) be student centered. The process that North is referring to is the process of helping students become better writers, as opposed to making better written products.

This notion has been seconded by many others in the field. One notable proponent is Jeff Brooks (1991/2011), who expounded on the idea of writing center consultations being student centered in his essay “Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Students Do All the Work.” According to Brooks, a tutor who plays the role of editing a student’s paper, makes direct suggestions on re-organizing the paper, and provides students with facts to add into the paper is in fact a terrible tutor. Instead, a tutor should strive to be a “minimalist tutor” and “take on a secondary role, serving mainly to keep the student focused on his own writing” (p. 129). This is accomplished through several means, such as keeping a closer physical distance between the student and their paper, having the student read the paper aloud, ensuring that the student (not the tutor) holds the pen, and finding something positive to say about every paper. The ultimate goal is for students to take charge of their writing, and help them feel competent enough to do so, in order for the writing center to help produce better writers, not just better writing.

North (1984/2011) and Brooks’ (1991/2011) philosophy of the writing center has been met with some disagreement, as can be expected. Others in the field have discussed the flaws in that philosophy. One of the most notable essays written in opposition to the non-directive approach was “A Critique of Pure Tutoring” by Linda Shamoon and

Deborah Burns (1995/2011). Shamon and Burns criticized the non-directive approach being an “ideology rather than examined practice” (p. 135) that lacked research backing. Burns also recounted the personal experience of having a thesis advisor use very direct measures, practically rewriting one of her papers, and being better for it as she learned the rhetorical style proper for her discourse community through her advisor’s revisions. Furthermore, Shamon and Burns added that many disciplines, such as music education, art, nursing, and, pharmacy, utilize the model of protege–expert to much success. There is often direct and public handing down of knowledge, and the protege emulates the techniques of the expert. Doing so does not diminish the self-expression of the protege, but allows them to obtain the skills to obtain their goals. As they become more skilled in their work, they see themselves as members of the discipline. Therefore, Shamon and Burns argued that there is a place even within the writing center for tutors to be the experts in writing that they are, and to use direct methods to model skills that would benefit students more than leaving students to reinvent the wheel.

In addition, Carino (2003/2011) noted that North and Brook’s philosophy assumed that the student and the tutor are truly equals in writing ability, but the reality is that writing center tutors are typically more skilled writers, and students often expect (and want) tutors to demonstrate their superior abilities. Carino also cited a tutor (Palmeri, 2000) who lost the confidence of a student after failing to directly instruct the student on a rhetorical method, and a new writing center director (Bokser, 2000) who questioned the non-directive, non-authoritative approach when people generally desire “hierarchical arrangements”, where there are clear hierarchies of authority (p. 113). Carino’s approach is not to completely eliminate the “peerness” of writing center tutoring or the non-

directive approach, but to balance it with the directive approach and tailoring it to the individual needs of each session. Carino suggested that in a session where the tutor has more discipline-specific knowledge on the student's paper and the student appears to have less knowledge, the tutor should not hesitate to be directive. On the other hand, if the paper is one in which the tutor has limited discipline-specific knowledge, and the student has more knowledge, then the tutor should certainly be less directive and allow students to take the helm on their own writing (p. 124).

Suggestions

A suggestion is classified as a directive, according to Searle's (1976) "Classification of Illocutionary Acts." Directives are "attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something" (p. 11). However, there are other forms of speech acts that can also be considered as directives, such as ordering, pleading, requesting, and instructing. The distinction between the other directives and suggestions is what Haverkate (1984) terms impositive or non-impositive directives. Impositive directives such as suggestions and instructions are meant to benefit the hearer, whereas non-impositive directives such as requesting, ordering, and pleading benefits the speaker. Rintell further elaborates that "in a suggestion, the speaker asks the hearer to take some action which the speaker believes will benefit the hearer" (1979, p. 99, cited in Martinez-Flor, 2005, p. 168). Additionally, a suggestion leaves the hearer with the option to act or not act on the suggestion (Verschueren, 1984, cited in Banerjee & Carrell, 1988).

Directives such as suggestions are, according to Brown & Levinson (1987), a type of Face Threatening Act (FTA). Humans are naturally invested in protecting their "face", that is, avoiding being embarrassed or humiliated. Either they would like their actions to

remain “unimpeded by others”, which Brown & Levinson termed “negative face”, or they would like their wants to be “desirable by at least some others”, termed “positive face” (p. 312). Suggestions that imply the addressee should do something they had not intended to do threatens their “negative face” because it requires the addressee to change their course of action. Due to the risk of embarrassing their hearers, people reduce the directness of their suggestions in an attempt to be polite (Mackiewicz, 2005; Clark, 1979)

Direct and Indirect Suggestions

Direct and indirect suggestions have been defined several different ways by scholars in the field. Banerjee & Carrell (1988) considered a direct suggestion one where the desired action is explicitly stated. Contrarily, an indirect suggestion does not state the desired action. The directness of the suggestion does not necessarily indicate that it is more polite. For example, “You need to change your blouse” is direct, but not polite. “Do you want to change your blouse before we go?” is both direct and polite. “Your blouse stinks” is indirect, and impolite. “It’s really hot; I’m perspiring” is indirect and polite, but still supposed to effect change in the hearer. (Examples taken from Banarjee & Carrell, 1988, p.324.)

Instead of two categories, direct and indirect, Martinez-Flor (2005) proposed three categories of suggestions: 1) direct strategies, 2) conventionalized forms, and 3) indirect suggestions. *Direct strategies* referred to suggestions whereby “the speaker clearly states what he/she means” (p. 174), *conventionalized forms* referred to suggestions whereby the hearers are still able to “understand the speaker’s intentions behind the suggestion... although not as direct as the first type” (p. 174), and *indirect suggestions* whereby “the speaker’s true intentions are not clearly stated” (p. 175). A complete list of types of

suggestions along with examples according to Martinez-Flor can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Martinez-Flor's Taxonomy of Suggestions

Type	Strategy	Example
Direct	Performative verb	I suggest/advise/recommend that you...
	Noun of suggestion	My suggestion would be...
	Imperative	Try using...
	Negative imperative	Don't try to...
Conventionalized forms	Specific formulae	Why don't you...?
	(interrogative forms)	How about...?
		What about...?
		Have you thought about...?
	Possibility/probability	You can/could/may/might...
	Should	You should...
	Need	You need to...
Conditional	If I were you, I would...	
Indirect	Impersonal	One thing (that you can do) would be...
		Here's one possibility...
		There are a number of options that you...
		It would be helpful if you...
		It might be better to...
		A good idea would be...
		It would be nice if
	Hints	I've heard that...

For the purpose of this research, a direct suggestion is defined as one where there is only one intended meaning, or one illocutionary force (Clark, 1979). Mackiewicz and Riley (2002) explained illocutionary force as “the speaker’s intent in producing the utterance” (p. 412). For example, “you need to capitalize this” is a direct suggestion. The meaning of that statement is clear to both the speaker and the hearer: “this” needs to be capitalized. On the other hand, an indirect suggestion is a statement that can have more than one meaning, and the meaning is not always clear to the hearer (Clark, 1979). An example of an indirect suggestion would be the speaker saying “Have you considered re-organizing this section?” The speaker could sincerely be asking if it is something the hearer has considered, or the speaker could be suggesting that the hearer considers re-organizing that section.

Hedging

Apart from indirect speech acts, hedging is also employed to increase politeness and reduce the intensity of directives on the hearer’s face (Mackiewicz & Riley, 2002; Riley & Mackiewicz, 2003; Thonus, 1999a; Thonus, 1999b; Hansen, 2008; Baker & Bricker, 2010). The italicized words in “*I think it would be a good idea* to explain that further” or “*Maybe you could* ask your instructor about it” are examples of hedging.

Syntactic Classifications of Suggestions

Using interactions between professors and students during office hours, study group conversations between students, and six popular ESL textbooks, Jiang (2006) investigated the language of suggestions. Jiang considered advice, proposals, suggestions, and recommendations as suggestions. Based on their analysis, Jiang developed nine categories of suggestions. These nine categories included modals, semi-modals, *Wh-*

questions, conditionals, imperatives, performatives, and others. A complete list with examples can be seen in Table 2.

According to Jiang, the data provided strong evidence that modals are frequently used in making suggestions in authentic speech. The modal *have to* was equally used in both office hours and study groups, while *need to* and *should* was more common during office hours. Additionally, the author reported different types of hedging in the two contexts, with *just*, *probably*, *might*, and *will* used during office hours, and *do*, *really*, and *must* used more frequently during study groups. Suggestions made using performative verbs such as *I suggest* and *I recommend* were not found in study groups, but did occur during office hours. In other words, they are generally less naturally occurring except in contexts where suggestions are being made by someone of a higher-status to someone of a lower-status. Martinez-Flor (2005) also wrote that, based on an analysis of other authors, performative verbs such as “I suggest...” are not commonly used due to its direct nature, except in formal situations.

Table 2

Jiang's (2006) Syntactic Forms of Suggestions

Grammatical Structure	Examples
Let's	Let's
Modals and semi-modals	You have to/ need to/ should/ shouldn't/ ought to/ must/ can/ could/ might... You're supposed to... You had better...

Wh-questions	Why don't you...? Why not...? How about...?
Conditionals	If I were.../ If you...
Performatives	suggest/recommend/advise/propose suggestion/recommendation/advice/proposal
Pseudo cleft structures	What...is... All...is... One thing you could do is... Another thing to keep in mind is... One of the most important things to remember is...
Extraposed <i>to</i> -clauses	It might be...to... It is * to... It never hurts/...won't hurt/...wouldn't hurt to...
Yes-no questions	Have you ever thought of/about...? Would you consider...?
Imperatives	(No example given)

Suggestions and Non-Native Speakers

Various sources have documented the difficulty NNS face in making suggestions.

In a meta-analysis, Martinez-Flor (2005) reviewed numerous studies on the speech act of

suggestions that showed NSs made more suggestions than NNSs and used different types of suggestions depending on the context (Banerjee & Carrell, 1988); that both NSs and NNSs are cognizant of social distances between them and their superior/peer, but NSs were more likely to use indirect comments with a superior and use more hedging with both superiors and peers (Hinkel, 1994, cited in Martinez-Flor, 2005); and that NNS can, over time, improve in their ability to make status-appropriate suggestions, but did not improve in their ability to use the appropriate forms of suggesting, perhaps attributed to a lack of instruction of the different forms (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993, cited in Martinez-Flor, 2005).

In Banarjee and Carrell's (1988) study, 28 nonnative speakers who spoke either Chinese or Malay as their first language and 12 native speakers of American English completed a discourse-completion questionnaire in which participants were presented with a scenario and instructed to write what they would potentially say in that situation. They also had the option not to respond, if they felt that was necessary. The questionnaire included scenarios in three possible categories: "1) neither embarrassing, personal, nor face threatening, 2) only slightly embarrassing but affecting the hearer's personal appearance and therefore slightly face threatening; and 3) potentially embarrassing and related to the hearer's personal habits and therefore face threatening" (p. 322).

On average, American speakers were less likely to point out a negative trait in someone else, while nonnative speakers in the study occasionally gave suggestions that could be taken as an insult to the hearer, for example, saying "You look very untidy today" (p. 335). Banarjee and Carrell also found that ESL speakers occasionally transferred forms that would be polite when making a request but became impolite when

making a suggestion. An example would be “Would you please change your clothes?” (p. 336). Interestingly, the participants in this study speak either Chinese or Malay as their first language, and though the researcher does not include the participants’ countries of origin in the study, it can be presumed that some were from Malaysia and have similar backgrounds to the researcher of this study. It would be interesting to discover if the differences in the way NNS made suggestion were due to cultural differences or a lack of linguistic understanding of the English language.

According to Banarjee and Carrell, second language learners must be instructed on the appropriateness of certain suggestions, ones that can be appropriate for some situations but not for others. For instance, it is perfectly acceptable to say “You should/need to get a card” (p. 335) to a friend, but not to a supervisor, and ESL speakers may not be aware of such distinctions. They also found that nonnative speakers were more likely to be unintentionally less polite in their manner of delivering a suggestion. Additionally, the authors suggest that the teaching of suggestions should include several different scenarios where ESL learners can role-play different methods of making a suggestion that would be situationally appropriate.

Another study by Baker and Bricker (2010) investigated how native English and ESL speakers responded to direct and indirect written feedback from their instructors. Native and non-native university students from a variety of disciplines read student papers that had either only direct, only indirect, or only hedged written teacher feedbacks. “The direct form was ‘change the verb remember to past tense,’ the indirect form was ‘could you change the verb tense?’ and the hedged form was ‘you might want to change the verb remember to the past tense.’” (p. 78).

Participants were presented with one portion of the paper at a time. Each section contained one teacher feedback. Participants were asked to respond to the question “is a correction needed” (p. 78). If the student answered “yes”, they were prompted to provide the appropriate correction. The response times for both questions were then calculated, and accuracy in answering the questions correctly was also measured. The main purpose of the study was “to determine whether directness type [sic] of teacher written feedback affected how quickly and accurately participants were able to identify the intent of the feedback and make corrections if necessary” (p. 79).

Results from Baker & Bricker’s study indicated that it took both NS and NNS the longest time to respond to indirect comments when the comments were positive. When the comments were negative, both groups took the longest time to respond to hedged comments, followed by indirect comments, and they were fastest at responding to direct comments. It also revealed that NNS were least accurate at responding to hedged comments, followed by indirect comments, and most accurate at responding to direct comments. In other words, direct feedback produced the most desirable response of making the most accurate correction, most quickly.

Liu and Zhao (2007) borrowed Jiang’s (2005) system to analyze suggestions made by American NS and Chinese NNS instructors of first-year writing composition classes during teacher-student conferences on a draft of a paper. The NNS instructors were highly proficient ESL speakers. They found that the Chinese instructors were slightly more likely to make direct suggestions. Additionally, the American instructors were more likely to use mitigation techniques that lessened the threat to students’ face. Conversely, two of the three Chinese instructors reported using more direct and forceful

suggestions to establish their authority as experts.

Suggestions in the Writing Center

The discussion surrounding suggestions takes on a whole different level of complexity when placed in the context of the writing center housed in most colleges and universities. As discussed in a previous section, writing center pedagogy has been heavily debated in recent years, with some advocating for complete indirectness (North, 1984/2011; Brooks, 1991/2011), and others proposing a more direct approach (Shamoon & Burns, 1995/2011; Carino, 2003/2011). This then translates into whether indirect suggestions are preferable to direct suggestions. At the writing center, tutors are injecting themselves into students' writing, hence potentially threatening their negative face (Mackiewicz, 2005). Writing center tutorials can also threaten students' positive face when tutors offer criticisms of students' writing. Writing center consultants, then, are met with a difficult predicament. Do they take a more direct or indirect approach when making suggestions?

Williams (2005) writes that "According to accepted writing center practice, tutors are not supposed to appropriate student writing, or directly tell writers to make changes in their writing. In practice though, tutors often do give direct advice. And, as has been found repeatedly, this is what some writers, especially L2 writers, expect and want them to do" (p. 48). Williams (2004) studied the interactions between tutors with NS and NNS tutees by videotaping tutorial interactions and conducting a post-session interview afterwards. The results indicate that tutors use more direct suggestions with NNS compared to NS, and said it was to increase comprehensibility of suggestions. The purpose of the post-session interview was to "analyze participant motivation for their

contributions to the interaction and their understanding of, and reactions to, their partners' contributions" (p. 40). The post-session interviews revealed that all NNSs "explicitly stated that their purpose in coming to the writing center was to have tutors make suggestions about how to improve a specific piece of writing" (p. 48).

Furthermore, Young (1992, cited in Thonus, 1999a) found in a study of 19 tutorials involving NS tutors with NS or NNS tutees that NNS tutees preferred when tutors used "unmitigated imperatives" instead of "indirect, mitigated suggestions characteristic of the solidarity politeness valued in American culture" (p. 4). In other words, they preferred suggestions such as "change the tense of this sentence" more than "perhaps you might want to consider the tense of this situation." In fact, students "expressed a strong aversion to such expressions, which they said confused them and cast doubt on the credibility of tutor comments" (p. 4). Thonus (1999a) found this to be true in her own study of NS and NNS writing center tutorials.

Thonus (1999a) studied the interactions between tutors with six NS tutees and six NNS tutees. The types of interactions that were studied included, among others, directive and mitigation type and frequency, and negotiation of acceptances and rejections of suggestions (p. 2). In other words, were the suggestions direct or indirect, and what kinds of mitigations were used. Thonus (1999a) did not explicitly explain mitigation. Riley and Mackiewicz (2003) described mitigators as strategies to reduce the face-threatening nature of directive speech acts. Because directive speech acts such as suggestions, advice, and requests typically carry with them the notion that changes must be made by the receiver of the directive, they negatively threaten the "face" of the receiver. As such, mitigation is necessary to protect the "face" of the receiver (p. 3-4).

Thonus found that as compared to interactions with NSs, tutorial sessions with NNSs contained “more variability in directive frequency, and indirect and second-person modal directives” (p. 8). An example of a mitigated indirect directive would be “maybe the thesis doesn’t have to say everything changed one way or the other” (p. 10) and an example of an unmitigated second-person modal directive is “You need to talk about the intro before you get into the, into the thesis” (p. 10). Additionally, tutorials with NNSs contained “fewer imperative and first-person directives, and less mitigation, multiple mitigation, and variability in mitigation strategy” (p. 8). It was hypothesized that the lower frequency of mitigation suggests that tutors “showed less concern for NNS students’ ‘face’ ” (p. 8).

In another study by Thonus (1999b), investigating whether factors such as tutor gender, tutee gender, and tutee language proficiency changes the dynamics of a writing center tutorial, Thonus found that NS tutees received more suggestions compared to NNS tutees. When looking at the number of suggestions per turn, NS tutees received an average of 0.55 suggestions per turn, compared to 0.48 suggestions per turn with NNS tutees. Furthermore, Thonus (1999b) used the same directive classification as in Thonus (1999a) to code the types of suggestions made.

The analysis in Thonus (1999b) showed that the 2nd-person modal, for example, “you should move this sentence to another section”, was indisputably the most popular type of suggestion with all tutees, regardless of tutor gender, tutee gender, or language proficiency, accounting for 50% of all suggestions made. The mitigated 2nd-person modal was slightly more popular than unmitigated 2nd-person modal, accounting for 30% of all suggestions versus 20% of all suggestions, meaning it is more likely that tutors

use some form of mitigation to reduce FTA. Furthermore, Thonus analyzed the different mitigation strategies by tutor gender, tutee gender, and language proficiency. The mitigation strategies can be found in Table 2. While there were individual tutor differences, Thonus did not find significant group differences in mitigation strategies.

Table 3

Thonus' (1999b) Tutor Mitigation Strategies

Mitigation Type	Example
Alerter	It seems like you've got to make a stand, <i>my friend</i> .
Polite marker	Should you, should you put a reference to the graph, <i>do you think?</i>
Aspect	<i>And I was wondering</i> , maybe, maybe you need to qualify that a little bit.
Conditional	You could say, <i>if you wanted to</i> , "an important part of any language."
Appealer	Um and again, this is because you've been using the future tense throughout, you will want to use that tense there, <i>right?</i>
Cajoler	<i>Well</i> , I think you probably should mention the number of people.
Hedge	And maybe, maybe the thing for you to do, <i>at least at this point</i> , is be consistent.
Downgrader	Or <i>maybe</i> just put that, that part of the Miller Test up front.
Subjectivizer	<i>I mean</i> we'll just, I'll just make a copy of this.
Understater	I think you're right that you could work <i>a little</i> bit on your topic sentence.
Upgrader	And you need, you need to <i>really</i> hit your arguments <i>much more</i> strongly than you are.

The Gap

As far I am aware, there has been no research that explicitly investigates the interactional discourse of a NNS tutor at a writing center. Even though I have spoken English as a first language my entire life, it was undoubtedly influenced by the Malaysian variety of English, as well as the other languages that I speak (Malay, Cantonese, and Chinese), and the Malaysian culture. Despite being highly proficient in English, and having pursued both my undergraduate degree and graduate degree at American institutions, my pragmatic use of the English language is different from that of a Minnesotan who grew up speaking American English, as exemplified in Chapter 1. Hence, I am interested to find out if I am more likely to use direct or indirect suggestions in my tutorials. Additionally, I am curious to discover if I am more likely to use hedging or not use hedging during consultations. Finally, I am also interested in the differences that may be found between my interactions with NS and NNS tutees. In this study, I will specifically focus on the presentation of suggestions by me as the tutor, and the students' response to suggestions.

Research Questions

- 1) Do I make more direct or indirect suggestions during writing center consultations?
- 2) Do I make more hedged or unhedged suggestions during writing center consultations?
- 3) Is there a difference in the frequency of direct and indirect suggestions when working with native speakers compared to non-native speakers?
- 4) Is there a difference in the frequency of hedged and unhedged suggestions when working with native speakers compared to non-native speakers?
- 5) What are the syntactic forms of the suggestions I make?

6) What are students' perceptions of suggestions that I make?

Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the literature on writing center pedagogy and suggestions. I also presented the gap in research and my research questions. In Chapter Three, I will discuss my methodology for acquiring and analyzing data to answer my research questions.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Overview of the Chapter

In this chapter, I will present the rationale for using a mixed method paradigm to collect and analyze data for this research. Additionally, I will provide information regarding data collection and analysis. I will provide background information on the participants and setting of this study, describe the three procedures I used to collect data (which were discourse analysis, questionnaire, and stimulated recall interview), detail the ways I categorized suggestions that I made during tutorials, and discuss steps taken to ensure that the data of this study is valid and ethical.

Mixed Methods Paradigm

This study employed the use of the mixed methods paradigm by incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods in the data collection and analysis. There were several reasons that the mixed method paradigm was deemed to be the most relevant to this study.

Quantitative Methods

Several key features of quantitative methods that were applied in the design in this study include 1) using a priori categorization, meaning that categories for analysis have been determined prior to the study; 2) using statistical analysis to analyze data; and 3) using numbers to present findings (Dornyei, 2007). In this study, suggestions were coded according to pre-established categories (writing concerns, syntactic forms, and

hedging-directness). Furthermore, the suggestions were tabulated to find patterns in frequency for each category, and numbers were used to present the frequency of suggestions made in each categories.

Qualitative Methods

There were several aspects of this study that reflected the characteristics of qualitative methods. Most importantly, qualitative research “is concerned with subjective opinions, experiences, and feelings of individuals and thus the explicit goal of research is to explore the participants’ views of the situation being studied” (Dornyei, 2007, p. 38). The outcome of the research, however, is ultimately a product of the researcher’s interpretation. Because of the intensive nature of qualitative research, the sample size of qualitative research is typically small. Finally, qualitative research is usually conducted in the natural setting of the participant and context being studied. This study employed the use of stimulated recall interviews to explore participants’ views of suggestions made by the tutor because participant opinion was an important part of answering a research question. Additionally, the sample size of this study was kept small because of the work required to conduct stimulated recall interviews. Finally, it was conducted in the natural setting of writing center tutorials at the writing center, and efforts were made to minimize departure from the natural setting.

Data Collection

Participants

Consultant. I am a female graduate student in the Teaching English as a Second Language/ English as a Second Language program at the participating university, and work at the university’s writing center. It is my second year working at the writing center.

Prior to working at the writing center, I taught ESL in a private college in Malaysia. I am of Malaysian Chinese origin, and have spoken English as a first language since birth, despite growing up in Malaysia. However, growing up with Malaysian English makes me a non-native speaker of American English. At the time of this study, I have spent eight years pursuing higher education in the United States of America.

Students. Four students (2 NS and 2 NNS) participated in this study. All four student participants were female. Of the two NS, Macey was a graduate student in the English as a Second Language program, while Jess was an undergraduate senior majoring in Biology. The first NNS, Gina, was an international student from Korea who speaks Korean as a first language. She has been in the United States for less than 4 years and was a graduate student in Teaching. The second NNS, Sandra, grew up in the United States and speaks Hmong as a first language. She was a sophomore majoring in Criminal Justice. All students' names have been changed to protect their privacy.

Location/Setting

The setting of this study is a writing center at a small, urban, private university in the upper Midwest of the United States of America. The university offers both undergraduate and graduate programs. As such, the writing center serves both groups of students. In addition to that, the university enrolls between 80 to 100 international students annually, and is located in a state that has a high number of minority populations. Hence, the writing center sees many non-native speakers of English annually. Students come to the writing center to seek help on a variety of writing concerns, including brainstorming, argumentation, organization, clarity in writing, grammar, formatting, and others. The service is provided free of charge to students, and

students may solicit help on any written work. Appointments with tutors are made via an online writing center portal.

Discourse Analysis of Writing Center Tutorials

Discourse analysis is the study of discourse, meaning the use of language, through the analysis of the words used to form sentences, as well as the context in which they occur (Gee, 2011). This study will employ the use of discourse analysis to discover the answers to its first four research questions: 1) Do I make more direct or indirect suggestions during writing center consultations? 2) Do I make more hedged or unhedged suggestions during writing center consultations? 3) Is there a difference in the frequency of direct and indirect suggestions when working with native speakers compared to non-native speakers? 4) Is there a difference in the frequency of hedged and unhedged suggestions when working with native speakers compared to non-native speakers? 5) What are the syntactic forms of the suggestions I make?

McKinney (2016) writes in *Strategies for Writing Center Research* that “discourse analysis can help writing centers describe concretely what is said in writing center tutorials...” (p. 40). Understanding what is said in tutorials can help tutors “better understand how culture is represented and enacted through language use” (p. 40), hence becoming “more conscientious language users” (p. 40) and improving their tutoring. According to McKinney, a limitation of discourse analysis is that the sample size must usually be kept small. As a result, findings from discourse analysis may not be generalizable to a larger population. Furthermore, the research must be careful not to assume the intent of a statement or a behavior because it is not necessarily discernible to the researcher. This is a reason the stimulated recall interview, which will be further

discussed in the following section, is recommended when conducting conversation analysis. To conduct conversational analysis, the researcher records a discourse exchange between participant(s) to be later transcribed and analyzed (McKinney, 2016). In this study, four writing center tutorials were audio-recorded and later transcribed.

Post-Tutorial Questionnaire

To answer the final research question, “What are students’ perceptions of suggestions that I make?” a questionnaire was administered immediately after each audio-recorded tutorial to allow for more accurate recall of the session on the part of the students. There were several reasons administering a questionnaire was more beneficial in this situation compared to conducting an interview immediately after the tutorial. Dornyei (2007) wrote that questionnaires are a cost-effective way to collect data, requiring little time and money. Dornyei added that it is easier to process data collected from a questionnaire. Additionally, because I was the primary researcher, administering a questionnaire allowed students to respond more honestly immediately after the consultation. The limitation of a questionnaire is that the gathered data could be superficial (Dornyei, 2007).

The questionnaire asked several demographic questions in addition to questions that answered the second research question: “What are students’ perceptions of suggestions that I make?” Apart from the demographic questions, the questionnaire included three open-ended questions and four Likert scale questions. A complete sample of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1.

Stimulated Recall Interview

Students were invited to return for a stimulated recall interview one week after the

tutorial. In a stimulated recall interview, the researcher brings a participant to a moment in the past and asks clarifying questions about what is happening during that moment. The purpose is to ensure that the researcher's interpretation of a moment accurately reflects the participants' thoughts and intents about the moment (McKinney, 2016), and resolves the problem that discourse analysis presents. This usually involves bringing artifacts that can stimulate a response, such as audio or video recordings, to the interview. A stimulated recall interview is also beneficial as a form of member check, increasing the internal validity of a qualitative study (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). A member check is the process of soliciting feedback from the participants of a study to ensure the interpretation of data by the researcher is accurate. Data from the stimulated recall interview will also provide a triangulation of data along with the post-tutorial questionnaire, further increasing the internal validity of the study. The questions asked in the stimulated recall interview were primarily aimed at answering the final research question: "What are students' perceptions of suggestions that I make?" A full list of questions can be found in Appendix 2.

Procedure

Students who made an appointment with me on the writing center's online appointment portal were sent an email ahead of time inviting them to participate in the study, along with information about the study. When they arrived at the writing center, they were briefed on the purpose and procedures of this study, and given an opportunity to participate. Students were informed that they would receive a gift card for completing all stages of the study, but they had the option of dropping out at any point. They were also informed that their participation or non-participation in the study would not in any

way affect the service they receive from the consultant or writing center in the present or future. If they agreed, they signed a consent form, I turned on the audio recorder on my iPhone, and we proceeded with the session as usual. After the session was over, the participants completed a questionnaire on one of the writing center computers using GoogleForms. The questionnaire asked several demographic and opinion questions. A full list of questions can be seen in Appendix 1. Following that, I scheduled a time with the participant for a stimulated recall interview that was at least a week from the tutorial.

After the tutorial, I listened to the recording of it and marked instances when suggestions were made. When participants returned for the stimulated recall interview, I played the moments of suggestions from a laptop, and asked the stimulated recall questions as listed in Appendix 2. The stimulated recall interview was also audio-recorded on my iPhone. Participants who completed the questionnaire and stimulated recall interview were given a \$15 gift card of their choice as compensation for their participation.

Data Analysis

Conversational Analysis of Writing Center Tutorials

Audio recordings of the tutorials were transcribed verbatim. Next, instances of suggestions were marked for further data analysis. As the tutor, I marked utterances that I made with the intention of getting students to do something that I believed would benefit them, following the definitions of suggestions in Chapter 2. While some of the suggestions, especially the indirect ones, might not look like suggestions, the intentions behind the utterance were to get the student to make some form of change in their paper. The suggestions were then categorized several ways. The suggestions and their

categorizations were reviewed by another person to increase internal validity.

Hedging and Directness. First, suggestions were marked either direct or indirect following the definitions laid out in chapter 2. Direct suggestions were utterances that had one potential meaning, while indirect suggestions were utterances that could have multiple potential meanings. Next, the suggestions were marked for hedging. Suggestions that contained words or phrases intended to soften the impact of the suggestions were considered hedged. Hence, there were four possible combinations of suggestions: 1) hedged-direct, 2) unhedged-direct, 3) hedged-indirect, and 4) unhedged-indirect. Table 3 provides examples for each of the possible suggestions.

Table 4

Examples Of Suggestions According To Hedging-Directness

Hedging-directness	Examples
Hedged-direct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● So those two components are not parallel. <i>I think</i> all you need to do is to add "is" to the sentence ● You could <i>kinda</i> mention the context ● <i>Those seem like</i> plural nouns to me so it would have to be "present"
Unhedged-direct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● So then this [referring to a comma] would come here. ● This needs to be italicized ● You need to attach it to another sentence
Hedged-indirect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>But I'm wondering if</i> it could be of more value somewhere else? ● While I'm reading this <i>I'm wondering...</i> What were the details of Proposition 227 and 203 that...took away the access from minorities? ● <i>It feels like</i> you're focusing on recast...and then suddenly you jump into talking about the three different types of feedback.
Unhedged-indirect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● By getting recast...What does getting recast on their errors mean?

- "The reason being they found is age 18-24"...something is odd about this sentence here...you know what I mean?
- "And students are learning quickly..." What tense should this be in?

Note: Words that are italicized and bolded are examples of hedging.

Syntactic Forms of Suggestions. The syntactic forms of the suggestions were also analyzed following Jiang's (2006) taxonomy of suggestions. Because many of my suggestions did not take the form of a suggestion according to Jiang's system, I also added two categories to the list. The first was *none applicable* for all statements that did not fall under one of Jiang's categories. The second was *non applicable-questions* for all questions that did not fall under two of Jiang's categories of suggestions in the question format. Although Jiang had two categories for questions, *yes-no questions* and *WH questions*, they are meant to include suggestions that are explicitly suggestions, for example "Have you considered this option" or "Why don't you go home and think about it." However, many of my suggestions that fell into the *non applicable-questions* category were not explicit suggestions, such as "What do you mean by that?" They were meant as hints for the student to realize that there was not enough information in their essay and they needed to do something about it, hence still a suggestion by definition, but did not take on the conventional syntactic form of a suggestion.

Writing Concerns Addressed by Suggestions. Finally, the suggestions were given categories according to the writing concern it was addressing. The categories came from the participating writing center's appointment form. These categories were 1) thesis/argument/claim, henceforth referred to as *argument*; 2) organization/structure/transitions, henceforth referred to as *organization*; 3) evidence/support/quoting and paraphrasing,

henceforth referred to as *evidence*; 4) style/writing with clarity and concision, henceforth referred to as *clarity*; 5) mechanics/grammar/sentence structure, henceforth referred to as *grammar*; and 6) APA/MLA format and citation guidelines, henceforth referred to as *formatting*.

Frequency Analysis. After all suggestions were given categories, they were then tabulated for number of suggestions per student, number of suggestions per minute per student, number of suggestions according to hedging-directness, syntactic form, and writing concerns, and frequency of suggestions per student according to hedging-directness, syntactic form, and writing concerns. The frequency score was calculated by percentage of suggestions out of all suggestions made.

Post-tutorial Questionnaire

The post-tutorial questionnaires did not produce any insightful data and were therefore disregarded from the data pool. It turned out that data provided in the questionnaires were indeed limited and superficial, as Dornyei (2007) had warned.

Stimulated Recall Interview

The stimulated recall interviews with each participant were transcribed and analyzed for comments that provided me with insight to what students thought of the suggestions I made, especially in regards to the clarity and politeness of a suggestion and whether or not students considered suggestions I made to be suggestions.

Verification of Data

Three methods of collecting data were used in this study to ensure the validity of data collected, using what researchers call *triangulation* (Merriam, 2009). In addition to that, the stimulated recall interview was conducted as a form of *member check*, to ensure

that the result accurately reflected participants' ideas and feelings, and the data gathered from the tutorial and questionnaires have not been misinterpreted by the researcher (Merriam, 2009).

Ethics

In order to protect the rights of the participants in this study, these steps were taken:

1. A human subjects review was submitted to the Institutional Review Board of this university;
2. Participants were informed of the research objectives;
3. Participants were given an informed consent form, and their written permission was obtained;
4. Participants were given the option of opting out of the study at any time;
5. Data from the sessions were transcribed verbatim, without alteration from the researcher;
6. The names of participants were changed to maintain anonymity;
7. Audio recordings were not used for any purpose other than academic research;
8. Data from the study are being kept on a password protected laptop. All files will be deleted 5 years after completion of the study.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I described the methods I used to conduct my study. I performed a conversational analysis of writing center tutorials, administered a questionnaire after the tutorial, and conducted a stimulated recall interview based on data from tutorials. In Chapter 4, I will present the results I found from my research.

CHAPTER 4

Results

The purpose of this research was to determine the types of suggestions I, as a NNS tutor, make during writing center tutorials. Additionally, I wanted to know if I made suggestions differently when meeting with NS compared to NNS. Finally, this research was also designed to explore how students perceive my suggestions. Specifically, my research questions were:

- 1) Do I make more direct or indirect suggestions during writing center consultations?
- 2) Do I make more hedged or unhedged suggestions during writing center consultations?
- 3) Is there a difference in the frequency of direct and indirect suggestions when working with native speakers compared to non-native speakers?
- 4) Is there a difference in the frequency of hedged and unhedged suggestions when working with native speakers compared to non-native speakers?
- 5) What are the syntactic forms of the suggestions I make?
- 6) What are students' perceptions of suggestions that I make?

To answer research questions 1-5, I audio-recorded four writing center tutorial sessions with two NSs and two NNSs. Following that, I listened to the recordings for instances where suggestions were made, and invited students back for a stimulated recall interview to answer research question 6. The suggestions were then analyzed and tabulated for patterns of types and frequency. In this chapter, I will report the findings

from the data analysis.

Frequency of Suggestions by Student

Frequency of suggestions by student was calculated by dividing the suggestions made to each student by the length of their transcribed session. I made the most suggestions and suggestions per minute with Gina, a NNS graduate student (124 suggestions, 2.58 suggestions per minute), followed by Jess, a NS undergraduate student (52 suggestions, 1.54 suggestions per minute), Sandra, a NNS undergraduate student (35 suggestions, 0.95 suggestions per minute), and the least suggestions per minute with Macey, a NS graduate student (09.43 suggestions per minute).

Table 5

Suggestions by Student

Student Pseudonym	Macey (NS, GRAD)	Jess (NS, UGRAD)	Gina (NNS, GRAD)	Sandra (NNS, UGRAD)
Total suggestions	27	54	124	35
Length of transcribed session (in minutes)	63	35	48	37
Suggestions/ minute	0.43	1.54	2.58	0.95

There are several possible reasons behind the discrepancy in Macey and Gina's sessions. With Macey, there was more back and forth interaction where she participated more in the session to produce her own outcomes. Because she was a more active participant in producing her own outcomes, I made far less suggestions. Gina's session had more suggestions per minute because it often required me to make several

suggestions in different ways before we could arrive at a resolution. Take the following interaction as an example.

C: On the other hand, prompt elicit modified output... [unhedged, indirect]

S: elicit THE modified output?

C: Mmmm mmmm [no].... So this is subject verb agreement here. Because this is singular right? What do you need here? [unhedged, indirect]

S: prompt...elicit....

C: So here you used prompts as plural, here you used it as singular. Do you want it to be singular or plural? [unhedged, indirect]

S: prompts

C: Okay so then "prompts elicit modified output" will be okay [unhedged, direct]

In this succession of moves between myself and Gina, four suggestions were made in an attempt to resolve one issue in the student's paper. First, I flagged the problem. The student deduced that there was a problem and attempted to correct it, but her correction was inaccurate. Next, I stated the grammar rule that was broken and prompted the student to solve the error. Seeing that the student was struggling to produce the correct form, I again asked a question, this time more specifically, in an attempt to help the student arrive at the correct form. The student responded to the question with "prompts", meaning that she wanted it to be plural, and the tutor made the final suggestion that directly told the student what to write.

Analysis of Hedging-Directness of Suggestions

Hedging

Eighty-five percent of the session with Macey (NS, Grad) was hedged. She was the only participant with whom I was more likely to make hedged rather than unhedged suggestions. In contrast, 43% of the session with Jess (NS, UGrad) was hedged, 31% of the session with Sandra (NNS, UGrad) was hedged, while 21% of the session with Gina (NNS, Grad) was hedged. Overall, I made more hedged comments towards the native speakers, especially the graduate student, and made more unhedged comments towards the non-native speakers, especially the graduate student.

Table 6

Analysis of Suggestions by Hedging

Student	Macey		Jess		Gina		Sandra	
Total hedged	23	85%	23	43%	26	21%	11	31%
Total unhedged	4	15%	31	57%	98	79%	24	69%

Directness

According to the data analysis, I made more indirect suggestions towards the native speakers, Macey (n=16, 59% of session) and Jess (n=31, 57% of session). Conversely, I made more direct suggestions towards the non-native speakers, Gina (n=66, 53% of session) and Sandra (n=23, 66% of session). Although the difference is not large, the data is indicative of a pattern in my tutoring: that I am more likely to make indirect suggestions with NS, and direct suggestions with NNS.

Table 7

Analysis of Suggestions by Directness

Student	Macey		Jess		Gina		Sandra	
Total direct	11	41%	24	44%	66	53%	23	66%
Total indirect	16	59%	30	56%	58	47%	12	34%

Hedging-Directness

Analysis of both hedging and directness revealed fascinating data from the sessions. During the session with Macey, 48% of the suggestions I made to Macey (NS, Grad) were *hedged-indirect*. The pattern of suggestions made during the sessions with Jess (37% of session) and Gina (41% of session) were similar, with *unhedged-indirect* suggestions being most common. Finally, Sandra's session consisted of 40% *unhedged-direct* suggestions.

Table 8

Analysis of Suggestions by Hedging and Directness

Student	Macey		Jess		Gina		Sandra	
Hedged-direct	10	37%	13	24%	19	15%	9	26%
Hedged-indirect	13	48%	10	19%	7	6%	2	6%
Unhedged-direct	1	4%	11	20%	47	38%	14	40%
Unhedged-indirect	3	11%	20	37%	51	41%	10	29%

Students' Feedback on Suggestions

Despite frequently making indirect suggestions, students were able to identify the indirect suggestions as hints that something needed to be changed. Take for example the following interaction with Gina. During this interaction, I merely re-read Gina's statement on her paper.

S: "So there are several types of oral feedback that teachers can use in their interaction with students...." *incomprehensible reading*

C: okay let's pause there. Urmmm....this sentence. So everything else is good so far. **"Explicit correction is that a teacher provides correct form of the target language to the students' incorrect output by point out explicitly".....**

S: By pointing out.

C: Mmmm hmmm [yes]. **What are they pointing out? Pointing out the error?**

S: mmmm hmmm [yes]. Pointing out error

C: **the error**

S: the error

Simply by me reading from the paper, the student inferred that there was a problem with that statement, as she indicated during the follow-up interview.

C: What did you think I meant by this statement?

S: Here..I need to change something,

C: How did you pick up that I meant that you need to change something?

S: Because you read it?

C: Oh! So because the rest of it...

S: You just skip it.

C: And then when I pause at a sentence and said "Okay let's read this one"....so it indicates to you that...

S: Oh there's something wrong.

C: How did you pick that up?

S: Like...I'm not really [a] teacher but I volunteer at school and working with kids, and I did the same thing too...Because if they are doing good I don't say anything, and at some if they need something to change...."Okay let's pause", and then we go over it together.

However, using that method is not always successful, and may sometimes cause frustration in the student. Take for example the following interaction with Gina.

C: So then explicit correction is....

S: I think is that...

C: Sorry, you think is what?

S: explicit corrective feedback?

C: No...I think "explicit correction" is correct. It's this part here.

"Explicit correction is"....you need a.... maybe you could say..."explicit correction is used when"....

During the follow-up interview, the student revealed the following:

C: What do you think I meant by this statement?

S: I wasn't sure what you were trying to figure out, so at the same time...what did I do wrong? *laughter*

C: *laughter* yeap I felt that way about that, yeap

S: so like...I don't know how to fix it because I don't know what's not clear or what the problem is

C: On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being very unclear and 5 being very clear, how clear was this statement to you?

S: *laughter* It was like....2.5

C: Okay. So it was kinda in the middle?

S: Yeah. Because I kinda figured...you are thinking something here...But....I got it...what she's trying to do...but it wasn't clear what to do

C: How would you describe the style of this statement? Rude, polite, or neutral?

S: Mmmmm...This is hard. It's not rude but...it's...frustrating

C: It's frustrating

S: Yeah

C: Because I was not clear, right?

S: Yeah

Despite the potential to cause confusion, it appears from the follow-up interviews that students appreciated the indirect suggestions that gave them the autonomy as writers and owners of their paper. In response to the following suggestion that was categorized as *unhedged-indirect*,

C: MMMMM I see. Ok. Do you plan to move this somewhere, based on his feedback? Where do you plan to move it?

The student (Sandra) said this during the follow-up interview:

C: Was that statement rude, polite, or neutral?

s: It was polite just because you noticed something in there but you didn't necessarily suggest anything. You were kinda just like "Hey maybe you might want to look into this, but you didn't really put your own thought into how I should change the paragraph, I guess.

Another student (Macey) said something similar in response to this suggestion that was categorized as hedged-indirect.

C: So then I am wondering here.... Where it says "research however shows the opposite...." Ummm....This is a good sentence, but it seemed to me like it's... like it belongs somewhere else. You know what I mean? Because here we're talking about...

When asked if she considered this statement rude, polite, or neutral, the student said,

S: It was polite

C: How so or why?

S: What were your words.... "I think you could" or well you started by saying "this was a good sentence".

C: Okay. So hedging it helped?

S: Yeah. Oh you said "I wonder if it would make more sense somewhere else"

C: Yeah. If it could be of more value somewhere else

S: Yeah. Your "I wonder" sorta just...hmmm.....you're not telling me "do this" or "it doesn't make sense" but you're just letting me make the decision.

Nonetheless, there were instances where students welcomed, and even preferred direct suggestions. This was particularly the case when the suggestion made was towards a *grammar* or *formatting* concern. In response to the following suggestion made by the tutor regarding APA formatting, “The only thing is that you have to include page numbers for every direct quotation” (hedged-direct), Macey stated:

S: I would say it was [a] neutral [suggestion] because it's not about my style of writing or the context of what I wrote, but it was just the formatting... Then it takes the onus off of me... It's just the facts.... You've just got to do this.

C: Oh okay. So it didn't seem rude because I wasn't attacking your ideas.

S: Yeah

Sandra said something similar:

C: Do you find that it's more polite when the tutor just gives the student the opportunity to decide for themselves what they want to do. So you find that that's more polite?

S: Yeah for sure for like...paragraph structure or if they're talking about context that the tutor doesn't have a lot of information about, I think that's more helpful. But for like grammar or sentence structure, or something like that, I definitely like it more when the tutor just tells me, like suggest what they think I should change.

Analysis of Suggestions by Writing Concern

What is revealing to me is the frequency at which I made suggestions that addressed *mechanics, grammar, and sentence structure (grammar)*, particularly with the

non-native speakers. With both Gina (n=72, 58%) and Sandra (n=19, 54%), more than half of the suggestions made addressed writing concerns in the grammar category. With Jess, suggestions towards grammar (n=11, 20%) came in second after *APA/MLA format and citation guidelines (formatting)* (n=29, 54%). When Jess' session was analyzed without the final 11 minutes of formatting work, suggestions towards grammar accounted for 46% of the session (n=11). In sharp contrast, only 7% (n=2) of the suggestions made during Macey's session addressed grammar concerns. The suggestions offered to Macey were predominantly made towards *organization, structure, and transitions (organization)* (n=12, 44%), and *evidence, support, quoting, and paraphrasing (evidence)* (n=10, 37%). It might be worth mentioning that I never once made suggestions towards organization with all of the other three students. This finding is both surprising and insightful to me. First of all, writing center pedagogy encourages tutors to focus on higher-order concerns such as argument, evidence, clarity, and organization, and discourages too much attention given to lower-order concerns such as grammar and formatting. The frequency at which I made suggestions towards grammar during Gina's session does not surprise me because she explicitly stated at the start of her session that she wanted to delve into grammar concerns during the session.

“I think this it's like the flow is okay, but basically on grammar and making sentence clearly. I have a lot of questions about citations in the text, but I can ask you when it comes.”

-Gina

On the other hand, Macey explicitly requested that we focused on higher-order concerns during the session, and indicated that she would return to the lower-order concerns later.

“For today I'm really not worried about my formatting, or any...ummm...like technical edits of the language that...the writing that just...my bigger ideas are coming together. And once I feel like that's all been...I will go back.

-Macey

Jess initially mentioned *evidence* and *style/ writing with clarity and concision (clarity)* as her goal for the session. It was only after I asked “now are you at the point where you're looking at the nitty-gritty *grammar* stuff as well?” that she indicated a desire to look at *grammar* concerns as well. Sandra requested that we focus on *brainstorming* and *formatting* during her session, reason being that her draft had been submitted once and was to be part of a larger paper. She had wanted to brainstorm for the larger paper during this session. However, I made several suggestions towards grammar in the draft that she brought in, before stopping in my tracks and asking if it was something she wanted to focus on. That interaction in the initial session with Sandra is as follows:

C: I'm sorry. You weren't asking for grammar at all today.

S: Oh yeah no. That's totally fine. That's like another thing I was going to do later anyways, so it's fine

C: Oh you were? Okay...

S: I was going to go through it again later anyways

C: We should just focus on APA today unless you want me to keep looking

S: Yeah no you can keep looking

The direction of Gina and Macey's sessions, both graduate students, proceeded as they had requested. Contrary to that, I made a large percentage of suggestions towards *grammar* during Jess and Sandra's sessions, when they had not originally asked for it. This information confirms what I had feared, that despite my best attempts, I have a tendency towards addressing grammar concerns, even when students do not ask for them.

Syntactic Analysis of Suggestions

Syntactic analysis of the suggestions based on the categories that Jiang (2006) developed and that Liu and Zhao (2007) applied to their analysis of suggestions in teacher-student conferences did not reveal much, other than that the categories were unreliable in reflecting real-world suggestions in writing center consultation sessions because many of the suggestions did not fall into one of Jiang's categories. This was partly due to the way I defined suggestions in this study, with a suggestion being any statement that is intended to do something that I perceived to benefit the hearer. As a result, I created two "categories" to code the suggestions that did not fall under any of Jiang's categories. One was *none applicable*, for all statements that did not qualify as a suggestion according to Jiang, and *none applicable-questions*, for all questions that did not qualify as a suggestion.

Table 9

Analysis of Suggestions by Syntactic Form

Syntactic Form	Macey		Jess		Gina		Sandra	
Imperatives	1	4%	2	4%	0	0%	0	0%

Modal-Other Agents	5	19%	4	7%	2	2%	3	9%
Modal-You Agent	7	26%	10	19%	35	28%	13	37%
Conditionals	0	0%	0	0%	2	2%	0	0%
Extraposed-to Clause	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%	0	0%
Yes-No Questions	2	7%	3	6%	3	2%	3	9%
Wh Questions	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%	0	0%
None Applicable	6	22%	23	43%	36	29%	11	31%
None Applicable-Questions	6	22%	12	22%	44	35%	5	14%

With all four students, regardless of first language and degree-seeking status, the large majority of my suggestions fell under the categories of *not applicable (NA)*, *not applicable-questions (NA-Q)*, and *modals with you (MY)*. The session with Macey produced 26% suggestions in the MY category, 22% NA, and 22% NA-Q. During the session with Jess, 43% of suggestions made fell under the category of NA, followed by 22% of NA-Q, followed by 19% of MY. While meeting with Gina, I made 28% MY suggestions, 29% NA suggestions, and 35% NA-Q suggestions. Finally, Sandra's session consisted of 37% MY suggestions, 31% NA suggestions, and 14% NA-Q suggestions.

Part of the reason for this occurrence is that I considered statements and questions that did not necessarily "look like" a suggestion to be a suggestion. As per writing center pedagogy, instead of directly offering a solution to students when I see a problem, I flagged a problem to draw the student's attention to the fact that there is a problem.

Thereafter, I negotiated a solution with the student, giving them room to arrive at their own solution. Take for example, the following interaction with Macey.

C: English plus wants to promote all languages at no cost. **How so I wonder?**

S: That's kind of a...ummm...maybe too general of a statement...of just trying to say that like what's the harm in promoting a second language when we're seeing all these benefits of doing it in two languages, but with English only they're really taking away benefits that students could have. So I don't mean a literal cost here...and maybe it just needs to be rephrased as like..... Yeah it just needs to be re-phrased

The question “**How so I wonder?**” was coded as an *unhedged, indirect* suggestion to address a problem with *evidence*. The suggestion fell under the category of *none applicable-question*. Although this is a WH-question, which is one of Jiang’s categories, it does not explicitly make a suggestion like Jiang’s examples do, such as “Why don’t you...”

When reading the statement in the student’s paper, my thought was that the idea wasn’t well developed and needed more evidence. Instead of making a direct suggestion like “There isn’t enough development or evidence in this statement”, I asked her a prodding question that would 1) make her aware of the problem with that under-developed statement, 2) allow her the autonomy as a writer to dictate the direction her paper should take, and 3) protect her confidence as a writer.

Interestingly enough, in all four sessions, I never once used the traditional performative form to make a suggestion, meaning that I never said “I suggest that...” or

“It is my recommendation that...” Two other syntactic forms of suggestions according to Jiang (2006) and Liu and Zhao (2007) that were never used in any of the sessions were *pseudo cleft structures* and *want structures*. Although infrequently, the following syntactic forms of suggestions were used moderately during the sessions: *extraposed to - clauses* (n=1), *wh-questions* (n=1), *conditionals* (n=2), and *imperatives* (3). *Yes-no questions* (n=11) and *modals with agents other than you* (n=14). The most frequently used form of suggestions were *modals with you agent* (n=65), *none applicable-questions* (n=67), and *none applicable* (n=76).

Incidental Findings

Further Analysis of Jess’ session

The data from Jess’ session was skewed by a high number of suggestions on formatting (n= 29, 54%) that 1) significantly increased the number of suggestions made in the entire session, and 2) increased the amount and frequency of unhedged direct suggestions made during her session. I was curious to ascertain the difference caused by the final 11 minutes of the session that was spent making suggestions towards formatting. Hence, I conducted a second analysis of Jess’ session without the final 11 minutes. After taking out the final 11 minutes from the analysis, the number of suggestions made dropped by more than half, and suggestions made per minute dropped to 1.04. The following table demonstrates the difference.

Table 10

Comparison of Suggestions in Jess' Entire Session and Abridged Session

Variable	Entire Session	Abridged Session
Total suggestions	54	25
Length of transcribed session (in minutes)	35	24
Suggestions/ minute	1.54	1.04

Table 11

Comparison of Jess' Entire Session and Abridged Session by Writing Concern

Writing Concern	Entire Session		Abridged Session	
Argument	0	0%	0	0%
Clarity	7	13%	7	29%
Evidence	7	13%	7	29%
Formatting	29	54%	0	0%
Grammar	11	20%	11	46%
Organization	0	0%	0	0%

The analysis of the abridged session without the final 11 minutes of formatting work also revealed that both the percentage of unhedged suggestions and direct suggestions increased, indicating that unhedged and direct suggestions are indeed more frequently used when addressing formatting concerns. My assumption was that the

amount of unhedged-indirect suggestions would decrease significantly, and would no longer be the most frequently used type of suggestion. However, my assumptions were proven wrong. *Unhedged-indirect* remained the most popular form of suggestion made to Jess in both comparisons.

Table 12

Comparison of Jess' Entire and Abridged Session by Hedging and Directness

Hedging-Directness	Entire Session		Abridged Session	
Total hedged	23	43%	12	50%
Total unhedged	31	57%	12	50%
Total direct	24	44%	9	38%
Total indirect	30	56%	16	67%
Hedged-direct	13	24%	6	25%
Hedged-indirect	10	19%	6	25%
Unhedged-direct	11	20%	3	13%
Unhedged-indirect	20	37%	10	42%

Interestingly enough, this analysis revealed to me that I made 10 unhedged-indirect suggestions towards *APA/MLA format and citation guidelines* (formatting), making that the most frequently used combination of suggestion towards formatting. I had wrongly assumed that the majority of suggestions made towards formatting writing concerns would be direct. Although 15 of the suggestions towards formatting were

indeed direct suggestions, that amount is comparable to the 14 indirect suggestions made towards formatting during Jess's session.

Table 13

Analysis of Suggestions towards Formatting during Jess' Entire Session

Hedging/Directness	Number of Suggestions
Unhedged-indirect	10
Unhedged-direct	8
Hedged-direct	7
Hedged-indirect	4

One possible reason behind this surprising finding might be the way *indirect* was operationally defined to categorize and analyze suggestions in this study. *Indirect* was operationally defined as feedback that “implies more or other than what is explicitly said.” As a result, several suggestions that did not have only one intended meaning were categorized as *indirect*. Here are several examples:

C: Okay...DOI...et al...are there more authors? [*unhedged-indirect*]

- In this example, I could be genuinely asking if there are more authors. However, my intention behind the statement was to make the student aware that the *et al.* should not be part of the reference in the reference list, and if there were more authors the student should list it out.

C: Lake Water. I'm assuming lake water here is not (a) proper noun. [*hedged-indirect*]

- Here, I could simply be stating the fact that lake water is not a proper noun. In actuality, I was indirectly suggesting that “lake water” in this reference should not have any capitalization.

C: And then there's 2008 there...I'm not sure why... [*hedged-indirect*]

- To the outside eye, it might look like I am genuinely confused by the presence of 2008 at the end of a reference. However, I was in actual fact making an indirect suggestion for the student to remove “2008” because it did not belong at that part of the reference.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the findings of this study in several ways. First I presented the number of and frequency of suggestions made to each student. Next, I presented the analysis of suggestions based on several categorizations: 1) the hedging-directness of the suggestions, 2) the writing concerns addressed by the suggestions, and 3) the syntactic forms of the suggestions. I also discussed students’ perceptions of my suggestions from the stimulated recall interview. Finally, I presented incidental findings of the study. In the next chapter, I will further discuss these findings and its implications, the limitations of this study, and suggest future research.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

In the last chapter, I presented the findings from the data analysis. I discussed the amount and frequency of suggestions made to each student and types of suggestions analyzed three different ways (hedging-directness, syntactic form, and writing concern addressed). I also presented some findings from the stimulated recall interview that provided insight to students' perception of my suggestions. In this chapter, I will further discuss the findings from the last chapter, discuss the implications of the findings for me as a writing tutor and for writing centers, disclose the limitations of this study, and finally make suggestions for future research.

Discussion of Findings

Frequency of Suggestions

The number and frequency of suggestions made to students was surprising because they did not corroborate with previous research by Thonus (1999b), which found that NS received more suggestions than NNS. In this study, the NNS graduate student received the highest number of suggestions. However, this was followed by the NS undergraduate student, even after accounting for the final part of the session that was formatting suggestion heavy. It does not seem that there was a pattern to the number of suggestions made based on first language or degree-seeking status. However, one must take into consideration a flaw in this research: there was only one participant in each group. To be certain that this finding is valid, a larger sample size is necessary.

Hedging

The data showed that I made the most hedged suggestions during my session with Macey. One possible reason could be that Macey (native speaker, graduate student) was closest to me in terms of power distance (Thonus, 1999b), followed by Jess (native speaker, undergraduate student), Gina (non-native speaker, graduate student), and Sandra (non-native speaker, undergraduate student). One would assume that based on the power distance, I would have made unhedged suggestions most infrequently with Sandra instead of Gina. However, Sandra is in actual fact a generation 1.5 non-native speaker of English who has a higher level of English proficiency (Thonus, 2003) than Gina, who is an international student from Korea who has predominantly spoken Korean her entire life. Thonus (1999b, 2004) and Williams (2004) wrote that tutors used less mitigation with NNS in their studies to increase comprehensibility. It is perhaps the case that the least amount of hedging was used with Gina to make the suggestions clearer.

Directness

Consistent with Williams (2004), I made more direct suggestions with the NNS compared to the native students. The findings also corroborated with Thonus' (1999a) findings that tutors were more directive with NNS, particularly when dealing with grammar. Different sources reported different reasons for tutors' use of more direct suggestions. Research that involved NS tutors (Williams, 2004) reported that tutors were more direct to reduce the processing load of an indirect suggestion. However, Liu and Zhao (2007) revealed that NNS instructors used more direct suggestions to establish their authority. It is a possibility that I used more direct suggestions with the NNS because I addressed more grammatical concerns when working with them, and the data analysis

showed that a majority of direct comments were made towards grammar and formatting. Regardless of the reasons, for more directness with NNS, it appears that both the NNS and NS preferred when I was direct about what I thought they should do, especially when it came to grammar and formatting, and they did not consider it rude when I did, confirming what Young (1992) and Thonus (2003) have reported. This also gives credence to Riley and Mackiewicz's (2002) suggestion to reduce the use of indirect suggestions especially when working with NNS to increase clarity and reduce confusion.

Analysis of Suggestions by Writing Concern

The most surprising result from analyzing suggestions made towards the different categories of writing concerns was learning the frequency at which I made suggestions towards grammar and formatting, both of which are lower-order concerns, which writing center pedagogy discourages focusing on. This was true in all of the tutorial sessions with the exception of the session with the native-speaking graduate student, who explicitly indicated that she would address those at a later time. It confirms my prior fears that I have a tendency to address lower-order concerns more than higher-order concerns.

Syntactic Analysis of Suggestions

Overall, Jiang's (2006) categories of suggestions fell short in including all possible forms of suggestions that were made in my tutorials. This was partially due to the way in which suggestions were defined in this study, which regarded utterances made with the intention of getting the hearer to do something that the speaker perceives to benefit the hearer. As a result, I had to add two "miscellaneous" categories to the taxonomy provided by Jiang for all those that did not fall into any of the original categories. Nonetheless, it provided some insightful information. Modals were indeed

frequently used to make suggestions during all four tutorial sessions, confirming Jiang's (2006) finding that modals are commonly used to making suggestions. Thonus (1999b) found that the 2nd-person modal suggestion (modals with you agent) was the most popular type of suggestion used by tutors regardless of tutee language proficiency. My data revealed the same thing, that 2nd-person modal suggestions were the most frequently used type during the interactions with Macey and Sandra. This is also true of Jess and Gina's session, if discounting the none applicable and none applicable-questions category. It would be interesting, for future research, to further break the 2nd-person modal down to the different types of modals used, for instance, distinguishing "you have to" from "you should" since those modals carry with them different levels of "necessity".

Jiang (2006) wrote that performative verbs are generally not used except by someone of higher-status to lower-status, while Martinez-Flor (2005) wrote that they are not used except in formal situations because of their direct nature. Performative verbs were never used in all four tutorials. This could possibly be due to the fact that it would appear too forceful. Hence, in keeping with writing center pedagogy, I did not use performative verbs when consulting with students.

Implications

I set out conducting this research to discover if I made more direct or indirect suggestions, if I was more likely to make suggestions with or without hedging, if I differentiated between NS and NNS, and what students thought of the suggestions. What I discovered was that there were indeed differences in the way I made suggestions towards NS and NNS: I was more indirect with the NS. Whether my directness with the NNS was due to power differences or due to a desire to be clearer in my suggestions is

unclear, but what I discovered through the stimulated recall interviews is that both the NS and NNS actually prefer that I am direct with my suggestions, especially when addressing lower-order concerns. However, the students did appreciate when I was indirect with higher-order concerns and respected their ownership over their work. This discovery gave me, as a writing consultant, greater confidence and comfort in at times using direct suggestions, knowing that students prefer it and it is beneficial for them. Furthermore, this discovery also raises questions for writing center pedagogy that has long promoted indirectness as the best way to conduct tutorials, and confirms what some writing center practitioners (Riley & Mackiewicz, 2003) have suspected: there is a place and time for directness during tutorials.

The findings of this study also revealed to me that I made a large percentage of hedged suggestions with the NS graduate student, but not with the rest of the students who were mostly recipients of unhedged comments. Despite that, none of the students indicated that I was ever rude during all of the sessions, and most of the time they responded that I was polite during the stimulated recall interviews. An implication of this finding is that hedging is not necessarily correlated to politeness, and vice versa a lack of hedging does not necessarily indicate impoliteness. There are other factors that must be taken into consideration, such as the purpose and context of the suggestion, the intonation, and the syntactic form of the suggestion.

I also discovered that I made a large amount of suggestions towards grammar and formatting, and that is disconcerting to me. The implication of this finding is that I will be more intentional about addressing higher-order concerns instead of lower-order concerns

with students in the future, particularly if they do not indicate a desire to address lower-order concerns.

Finally, conducting this research has been very enlightening for me as a writing center consultant. I have discovered much about my practice as a writing center consultant, and recommend that other writing center consultants likewise record and analyze their tutorial sessions. Furthermore, it also shone light on the need for more empirical research in the writing center to support pedagogy. Pemberton (2010) wrote regarding the current lack of empirical research in the area of writing center pedagogy that “few other writing center researchers...have analyzed transcripts of tutor-student conversations...but the number and frequency of such studies are too few and too far between” (p. 24). Mackiewicz and Thompson (2014) added that “writing center researchers have barely begun the much-needed systematic, empirical analysis of the ways writing center tutors talk to student writers during writing conferences” (p. 1). The findings from this study that at times agreed with writing center pedagogy and at other times disagreed with it raises the need for more research to be done to support or oppose such ideologies.

Limitations

One of the difficulties faced in analyzing the data in this study was reflecting the use of other verbal cues or non-verbal cues to signal a suggestion. Take for instance a suggestion that was made to Jess on formatting: “Et al. in number 8?” There was nothing in that sentence that indicated that it was a suggestion, but from the way it was said, the student recognized it to be a suggestion to remove “et al.” The intonation of a sentence can significantly change the meaning behind the sentence (Hirschberg, 2004). Other non-

verbal factors, such as facial expressions and hand gestures, can also alter meaning (Wharton, 2009). There has been research on tutor verbal and non-verbal behaviors during writing center consultation (Thompson, 2009), and it would be advantageous in future research to also analyze the non-verbal strategies used to make suggestions.

Considering the small sample size of this study of just one consultant and four tutees (two NS and two NNS), the external validity of this study is undeniably limited. Additionally, both the NNS come from Asian backgrounds, one Korean and one Hmong. They are by no means representative of all NNS. Furthermore, both graduate students in this study were graduate students in teaching, and both their papers were for classes that I have personally taken. On the other hand, both undergraduate students were enrolled in majors that are unfamiliar to me (biology and criminal justice), and their papers were on topics that were unfamiliar to me. All of these factors could have skewed the way I made suggestions.

Finally, I was both the tutor-participant and the researcher of the study. As mentioned in Chapter 1, researcher bias is unavoidable in the analysis and reporting of the data, reducing the internal validity of this study. Nevertheless, the findings from this action research have proven to be extremely beneficial to me as a writing consultant, and will certainly inform my future practice. Additionally, it also serves to inform writing center pedagogy of the need for greater research in the field.

Future Research

Several recommendations for future research are born out of this study. Firstly, it is recommended that this study be replicated with a larger sample size of more NS and NNS tutees as well as tutors to increase the external validity of the findings. In addition,

it would be beneficial to include a NS tutor in future research in order to investigate if NS tutors make suggestions differently than NNS tutors. It would also be beneficial, to increase internal validity, for the researcher and participants to have separate roles, and for more coders who would analyze the suggestions. Furthermore, it is recommended that a different system be developed to categorize suggestions, especially suggestions that may not have an explicit syntactic form of a suggestion. Although I created two categories for suggestions that did not fall into any categories, those were more so “miscellaneous” categories rather than categories that truly reflect the syntactic form of the suggestions. Finally, for future research, it would be interesting to analyze the non-verbal behaviors of the suggestions.

Plan for Communicating Results

The results of this study can be used several ways. Firstly, it can be applied to my own practice as a writing center consultant, as well as future practice as an ESL professional. The results and implications can also be shared with my co-workers at the writing center where I work, and with the greater writing center community through writing center listservs. Finally, a copy of this study will be made publicly available through Hamline University’s online open access repository, Digital Commons.

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Appendix 1

Post-tutorial Questionnaire (To be completed by student immediately after the tutorial)

Note: The purpose of this research and this questionnaire is to gather honest and accurate information. Please be completely honest in your feedback. No offense will be taken by your tutor!

1. What is your class-standing? (e.g. Freshman) _____
 2. What is your major? _____
 3. What is your first language? _____
 4. What is your gender? _____
 5. Was this your first visit to the Writing Center? A. Yes B. No
 6. Was this your first time working with this tutor? A. Yes B. No
 7. Did your tutor make any suggestions during the session?
 8. What were some specific suggestions that your tutor made? (List as many as you can recall using your tutor's words as much as you are able to)
-

9. On a scale of 1-5, how **clear** were the suggestions made by your tutor?
 Very unclear 1 2 3 4 5 Very clear
 10. On a scale of 1-5, how **useful** were the suggestions made by your tutor?
 Very useless 1 2 3 4 5 Very useful
 11. On a scale of 1-5, how **polite** were the suggestions made by your tutor?
 Very impolite 1 2 3 4 5 Very polite
 12. On a scale of 1-5, how **useful** was this tutorial session?
 Very useless 1 2 3 4 5 Very useful
 13. Is there anything you wish was different about this session?
-

14. Are there any changes you plan to make to your assignment as a result of this tutorial session?
-

Appendix 2

These questions will be asked in reference to a specific suggestion made by the tutor using audio playback. Several sections will be played and the same question will be asked for each sections.

1. What do you think I meant by this statement?
2. On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being very unclear and 5 being very clear, how clear was this statement to you?
3. Did you think this statement was a suggestion?
 - a. Why or why not?
4. Did you agree with it?
 - a. Why or why not?
5. Did you make any changes to your paper as a result of this statement?
6. How would you describe the style of this suggestion? Rude / Polite / Neutral.

Appendix 3

Hello,

I am a graduate student working on an advanced degree in education at Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota. As part of my graduate work, I plan to conduct research with students seeking tutoring services at Hamline's Writing Center. The purpose of this letter is to request your participation.

The topic of my master's capstone (thesis) is "Discourse in Writing Center Tutorials." I plan to audio and video record a 30-minute writing center tutorial with several students. After the completion of the tutorial, participants will be asked to answer a post-tutorial questionnaire. Participants will also be asked to return two weeks after the tutorial for a follow-up interview, which will be audio recorded. **After successfully completing all three components of the study**, participants will be presented with a \$15 gift card to a store of your choice.

Participation in the interview is voluntary, and at any time, you may drop out of the study and have your tutorial, questionnaire, and interview data deleted from the capstone without negative consequences. The quality of services you receive from the Writing Center in your recorded session and all future sessions will not be influenced by your participation in this study.

There is little to no risk if you choose to participate. All results will be confidential and anonymous. Pseudonyms for the university, program, and participants will be used. The tutorial sessions, interview recordings, and all accompanying participant material will be destroyed after completion of my study.

I have received approval from the School of Education and the Writing Center at Hamline to conduct this study. This research is public scholarship. The capstone will be catalogued in Hamline's Bush Library Digital Commons, a searchable electronic repository. My results might be included in an article in a professional journal or a session at a professional conference. In all cases, your identity and participation in this study will be confidential.

If you agree to participate, keep this page. Fill out the duplicate agreement to participate on page two and return it to me. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,
Chin Wah Teo

Informed Consent to Participate in Writing Center Research

Keep this full page for your records.

I have received the letter about your research study for which you will be recording Writing Center tutorials. Additionally, I will be answering a questionnaire, and returning for a follow-up interview. I understand that my participation poses little to no risk for me, that my identity will be protected, and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences.

Signature

Date