Non-Native English Speaking Online Doctoral Students Attitudes, Perceptions and Actions in response to written feedback

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Abstract

Background. Previous research on written feedback has taken place mainly in campus-based
settings. Written feedback to Non-Native English speaking Online Doctoral students is
under researched.

Aim.   The purpose of this study is to explore the attitudes, perceptions and actions of Non-
Native English Speaking (NNES) Online Doctoral students toward the written feedback
that they receive from their Native English Speaking (NES) doctoral research
supervisors. This research will address questions about these students' attitudes and
perceptions regarding written feedback and the feedback providers. Furthermore, the
investigation's research findings point towards practical application by doctoral
research supervisors. The Social Presence, Transactional Distance and Second Language
Activity theories frame the interpretation of the findings.

Sample. 100 online doctoral students completed the online survey of which 41 completed enough
of the survey to be included in the study and 10 telephonic or Skype interviews were
conducted. The survey respondents lived on different continents and represented
seventeen distinct first languages, namely Afrikaans; Arabic; Chinese; Croatian; Dutch;
French; German; Italian; Malay; Malayalam; Mandarin; Portuguese; Romanian; Russian;
Spanish; Swedish; and Turkish.

Method. A survey preceded and informed the 10 individual semi-structured interviews. An
exploratory sequential, mixed methodological approach was used to develop an
understanding of the main themes related to what NNES online doctoral students do with
written feedback.

Findings. This study focuses on the intersection of the online modality with the language issues
encountered by NNES online doctoral students as opposed to campus-based NNES
doctoral students or NES online doctoral students. The focus of this study is not a
comparison between campus-based and online NNES and NES students, but is intended
to reflect upon issues that will promote the use of written feedback to improve the NNES

online doctoral students learning experience. This study found that while NNES online doctoral students share many of the experiences of NNES campus based students and NES online doctoral students, the combination of online and language issues compound the NNES online doctoral students' ability to make good use of the written feedback that they receive. This combination of online and NNES has significant implications for policy, institutional guidance and practice.

Keywords: Online learning; Doctoral studies; Non-Native English Online Doctoral Students; Native English Speaking Doctoral Research Supervisors; written feedback; attitudes

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Every year, thousands of Non-Native English Speaking (NNES) students pursue online doctoral degrees, most of them with limited personal experience of an English-speaking academic culture (PR Team, 2016). In completing their doctoral work, and particularly their research, they are required to write extensively in a language different from their initial academic experiences.

In recent times, globalization has significantly influenced online learning. Brown (2008), Kashyap (2011) and Szelényi and Rhoads (2007) explored the experiences of doctoral students and placed them in a global context. In addition, Appadurai (1996) and Taylor (2004) referred to the trend of greater student mobility in this context. Globalization has promoted the possibility of learning across national borders and boundaries. The spread of English as the 'lingua franca' of Higher Education is one such example (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p. 290; Suárez-Ortega, García-Mingo, & San-Román, 2012, p. 476). The growth of English as academic 'lingua franca' by implication means that a larger number of NNES speaking doctoral students will study at English-language medium universities.

The NNES online doctoral student brings notably different academic traditions to an English-speaking environment. Research shows that international students bring different cultural norms and literacy practices when writing academic papers for higher education degrees at campus-based English-speaking universities (Butler, Trosclair, Zhou and Wei, p. 207, 2014; Butler, Zhou and Wei, 2013; Reichelt, 2003; Snively, 1999). Snively (1999, p. 25-26) reports that an accomplished academic writer in Chinese will reveal the point being expressed within their academic writing slowly, building the argument in a manner which contrasts with the Anglo Saxon tradition of stating one's viewpoint at the beginning and using topic sentences to develop the argument in the dissertation.

In terms of practice, NNES students do not simply have to write in English, but also have to conform to British or US conventions of academic writing, which other (i.e. Native English Speaker) students take for granted. Academic English Writing Conventions (AEWC) is a

distinctive form of concise, precise and authoritative expression (Snow, 2010, p.450). AEWC is characterized as objective, distanced, logical, impersonal and in the passive voice (Casanave, 2010, p. 3). Standard checks of a person's language ability to write in English, for example the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), might not be sufficient to establish their ability to complete doctoral level work in an English-speaking environment (Canagarajah, 2002, p.6; Fotovatian & Miller, 2014, p. 288). NNES postgraduate students with proper guidance can adapt to the AEWC, although the latter are in most instances tacit and not a static entity (Casanave, 2010, p.12; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007, p. 80; Whitley and Grous, 2009).

Additionally, the struggles experienced by NNES students may be linked to what Butler et al. (2014, p.203) refer to as the value that each culture places on conventions within its academic writing style or rhetoric.

Written feedback is one of the most important teaching strategies in doctoral education. It conveys expectations of AEWC and discipline-specific customs and practices (Pitts, 2005). There exists some research with the dual focus on perceptions of NNES doctoral students and their response to written feedback provided while engaged in online doctoral study (Breslin, 2012). Furthermore, some research is available on NNES doctoral students studying at English–language medium campus-based universities (Huang, 2010; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). Can (2009) also referred to global trends when she suggested further research to understand NNES doctoral students' perceptions of feedback.

Students place high value on written feedback, and it is directly linked to their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their program (Nicol, 2010, p. 501). The student-doctoral feedback provider relationship is personal (Goode, 2010), but does not always include aspects of guidance that forms a clear and complete picture of the differences between their native language academic tradition and that of AEWC (Butler et al., 2014, p. 214).

Can (2009, p. 159) identified, as part of her study of written feedback to campus-based doctoral students, the need for an in-depth study of what NNES online doctoral students do with written feedback that they receive within an online environment. Given the global reach of online learning, one would expect that these increased online environments will include NNES doctoral students.

To date, most doctoral feedback research has assumed the use of a combination of physical presence and synchronous communication (Bitchener, Basturkmen, & East, 2010). Research conducted has primarily focused on written feedback with campus-based doctoral students or in a program that required a physical residency (Bitchener, Basturkmen, & East, 2010; Can, 2009; Can & Walker, 2011; Kumar & Stracke, 2007; Stracke & Kumar, 2010). The role of written feedback to NNES doctoral students has been under-researched with regard to online doctoral programs (Can, 2009).

Can's (2009) study focused on campus-based doctoral students in the social sciences, concerning their attitudes and perceptions towards written doctoral feedback providers. She limited the study to the social sciences due to different writing conventions and academic interaction patterns between students in the social sciences and the sciences, suggesting that "replication studies can be conducted with natural science and ESL doctoral students" (p. 159). Furthermore, due to the problematic nature as to which disciplines are included in social science, she opted for the Social Science Citation Index (Thomson-Reuters, 2008) as a guide.

A further consideration for online NNES doctoral students is the issue of identity, both doctoral and linguistic. Thornborrow (2004) defined identity, on an individual, social or institutional level, as something that we are constantly building and negotiating throughout our lives through our interaction with others. Doctoral student identity refers to development during the doctoral program, from a novice to a scholar with a specific and different identity (Zambo, Buss, & Zambo, 2013). Flottum, Dahl, & Torrodd, (2006) claim that language and identity are interlinked. Likewise, Tabouret-Keller (1997) stated that a person can be classified or grouped by a single phrase, for example

> *The link between language and identity is often so strong that a single feature of language use suffices to identify someone's membership in a given group. On the battle-field after their victory over the people of Ephraïm, the Gileads applied a language-identity test to sort out friend and foe: All of the soldiers were asked to pronounce the word shibboleth; those who pronounced the first consonant as [ʃ] were friends, those who pronounced it [s] were enemies and therefore killed at once (Judges: XII. 6) (p. 316).*

Changes in language identity may have important ramifications for NNES online doctoral students, but researchers differ on the extent and impact. On the one hand, Chang and Kanno (2010, p. 671) argued that language competence may not be that important in postgraduate studies, as different disciplines put different emphases on language abilities, and NNES students can compensate for limitations as far as language is concerned by other discipline-specific contributions. In this case, the doctoral student acquires a doctoral identity without losing her or his language identity. On the other hand, Bronson and Watson-Gegeo (2008) made a case for the centrality of identity loss in NNES doctoral student writing in English. For example, they referred to a Japanese doctoral student in a campus-based university in the USA who deliberately refused to use definite articles so as to preserve her Japanese identity (Bronson and Watson-Gegeo, 2008, p. 52). In this case, for the NNES online doctoral students their loss of expressing themselves in their native language might equate to the loss of their language identity.

Why this study?

Personal factors play a significant role in my choice of this topic. I am a NNES online doctoral student, and during the progression through my online doctoral program I encountered peers who experienced similar circumstances. It was my struggle with written feedback in an online environment that constantly forced me to think about academic writing and receiving feedback in English, highlighting the opportunity that my own experiences of receiving feedback was worthy of study.

After an initial review of current literature on the experiences of online doctoral students, their use of feedback and guidelines for online feedback providers, it was the lack of guidance which inspired me to investigate NNES online doctoral students' attitudes, perceptions, and revision decisions.

I share the frustrations and fascinations of thousands of NNES online doctoral students pursuing the highest degree in academic studies in a language other than their native tongue. It is my hope that the information in this dissertation will allow doctoral feedback providers to understand and value the NNES online doctoral students' contribution to the English-speaking academic world. Lastly, it is also my hope that these contributions will help other NNES doctoral students to understand their experiences in an online environment.

Dissertation structure

Chapter 2 provides a review of the relevant literature on written feedback and the formulation of the research questions. Chapter 3 describes the conceptual framework used in this study, based on a review of the relevant literature. Chapter 4 discusses the methodology and methods used. Chapter 5 reports and discusses the online survey findings. Chapter 6 reports and discusses the semi-structured interview findings. Chapter 7 considers the implications for doctoral feedback providers and future research, and offers guidelines for both doctoral feedback providers and NNES online doctoral students to enable future NNES online doctoral students and doctoral feedback providers to develop some systematic guidelines.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

An initial approach to the literature was to determine the extent to which previous research investigated the use of doctoral feedback by both providers (typically doctoral supervisors) and students. Much of the literature focused on the campus-based perspective, emphasizing the actions of students in response to feedback providers, but did not inquire into the nature of feedback within an online doctoral study context.

One such example is the study of Can (2009), whose aim was to develop an explanatory model that described the relationship between doctoral students and other factors that might influence their revision decisions. The qualitative phase of Cans' study resulted in the creation of a questionnaire and a theoretical model to understand the attitudes and perceptions of the campus-based doctoral student toward written feedback and doctoral feedback providers. Can (2009) emphasizes that:

> *the results of this study provided descriptive information on doctoral students'*
> *preferences for different types of written feedback and their perceptions and*
> *attitudes toward different characteristics of written feedback providers* (p. v).

The literature on NNES online doctoral students' attitudes and perceptions toward written feedback in a solely online environment, and the NNES online doctoral students' subsequent revision decisions, is rather limited. Many studies assume physical presence and synchronous communication (Bitchener, Basturkmen & East, 2010; Can & Walker, 2011; Kumar & Stracke, 2007; Stracke, & Kumar, 2010; Can, 2009), and within this context, doctoral students highlight the importance of written feedback. Breslin (2012) finds that students act upon feedback when they perceive its usefulness and practical value; however, the research only addresses the Native English speaking context not the online NNES context.

What is written feedback?

An initial review of research indicates that doctoral students report feedback as a critical component of their studies (Caffarella & Barnett, 2000; Heath, 2002; Jones, 2013; Kleuver, 1997; and Zhao, Golde, & McCormick, 2007) and it is a central characteristic of the doctoral student-supervisor relationship (Jones, 2013, p. 92) Doctoral feedback, intended to enhance student performance (Park, 2005, p. 189; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011), can also lead to tension between the feedback provider and student (Krase, 2007, p, 55; Nesbit & Burton, 2006).

The literature review also revealed a lack of a clear definition of what constitutes 'written feedback'. For example, Can (2009, p. 5-6) defined written feedback as the occurrence of one or groups of comments, edits, marks, written (handwritten or electronic) by someone who reviews an academic paper, while Breslin (2012, p.21) defines feedback as a response that highlights a gap(s) between desired and actual levels of performance, providing information on how to modify the performance to narrow the gap(s). Where Can (2009) describes feedback in terms of content, Breslin (2012) focuses on the impact on student development. Furthermore, Mory (2004, p. 777) highlighted the importance of feedback and feedback mechanisms as they related to effectiveness of learning, serving a critical function in knowledge acquisition, regardless of the particular learning paradigm through which we choose to examine it. Learning from feedback can be understood as information about the gap between a learner's present and desired level of knowledge, understanding and skill, together with information about the action necessary to close this gap (Ramaprasad, 1983; Sadler, 1989).

The dimension significantly missing in defining written feedback to doctoral students is the dialogic function of written feedback. It is not only a list of instructions from the feedback provider to the student, but a dialogue (Bloxham & Campbell, 2010; Nicol, 2010). According to Nicol (2010), effective written feedback,

> *...must be embedded in dialogical contexts in which feedback activities are shared between teachers and students and are adaptive, discursive, interactive and reflective...it is assumed that the overall purpose of the feedback process in higher education is to help students develop the ability to monitor, evaluate and regulate their own learning. (p.504)*

The dialogical nature of feedback highlights the types of feedback that doctoral feedback providers give to their doctoral students, the perceptions of doctoral students of the feedback received and the types of feedback that doctoral students find most effective.

Fernández-Toro, Truman & Walker (2013, p. 817) extended Nicol's definition by including the caveat that achieving this dialogue is more difficult in distance learning and online learning, compared to the dialogue that occurs on campus-based universities. In addition the dialogical nature of feedback highlights the diversity of feedback given to doctoral students, as the concept of dialogue remains imperative to understanding the different perceptions of feedback providers and students. For example, the perceptions of feedback and the types of feedback may differ between providers and students, and dialogue can be used to facilitate the exchange of perceptions.

Can's (2009) definition of written feedback, with some modification, forms the basis for this study:

> *Written feedback is the occurrence of one or a group(s) of comments, edits, marks, and so forth, written (handwritten or electronic) by someone who reviewed academic writing, to promote reflection by the doctoral student and dialogue between the doctoral feedback provider and the doctoral student. (p. 5)*

What are the language issues that impact on written feedback?

Davies (2003, p. 207) viewed native language users as those who identify themselves and are acknowledged as a member of a particular language group, thus included in the language groups and with a shared culture. NNES doctoral students do not represent a homogenous group and have a range of exposures and experiences in English-speaking academic contexts (Salager-Meyer, 2008, p. 125; Spack, 1997, p. 766).

The classification of NNES poses potential problems. Spack (1997, p. 766) argued that students are a diverse group and it would be difficult for any label to capture their differences. Feedback providers might with the best intentions use labels such as NNES to refer to a sub-group of students. However, by assigning a label to a group of students puts the feedback providers in a position of power to construct the identity of those students. The feedback providers might open themselves to criticism that they might create untrue assumptions about this group of students to do with written feedback. Spack (1997) acknowledges that we might still use labels, but it would as a minimum require some reflection on the manner the label is used. In this respect, Davies (2003), Ferguson (2005, 2007), Hwee (2006) and Swales (2004) concur with Spacks' (1997) view and questioned the native versus non-native dichotomy to distinguish academic writers. Hyland (2000, 2006) and Hyland and Hyland (2006) suggest an alternative dichotomy, namely that of the novice versus expert.

Salager-Meyer (2008) and Marino (2011) argue that in certain contexts the NNES/NES dichotomy might still be relevant. Salager-Meyer (p. 125) acknowledged the views that experience in academic publication and discourse could be deemed more important than the NNES/NES dichotomy. Salager-Meyer chose to stick to the NNES/NES dichotomy: Marino also argues for the upholding the NNES/ NES dichotomy (p. 140), and wrote from the perspective of NES and NNES, but acknowledged that the concept of "native speaker" was troublesome (p. 129). Noting that the concept of "native speaker" is based on intuition and common sense, and lacks scientific rigor to discern what it means given the range of English spoken across the world, she argues for upholding the dichotomy, underpinning it with a more rigorous analysis.

In deciding to engage in a doctoral programme in English, NNES students broaden their chances that their published research will be read by a wider audience within their discipline (Butler, Trosclair, Zhou and Wei, 2014, p. 207; Duszak & Lewkowicz, 2008; Huang, 2010). It is important to remember that the nature of writing expected by the different disciplines differ, for example between science and social science. One might ascertain that the level of language competency requirements also differs across disciplines. Thus, despite what the NNES doctoral students might lack in language skills, their other skills and insights might give them a standing in their disciplinary communities. As far as feedback is concerned, Fernández-Toro, Truman and Walker (2013) note that feedback is not homogeneous between disciplines.

What is the challenge of written feedback in an online environment?

Language competency levels have an impact in an online context. As most asynchronous discussion forms depend upon written contributions, English language proficiency is required to become an active member of these learning forums. Gunawardena and McIsaac (2004, p. 284), in their review of distance education in a cultural context, argued that NNES students may have disadvantages participating in online discussions. The disadvantage of NNES students arose from the difference between them and those for whom English is their first language.

Writing up research results is central to doctoral level academic activity. Written feedback from doctoral supervisors is identified as an important source for improving doctoral students' writing (Swales, 1996); however, doctoral students often misinterpret feedback, fail to recognize potential benefits or refrain from acting upon feedback (Hyatt, 2005; Orrell, 2006; Price, Handley, Millar & O'Donovan, 2010; Weaver 2006). For example, Sangganjanavanich & Magnuson (2009), in a campus-based study, note that misunderstandings might be prevented by the doctoral feedback providers explicitly discussing the procedures for writing dissertations with doctoral students. From an online perspective, Goodfellow, Lea, Gonzalez, and Mason (2001, p. 81) highlight the responsibility of online providers working with students from a diverse linguistic background to create supplementary material to clarify expectations.

Beyond the practical use of feedback as a means for improvement, written feedback within an online environment promotes connectivity (Nicol, 2010, p. 501; Wyman, 2012, p. 101). Connectivity is defined as the online doctoral student experiencing a personal relationship with the online doctoral feedback provider. Senior (2010, p. 146) proposed five dimensions that connectivity promoted: rapport, engagement, cooperation, collegiality, and integration. Furthermore, Senior (2010, p. 139) suggested for the broader use of the term 'connectivity': technically connectivity referred to the capacity of computers to be incorporated into networks. Senior (2010) stated that

> *The abstract noun 'connectivity' represents the notion of serving to connect, while the everyday verb 'to connect' means to bind or fasten together, to join or unite, to link, or to establish and maintain communication between. The prefix 'co-' signifies association combined with accompanying action, partnership, or joint responsibility." (p. 139)*

What actions are taken by doctoral students when they receive written feedback?

The literature on campus-based university doctoral students' experiences reports that there is a range of personalized responses to written feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 82; Wang & Li, 2011). Foss and Waters (2007) suggest that doctoral students listen to critiques and suggestions and accept feedback. However, they also suggest students respond to these critiques and suggestions, defend their ideas, and negotiate for revisions where necessary. Foss and Waters (2007) described defending one's ideas as "scholarly behavior" (p.318).

The literature reported that campus-based doctoral students use different strategies to clarify written feedback. The literature referred to the fact that the doctoral student in the dissertation phase tended to ask for more feedback than in other parts of the programme (Can, 2009, pp. 146, 154; Walker, Golde, Jones, Bueschel & Hutchings, 2008). Proactive students tended to get more time from their supervisors (Walker et al., 2008, p. 107). Campus-based doctoral students asked for feedback on more than one draft (Eyres, Hatch, Turner & West, 2001). Also, campus-based doctoral students displayed improved confidence as they progressed through the dissertation phase (Caffarella & Barnett, 2000).

Studies that focus on campus-based doctoral students suggested that written feedback received might contribute to confusion, such as the language used by the feedback provider, or that the written feedback was too vague or cumbersome for the students to comprehend. Carless (2006, p. 221) stated that one of the contributing factors to students' failure to act was that the language used by the feedback provider might be unclear or unfamiliar to the student. Bitchener, Basturkmen, East & Meyer (2011) found that for students "direct or 'to-the-point' feedback" (p. 5) was easier to understand and act upon. Getzlaf, Perry, Toffner, Lamarche and Edwards (2009) suggest a few strategies that are useful in campus-based settings to clarify the possible confusion, for example, "informal discussions after a classroom session, questions asked and answered as an assignment is being explained and non-verbal communication that complements verbal responses such as body language and facial expressions" (p. 4). Furthermore, Getzlaf et al. (2009) note that these strategies are difficult or impossible to implement in an asynchronous online context.

Which factors influence revision decisions?

The literature reports studies of campus-based NNES doctoral students' engagement with written feedback. In reference to Academic English Writing Conventions (AEWC), students did not seem to be fully aware of or fully understand the requirements of their doctoral program (Andrade & Du, 2007; Bailey & Garner, 2010; Burke, 2009; Hutchings, 2006; Maclellan, 2001). Additionally, students lacked the skills needed to self-assess their work relative to set requirements (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Burke, 2009; Hounsell, McCune, Hounsell, & Litjens, 2008; Hutchings, 2006; Maclellan, 2001; Thorpe, 2000). When feedback did not explicitly instruct them to revise their work, students might ignore the written feedback (Carless, 2006; Duncan, 2008; Maclellan, 2001; Struyven, Dochy, & Janssens, 2005).

Other factors that influence revision decisions of campus-based doctoral students are highlighted in the literature. Firstly, the building of mutual respect and trust between doctoral feedback providers and doctoral students motivated the doctoral student to revise the work (Mackenzie & Ling, 2009). Secondly, doctoral students that have previous negative experiences with their doctoral feedback providers' feedback might not readily have acted on the written feedback that they gave (Carless, 2006; Hutchings, 2006). Thirdly, constructive criticism motivated students to revise the work (Gill & Burnard, 2008). Finally, if there is not enough time given for the student to revise it, they might refrain from doing so (Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook & Irvine, 2008; Duncan, 2008; Gardner, 2008; Higgins, Hartley, & Skelton, 2002; Randall & Mirador, 2003; Stern & Solomon, 2006).

Literature that focuses specifically on online doctoral students' revision decisions was not found. Getzlaf, Perry, Toffner, Lamarche and Edwards' (2009) study that highlights some factors that impacted on online Masters Level Health Science and Nursing students might be of relevance to online doctoral students. Firstly, the students needed to be involved in the feedback process, as the feedback process was not considered to be a one-way conversation from the feedback provider to the student. Secondly, written feedback that provided constructive guidance that built confidence lent itself to be acted upon by the student. Thirdly, written guidance with clear and explicit expectations that provided ongoing coaching to the students was preferred. In addition to these factors, timelines for effective feedback needed to be mutually established and met.

Generating the Research Questions

This chapter explored the literature that focuses on the language and online aspects encountered by NNES online doctoral students with regards to the action they took upon receiving written feedback. It furthermore expanded on the fact that perceptions and attitudes of doctoral students were not limited to the written feedback they received, but also encompassed the doctoral feedback provider. Also, the literature brought to bear some of the factors that impacted on the revision decisions of doctoral students. The implications of practice concerning what NNES online doctoral students do with the written feedback that they receive seem to be under-researched.

The review of the literature generated four practitioner research questions:

1.   What are NNES online doctoral students' perceptions of and attitudes towards written feedback about their academic writing received during their doctoral study?

2.   What are NNES online doctoral students' perceptions of and attitudes towards the providers of written feedback about academic writing received during their doctoral study?

3.   How are NNES online doctoral students' revision decisions influenced by these perceptions and attitudes?

4.   How can what is learned about the relationships between NNES online doctoral students' attitudes, perceptions, and revision decisions enhance the feedback practices of NES doctoral supervisors?

Chapter 3

Conceptual Framework

This chapter reviews the conceptual frameworks most applicable to this study. Ravitch and Riggan (2012) defined a 'conceptual framework' as: *"an argument about why the topic one wishes to study matters, and why the means proposed to study it are appropriate and rigorous"* (p. 7). This chapter follows Ravitch and Riggans' definition of a conceptual framework, since my study is informed by a theoretical framework and my personal experience as a NNES online doctoral student.

This research focuses on what NNES online doctoral students did with the written feedback that they received from their doctoral feedback providers. Initially, two concepts require exploration and explanation: 1) the online environment and its impact on doctoral students' willingness to engage with and action written feedback, and 2) the notion of language as it relates to how to interpret how the NNES doctoral students read, understand and decide on a plan of action after they receive written feedback. Theories are presented to bring these key concepts into focus and help to understand how the attitudes and perceptions of the doctoral students potentially impact on their view of the written feedback, feedback providers and revision decisions. Additionally, theoretical frameworks that are typically used to understand what students do with written feedback are considered along with second language acquisition theories related to online learning regarding their helpfulness in understanding what NNES online doctoral students did with written feedback received. In this regard, four theories are discussed: situated learning and communities of practice (CoP); principles of instructional design and conditions of learning; Bandura's triadic reciprocal causation model (Bandura, 1986); and the social-cultural theory of learning. These four theories were used in some of the research I have found useful in my study, but I decided to reject them in terms of my own conceptual framework. These theories are briefly discussed to highlight their potential value to understand what NNES online doctoral students do with written feedback, accompanied by explanations on why I chose not to use them in this study.

Situated Learning and Communities of Practice

The concept of 'situated learning' refers to learning that occurs by participating in 'communities of practice'. Initially participation is from the periphery, and gradually the student engages more fully with all the complexities of the community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Wenger (1999) extended the concept of communities of practice and how it might be understood within an educational context. These theories are useful to describe how social dimensions impact on learning.

The social dimension of learning is an important aspect of the doctoral student's growth and development as a scholar and researcher. The community of practice concept fosters the idea that the student develops from novice to scholar and a colleague of the doctoral feedback provider and other colleagues in his or her specific discipline. The community of practice concept has been researched with regard to campus-based doctoral students (Basturkmen, East, Bitchener, 2014; Yu & Lee, 2013; Bunch, 1995; Catterall, Ross, Aitchison, & Bergin, 2011; Kumar, & Stracke, 2007), but not extensively as it relates to the online doctoral student experience. Can (2009, p. 3) applied situated learning and communities of practice theory to highlight the social practices of written feedback, an important learning tool in doctoral students' development in the academic community in a campus-based environment. Can (2009) argued that the emphasis on the social dimensions of learning necessitated an "understanding of doctoral students' feedback practices, their opinions and attitudes toward different characteristics of feedback and feedback providers, and the factors that affect their revision decisions" (p. 3). The importance of the social dimension of learning must be acknowledged. However, the situated learning and communities of practice theories do not address the specific linguistic and online issues that an NNES online doctoral student might encounter.

Principles of Instructional Design and Conditions of Learning

Gagne's principles of instructional design and conditions of learning (Gagné, 1985; Gagné, Briggs, & Wager 1992) were constructed from the position that there are different types of learning and that the way the instruction was structured would either enhance or hinder learning. Gagne (1987, p.5) advocated that instructional design took into account the learners' characteristics, such as their current knowledge levels and capabilities. Factors such as the learners' characteristics inform the parameters for designing a specific program of instruction. Gagné (1985) and Gagné et al., (1992) argue from a position where the instructional design is not only constructed from the institution's perspective, but also with the student in mind.

Can (2009, p. 2) states that according to Gagné's theory, providing effective feedback depends not only on the design of the feedback but also on other conditions that are distinctive within the learner. Gagné's theory is an appropriate theoretical lens to construct written feedback and is relevant to online doctoral students. Nevertheless, the principles of instructional design and conditions of learning do not specifically address either the linguistic issues of NNES online doctoral students or the online dimensions with regards to sending, receiving and responding to written feedback.

Bandura's Triadic Reciprocal Causation Model

Bandura's triadic reciprocal causation model (Bandura, 1986) refers to three domains of learning: personal, behavioural and environmental. Bandura's social learning theory suggests that humans are active information processors and learn from observing behaviours. This theory brings a helpful dimension from which to understand the student's learning process of improving an assignment or chapter. Bandura envisions that students learn academic writing primarily from their academic reading. Academic reading is the closest thing to the observed behaviour to be learned, while written feedback further assists the student in learning to improve the text. Breslin's (2012) study attempts to identify the degree to which the online doctoral students acted on the doctoral feedback providers' feedback, focusing "primarily on the internal personal events that predict a student's decision to act on his or her professor's feedback, and secondarily consider a limited number of environmental and behavioral factors" (p. 3). Exploring the factors predicting online graduate students' responsiveness to feedback from their professors she found that Bandura's triadic reciprocal causation model was useful in understanding the degree to which the student acted on the professor's feedback. Breslin's (2012, p. 21) use of this theory highlights the internal and personal factors that might influence the students' response to the written feedback received, "… such as decisions about available time to act on the feedback relative to a perceived need to act on it, which in turn may be influenced by grade motivation, emotional reactions to the feedback …" While helpful in terms of understanding the internal psychological processes that influenced online doctoral students' reaction to written feedback, this theory was not particularly helpful to understand the interplay of the linguistic or online dimensions that were the focuses of the present study.

Socio-Cultural Theory of Learning

The socio-cultural theory of learning (Vygotsky, 1978) provides another perspective in conceptualizing the help that doctoral students need as they progress from novice to expert in their respective fields. Discovering the potential developmental level of the novice and providing appropriate help accordingly is at the core of the socio-cultural theory of learning. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), central to the socio-cultural theoretical framework, suggests that the developmental progress of novice is guided by the expert, through mediation of language (Vygotsky, 1978). The socio-cultural theory is helpful to understand written feedback in its social context, but also as an educational tool to promote learning in the doctoral student.

In a study that focuses on NNES online doctoral students, Vygotsky's theory is helpful in understanding the role of language in the thought process as he is of the view that language is not only a tool for interaction but a tool for thinking. Vygotsky's (1962) account of the acquisition of higher mental functions using social learning conceptualized how human agents themselves bring personalized tendencies to situations, to reproduce or transform the various situations they encounter. He states that language is more than a complex, highly effective medium for sharing information and argues that humans gained a cognitive advantage over other species due to the sharing of individual experiences and through sharing solutions to problems. In Vygotsky's view, the blending of language with thought results in a unique kind of mental development and as such, language is not only a tool for interaction but a tool for thinking.

Vygotsky's theory has some limitation to be useful to this study. Given the time span between Vygotsky's lifetime and current issues one need to develop the theory or look at complementary theories that focus on the language issues that NNES online doctoral student's encounter, to explain the influence of the online environment in the sense-making process of these students. Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994, p. 468) argued that a dialogic activity characterizes the interaction that unfolds between more capable and less capable individuals. Dialogue is an essential component of Vygotskian theory, and hence of the ZPD. Without dialogic negotiation, it is virtually impossible to discover the novice's ZPD. Vygotsky's theory is a helpful starting point but needs to be adapted for understanding how a person acquires a second language.

Haas (1996, p. 17) extended Vygotsky's idea regarding tools of mediation. Haas proposed that the use of technologies should be included as one of the psychological tools and sign systems to mediate the interaction between humans and the environment. In particular, her arguments provide researchers with valuable theoretical perspectives, as she asserted that Vygotsky's theory of mediation help us see tools, signs, and technologies as systems that assist humans in processing activities from a psychological perspective.

Vygotsky's theoretical framework does not directly address the impact of second language acquisition within the online environment. In searching for a framework which extended Vygotsky's ideas to address the linguistic dimension of the current study, Second Language Activity theory, which applies socio-cultural theory to second language acquisition, looked promising despite the fact that this theory does not address the online environment.

Second Language Activity Theory

Second Language Activity Theory (SLA) assumes that second language acquisition is more than coding or decoding in an additional language (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006). In that respect, Second Language Activity Theory was based on the social-cultural approach and in particular referred to the work of Vygotsky (1978). Activity Theory postulates that all aspects of activities are shaped over time by the interaction with tools and other people in a social context. Activity Theory argues that human activity is mediated by cultural artefacts, such as language, which are culturally, historically and socially produced and reproduced by means of complex and multidimensional relationships (Engeström, 1987; Leontiev, 1978; Vygotsky, 1987). Activity in this context refers to all social activities that are promising in describing human development (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 209).

According to Activity Theory, people work or learn together to meet their goals and motives, and develop tools to assist in reaching their goals. The tool might be as diverse as, for example, a saw, a computer or a language. People use tools to solve problems, but changes or new problems might also prompt people to develop new tools.   Motives are socio-culturally determined, as Wertsch, Minick and Arns (1984) demonstrated. Moreover, actions or "goal-directed processes" are directed by specific goals in the pursuit of more general motives (Leontiev, 1978, p. 63). Leontiev (1978) emphasized that an activity can be realized by performing different actions, for example, to perform the same action in a different manner. However, the conditions of the activity might change and thus require certain operations as "methods for accomplishing actions" (p. 65).

The validity of Activity Theory resides in the fact that it takes a holistic, thorough and systematic approach to analysis. Engeström's activity system (1987) also assists in understanding the social context that shapes or influences change in the activity. Based on his version of the activity system, some key elements and their relationship to each other, such as the subject, the tools or mediating means used to achieve their desired object and outcome, were important. These concepts were underpinned by the rules of the context, the community whose goals influenced the activity and the division of labour to achieve the activity.

The social-cultural dimension of Second Language Activity Theory translates to the notion that learning is embedded in socio-cultural practices. It is not only the internal processes specific to a person that promote learning, but social interaction with other people or objects, that leads to the development of inner mental processes (Lantolf, 2011; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) argued that learners are "more than processing devices that convert linguistic input into well-formed (or not so well-formed) outputs" (p. 145). Learners are individuals with human agency who "actively engage in constructing the terms and conditions of their learning" (p. 145). The use of language is a required tool for participation in everyday activities. It is this participation in activities that constitute the learning process and outcomes. The key activity-theoretical concepts that Lantolf and others employ to understand second language acquisition are based on the notion that human activity is driven by needs that account for a general motivation. Motivation determines the orientation to tasks (Leontiev, 1978).

Second Language Activity Theory adheres to the central claim of the socio-cultural approach that all cognitive thinking is mediated by symbols (Lantolf & Beckett, 2009, p. 459); and mediation in language means to organize and structure by means of language use (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 201). Second language acquisition in terms of Second Language Activity Theory integrates the two concepts of acquisition: namely, of acquiring new tools and new ways to create meaning (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 5) as well as acquiring new conceptual knowledge in the language (Dunn & Lantolf, 1998, p. 427). NNES online doctoral student experiences might well be further illuminated by research into the relationship between thought and language and the thought processes of NNES individuals (Lantolf & Appel, 1994; Centeno-Cortés & Jiménez Jiménez, 2004; Smith, 2007; Swain, 2006; Ushakova, 1994). For example, Centeno-Cortés and Jiménez Jiménez (2004) studied how second language speakers used language as a mental tool to regulate their thinking process and found that most NNES students had to switch to their native language to be successful in higher cognitive tasks. Further, NNES individuals who were already advanced users of a second language found that when problem solving became too difficult, they reverted back to their native language (Van Weijen, van den Bergh, Rijlaarsdam, & Sanders, 2009, p. 236).

Lantolf and Thorne's (2006, p. 74) description of inner speech (also called egocentric speech, private speech, and the inner voice) serves as a unique way in which to understand how people mediate their world. Inner speech can be defined as people talking to themselves, whether silently or out loud. Ushakova (1994, p. 154) argued that inner speech that was based on a person's native language could not change. Lantolf and Thorne (2006, p. 92, 138) postulate that it is very difficult to change the language used for one's inner speech and referred to the experience of Eva Hoffmann, to highlight the dilemma for an NNES person's inner speech to be in a language other than their native language. Hoffman emigrated to Canada from Poland. She found her inner voice in Polish inadequate for her new surroundings, but her inner voice in English was not developed enough to be adequate.

Online doctoral students at English language universities receive written feedback in English and have to make sense of it by reading, reflecting and acting upon the feedback. On the other hand, the NNES online doctoral students read the written feedback in a language (English) other than their native language. One of the strategies the NNES online doctoral students might use to make sense of the written feedback could be inner speech. Given the above-mentioned case study of Eva Hoffmann (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006), it seems plausible to assume that NNES online doctoral students have to translate the feedback from English to their native language. NNES online doctoral students will then reflect on these comments in their native language and then translate their reflections back into English to formulate a response or plan of action. Second Language Activity Theory highlights the fact that language issues for NNES online doctoral students are not only those of grammar and style, but also the influence of their native language and academic traditions.

The link between language and thought has significant implications for NNES online doctoral students in an English-medium institution. According to Second Language Activity Theory the close link between language and thought implies that NNES online doctoral students' language of thought would be either in their native language, or the language of instruction or a combination of both, and might be contextually dependent on the individual student's fluency. Their native language is different from the language of instruction and this difference implies that there is already a discrepancy between the language of their thoughts and the language in which they have to conduct their academic writing. The thought process behind the construction and reporting of the research is of utmost importance for any doctoral student to be successful. The language discrepancy may have an impact on the higher thought processes of the NNES online doctoral students' understanding, processing, and action of written feedback (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006, p. 92). This theory adds an important dimension to address and understand the linguistic barriers that impact on the thought processes of NNES online doctoral students whilst considering written feedback in English.

Second Language Activity Theory has the potential to serve as a helpful lens to understand the relationship between the NNES online doctoral students in an activity, the tools they use, their objective and desired outcomes. Kain and Wardle (2015, p. 6 &12) explores how the use of an activity systems approach might be useful to understand how individuals carry out activities, in particular factors that influence and change the tool of writing. The theory has the potential to assist in understanding the nature of the activity by focusing on key aspects of the system. Second Language Activity Theory is helpful in understanding how the activity system works as a whole, to further anticipate potential needs and outcomes for those who partake in the activity, for example, the role and function of written feedback in the doctoral learning process. Lastly, it might help to isolate problems, which might assist in developing strategies to overcome those problems. Activity theory assists in understanding the relationship between the feedback provider and student, and the online tools they use to communicate to reach their goal of successful completion of a doctoral programme.

Transactional Distance Theory (Geographical and Psychological Distance)

Transactional Distance theory provides a way to consider the impact of the online environment as it relates to the NNES online doctoral learning experience. Moore's (1993) theory of transactional distance originated from traditional distance learning with a high degree of isolation when the student was geographically removed from the tutor. The theory of transactional distance provided an educational perspective on why distance learning might be more problematic than face-to-face learning. Moore (1993) defined the variable "transactional distance" as "a psychological and communications space to be crossed, a space of potential misunderstanding between the inputs of instructor and those of the learner" (p. 23). Transactional distance consists of three concepts: dialogue, structure and autonomy. Transaction implies two or more participants exchanging messages or artefacts, such as a written document. Shearer (2009, p. 3) stated that the implied notion of transactional distance is that the greater the level of communication/dialogue the more efficient/effective the transaction, which thereby reduces the possibility of miscommunication.

The online learning environment consists of a variety of contexts but excludes solely face-to-face interactions. The current dominant models of online learning can be described as a completely isolated online study mode or a blended model. Blended learning means that there are some opportunities for face-to-face meetings. Online learning provides an example of working in total isolation. The student receives their study material or research material online; they will do what is expected of them, and email their written work back to the feedback provider. The feedback provider will then return the written feedback to the student.

The transactional distance theory takes cognizance of the potential for isolation of the online student. In the context of isolation, an online doctoral student will experience a breakdown in communication if the doctoral feedback provider does not acknowledge or respond promptly when the students submit a piece of work. Given the distance between the feedback provider and the student, a possible lack of communication might leave the online doctoral student unsure of the relationship between themselves and the doctoral feedback provider.

Dialogue is deemed most successful in a face-to-face situation where both partners are in the same geographical location. The theory of Transactional Distance does denote geographical and psychological distance (Shearer, 2009). A given element of understanding Transactional Distance is the fact that a geographical distance between the student and the institution and lecturers is implied. Geographical distance implies that one cannot meet face-to-face. Transactional Distance also includes psychological distance; that contributes to the experience of isolation.

Transactional Distance theory, which includes social presence as a subset, has a specific understanding of dialogue (Moore, 1980, 1993). Dialogue refers to the action of conversation between at least two people in an educational setting. Dialogue constitutes the communication between the student and doctoral feedback provider but does not include the written course material or textbooks (Shearer, 2009, p. 4). Expansion of knowledge is the aim of this dialogue.

Social Presence Theory

Shearer (p. 5) extended Moore's definition and believed that dialogue not only facilitated understanding but also supported social presence in an online setting. One might consider dialogue as a dimension of social presence that not only guides the student but also promotes a connection with her or his doctoral feedback provider. The feeling of connection might foster a relationship between the student and the doctoral feedback provider. One might further speculate that if written feedback were conceptualized as one half of a dialogue, then how can one understand written feedback as a dialogue in a text-base solely online situation? What might be important for this current study is the fact that if written feedback is conceptualized as a dialogue, transactional distance directly influences the conversation.

Social Presence Theory considers the level of awareness of interacting partners. Social presence means a communicator has a sense of awareness of the presence of an interacting partner. Social presence is important for the process by which a person comes to know and think about other people, their characteristics, qualities and inner states (Short et al., 1976). Social presence in online learning denotes the notion of presence or 'being there' in an online situation.

Lowell (2004) looked at the effect of social presence, fluency and context on transactional distance, dialogue, and structure. Lowell described dialogue as "an exchange of ideas between two respondents made up of a series of communication transactions" (p.13). He also referred to dialogue and investigated the role of affect in social presence in an online dialogue (p.14). His findings provide a potential way to look at the interplay between social presence and how the connection might be developed between communication partners that are geographically and psychologically removed from each other. Importantly, Lowell (2004) did not regard social presence as dialogue, but thought that social presence was supported by dialogue.

Social presence could be viewed as a continuum from physical presence to a 'perceived presence' of the other person, which might have a psychological impact on behaviour (Biocca, Harms, & Burgoon, 2003). In the context of technologically mediated social interaction there seems to be an assumption that technology has an effect on the interaction (p. 473). Short, Williams & Christie (1976) used subjective self-report measures to measure "the subjective quality of the communications medium" (p. 65). The measure focused on the medium and not the experience as such.

The theory of social presence raises some speculative questions about the role of the connection between the student and the tutor or feedback provider. When one considers how and why NNES online doctoral students have a sense of connection in an isolated online environment, transactional distance becomes an important aspect to consider. An important question is whether students only use feedback as guidance to correct their academic work or whether there are other functions of written feedback for them. Social Presence Theory brings into question whether written feedback has additional functions in an online setting. One might further argue that if written feedback is viewed as a matter of connection, why does it matter for students to feel connected? The potential usefulness of the Social Presence Theory in the present study could be narrowed down to the questions: How can the Social Presence Theory help to ascertain social presence, and what aspects of social presence are considered?

It is necessary here to clarify what is meant by the term 'connection'. In the context of understanding social presence, it might be useful to understand connection as the coming together of two or more communication partners. In this context, it is the act of coming together to reach a definite goal, for example the successful completion of doctoral study. The teaching and learning process is enhanced if rapport is established between the doctoral feedback provider and student. The question then arises as to how feasible it is in an online environment. One solution might be in the use of online tools which are intended to replace face-to-face connections. The online tools could include one or a combination of the following; text-based (for example emails), audio (for example telephone) and video technology (for example Skype). The successful use of these tools requires a flexible use of the tools by the doctoral feedback provider and student (Kumar, Johnson, & Hardemon, 2013).

In conclusion, this chapter explored the theoretical frameworks that can potentially be used to understand the results obtained from this study.

1. What are NNES online doctoral students' perceptions of and attitudes towards written feedback about their academic writing received during their doctoral study?

Second Language Activity Theory highlights the interchange between the subject, the student, and the written feedback, the object. This interchange occurs through language. This theory highlights the components involved in the sense-making process, as well as the relations between the goal-orientated activity of acting on written feedback, and the social and community rules and expectations governing the interaction.

2. What are NNES online doctoral students' perceptions of and attitudes towards the providers of written feedback about academic writing received during their doctoral study?

Social Presence Theory highlights the awareness of 'being present' of communication partners. Thus, in this instance the theory might highlight how the awareness of the importance of social presence could harness and establish the relationship and subsequent perceptions of students about their feedback providers.

3. How are NNES online doctoral students' revision decisions influenced by these perceptions and attitudes?

Both Second Language Activity Theory and Social Presence Theory contribute elements that enable further understanding of the revision decisions made by students. It is the notion of psychological transactional distance which shapes their decisions. As the student is geographically removed from the feedback provider, the psychological distance perceived might be a barrier that the student experiences as distant, harsh and critical. One might speculate that this might not be the intention of the feedback provider, but given the lack of face-to-face interaction that influences the online doctoral student's perceptions and attitudes, the remoteness might negatively influence the student to act on written feedback.

4. How can what is learned about the relationships between NNES online doctoral students' attitudes, perceptions and revision decisions enhance the feedback practices of NES doctoral supervisors?

The two theories could potentially highlight the linguistic and online issues that the NNES online doctoral students experience. Second Language Activity Theory might be helpful as this theory not only describes the process of language acquisition, but views activity to be instrumental in the process of change and development of the student.

The next chapter will focus on how the study was conducted, the methodology that informed the study, given the conceptual framework, and the subsequent methods used in the study.

Chapter 4

Methodology and Method

The research takes a constructivist stance, using an exploratory sequential, mixed methodological approach to develop an understanding of the main themes related to what NNES online doctoral students do with written feedback. A survey precedes individual interviews. Can's already established survey instrument serves as an foundation as it contained questions that explored topics that appeared as a suitable starting point for surveying NNES online doctoral students. The interview questions were developed after obtaining the results of an initial pilot that tested the survey instrument.

Given my own experience as a NNES online doctoral student, I sought out examples from previous research conducted on NES doctoral students and NNES doctoral students, both in campus based as well as online environments. While the topic of written feedback to campus-based and online doctoral students has been studied extensively, the combination of NNES and online doctoral students has not. The experiences of NNES online doctoral students and their perceptions of written feedback remain not well understood. The research methodology and methods for the study were developed through an iterative process of reflecting upon my own experience, considering the literature and reviewing the results of the pilot study. Due to the emphasis on the students' perceptions, I chose not to look at examples of written feedback itself, nor to try to correlate the characteristics of the written feedback to reactions from the student. Rather, in allowing the students speak about their experiences, I sought to understand their responses to the feedback and the potential action it triggered.

As part of the choice of a self-administered survey as the starting point of the research, consideration of the key advantages and disadvantages of self-administered surveys were taken into account. The positive aspects included the potential that a large number of respondents could be reached, that the survey would be less expensive, less time-consuming and it allowed for anonymity to respondents, when compared to the sole use of face-to-face surveys (O'Leary, 2004, p. 154). The limitations of self-administered surveys include low response rate and incomplete or poorly completed answers. While the survey approach is one possible way of gaining access to a broad sample and some kinds of information are more readily gathered from a survey such as demographic information or responses from closed questions that required a yes or no answer, surveys are dependent on and limited to the structure of the presentation of the sentence or question. However the opportunity to provide clarification to students was particularly important given that the target population was NNES students.

Given the context of the online environment, direct observation and face-to-face surveys were not practical for this study (Sue & Ritter, 2012). In the context of online doctoral study, using online methods to elicit responses from this population was deemed appropriate. While Sue and Ritter (2012) highlighted some disadvantages of online surveys, they stated that e-mailed surveys might be of use. It is impossible to determine whether the email has reached the intended recipient's inbox (as opposed to being filtered out by spam filters), and to identify individuals who have not 'picked up' their email (Mitchell, Ybarra, Korchmaros, & Kosciw, 2014).

The majority of surveys that appear on websites are of the volunteer opt-in variety. The response rate for online surveys was a concern to me, as the literature reports a poor response rate. Galea and Tracy (2007, p. 646) proposed possible reasons for the decrease in the response rates, and the one that could influence this study is that the surveys become increasingly demanding and complex. Kesse-Guyot et al. (2013) suggested a multimedia approach including modes such as Facebook®. The need for purposeful sampling made me cautious to use multi-media as a research tool. Other types of disadvantages over which the researcher has no control, including incomplete or poorly completed answers, might negatively affect the research. However, it was decided that the advantages of online surveys outweighed the disadvantages.

Anderson (2004, p 208) contends that surveys are perhaps the most widely used data gathering technique in research. Anderson's view on the use of surveys was used in this study, namely that surveys could be used to gauge issues that are crucial to the understanding of what NNES online doctoral students do with written feedback. Surveys informed relevant aspects of this study such as NNES online doctoral students' behaviour, attitudes, opinions, characteristics, and expectations. Thus, the administration of a relevant survey was deemed appropriate for ascertaining NNES online doctoral students' perspectives on written feedback.

One limitation of the exploratory sequential mixed method approach is that there is a significant duration of time between the start of the quantitative and the subsequent qualitative data collection, whereas a concurrent mixed method approach uses the qualitative and quantitative aspects simultaneously. The quantitative survey has to be completed before the qualitative semi-structured interviews can be conducted (Driscoll, Appiah-Yeboah, Salib, & Rupert, 2007; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). It was important to elicit some rich data from the participants to understand how they respond to written feedback and why. The students' self-reported experiences and preferences could inform practice. Ultimately, given the exploratory nature of this study, the combination of an online survey and the semi-structured interviews was deemed appropriate for gathering the data that could lead to a deeper understanding of the key question of what NNES online doctoral students do with the feedback they receive from doctoral feedback providers.

I decided that it would be appropriate to start the research with a survey in order to collect as wide a range of student views as possible. During my literature review I came across the Written Feedback Survey developed by Can (2009) that was useful in initially considering what types of questions might be asked of NNES online doctoral students. Can's (2009) research aimed to construct an explanatory model to describe the relationships between students' perceptions and attitudes, their revision decisions, and other relevant factors in their written feedback practices. Subsequently, Can (2009) conducted some interviews to inform the survey. In turn the survey was used to establish the relationships to devise a model. Her study was limited to social science students due to the different academic writing tradition between social and natural sciences. When reviewing Can's (2009) study results, her goal was to identify a model to understand the relationships at play in the written feedback process. Her methodological approach was to conduct interviews that informed the survey that then lead to developing a model. Can (2009) develop the instrument to discern the attitudes and perceptions of social science doctoral students at two campus-based universities in Utah, USA; she administered it to the group of students, and used a range of statistical measures to validate it.

Using Can's survey had the benefit of being able compare the results against hers, to ascertain if the same issues as the campus-based doctoral students were present, or whether there were any differences. However, my use of Can's survey was different in three aspects: Firstly, in my study the focus is on using the survey to inform the interview questions and the desired outcome is to gain an understanding of the written feedback process to develop some practice guidance. Secondly, this study applies Cans' instrument to a different population and thirdly, the instrument is applied in a different environment.

Methodology

Given the intention of this study is to understand what the NNES online doctoral students do with the written feedback that they receive, it is important to listen to the students' perceptions about, and the decision-making processes concerning written feedback. To accomplish this, I needed a strategy to understand the world-view of the students that inform their decision-making process. Magoon (1977, p. 651) states that to capture the notion that individuals build knowledge, constructivists framed their epistemological lens with a metaphor of the process of construction. Thus, the methodological stance of a constructivist approach fits well given the goals of this research study is to get useful information from the students and gain greater understanding. Understanding the contextual impact provides a richer awareness of the theories in practice. I worked with the hunch from my own experience, where written feedback serves as more than basic transmission of information and may need to be explored further from the perspective of social presence within an online environment. Written feedback in an online environment holds potential for understanding it as a dialogue. The attitudes and perceptions of NNES online doctoral students toward written feedback will be investigated from an individual as well as a social perspective.

During this research, I sought to more fully understand how the process of receiving feedback and responding to the academic writing could assist in the construction of new knowledge. This co-construction of knowledge between the NNES online doctoral student and the doctoral feedback provider implies that the research takes the constructivist position. Knowledge is constructed from the experiences of those who engage in this relationship. If we want to understand what the NNES online doctoral students do with written feedback, it is necessary to ask those who encountered this experience. Hence, the focus is on the doctoral students' experience and not the doctoral feedback providers or the written feedback itself.

The constructivist position is also demonstrated in the way that this study acknowledges the importance of the influence of a specific socio-cultural context on a study, in this case the shared assumptions around academic English conventions and style. In addition, the constructivist approach encompasses the attempt to understand the social construction of the students' identities, as doctoral students, but more importantly students at an English-medium university.

Research sample

As a researcher, I secured distance from the material by not including in my sample any peers from my own doctoral programme cohort. The process of using Can's survey instrument minimized a potential influence on the study by virtue of my own experiences as a NNES online doctoral student, although my experiences were used as a reference point to probe certain lines of thought in the semi-structured interviews.

To begin the study, it seemed important to establish a broad feel for the issues that NNES online doctoral students deems important for them to act upon written feedback For the survey phase of the study, 100 participants were sought that were bone fide online doctoral students, and the sample size did not follow the usual sample size logic (Yin, 2009, p. 58). The participants represented different phases of doctoral students, including those writing papers for modules, research proposals and dissertations. Thus, since the intention was to explore trends and uncover issues with as broad a sample with respect to language diversity as possible, the goal of 100 survey respondents was sufficient. Khan and Ahmad (2012) stated that for an exploratory study such as this one, a +/- 10% margin error might be acceptable. Israel (1992, p.3) stated that for a population larger than a 100 000, a sample size of 100 will suffice for a precision of +/- 10%.

To gain a richer understanding of the experiences and perceptions of NNES online doctoral students, the decision to conduct interviews with between six and ten participants were deemed sufficient to establish the basic elements for meta-themes of a study (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006, p. 58, Morse & Chung, 2003; Creswell, 2009).

Pilot Study

To fully understand the potential of using Can's survey instrument, a pilot study was completed primarily to test the applicability of the questions within the NNES online doctoral context. I gained permission by email from Dr. Can to use the survey instrument (see Appendix I). Eighteen participants completed the survey, from which 6 participants indicated that they were willing to participate in the semi-structured interviews. Four NNES and two NES online doctoral students took part in the interviews. NES students were included in the pilot study to test the procedure. The four NNES online doctoral students all met the criteria for the population.

The purpose of the pilot study was fourfold: Firstly, to test whether the survey could be used with NNES online doctoral students; Secondly, the pilot study was deemed necessary to refine the data gathering plans, such as the detection of possible flaws or errors in the measurement procedures, and to identify and change unclearly formulated items (Welman *et al.,* 2005, p. 148); Thirdly, the pilot study was a necessary part of a responsible research approach, to limit any unnecessary confusion or potential stress of participants of the main study (Wester, Willse, & Davis, 2008) and fourthly, the original survey instrument was developed for campus-based mainly Native English Speaking (NES) students, and it was important to check whether it was user-friendly and appropriate in an online environment.

Validity is the criterion for how effective the design is in employing methods of measurement that will capture the data to address the research questions. There are two types of validity: internal, and external. Internal validity is a confirmation of the correctness of the study design. Internal validity was assured in both qualitative and quantitative dimensions of this study by a pilot to test the proposed survey instrument and interview protocol (Appendix F; Appendix J). The pilot study enabled the researcher to ensure the survey instrument's usefulness in an online setting.

The response rate and the comments gained from the pilot interviews confirmed that the Survey on Written Feedback (Can, 2009) could be used with online NNES online doctoral students. A small change was made to the demographic section of the survey, where it was made compulsory to complete questions about whether a student considers themselves NNES or NES. This demographic question was made compulsory in the main study. Whether a participant considered themselves as NNES or NES was central to the study. It had to be clear in order for the researcher to know if the participant was a member of the target population. Upon reflection of the survey findings, I recognised that the survey alone did not supply rich data regarding the implications for practice as expected.

The purpose of the pilot of the semi-structured interview protocol was to test some draft interview questions and to see how the interviews worked online. During the pilot semi-structured interviews, some suggestions were made that were considered for the main study. Firstly, it was suggested to use bullet points to communicate the email invitations clearly. The invitations in the main study used a shorter version with bullet points (see Appendix B). Secondly, the pilot study was conducted with a cohort of education doctoral students. The necessity of adding a demographic question regarding participants' current programme became clear to ensure they were part of the target population of social science doctoral programmes.

The pilot participants provided some feedback on the structure of the survey. One pilot study participant suggested that the Likert Scale be extended to 5 options, with the fifth to read "not applicable". I decided to leave the survey as it was, as any change might influence its validity. An instruction was added to leave the response blank if it was not applicable. Non-responses by some survey participants might account for some of the missing data in the surveys. While one participant commented that the questions repeated themselves in the survey instrument, I decided to leave the questions in their original order and format to enable future comparison. In addition, the pilot study found that the language used in the survey and semi-structured interview protocol was clear for the NNES participants. The NNES online doctoral students taking the survey reported no distress while completing it.

In the pilot interviews, there was a set of questions about how to improve the survey. Some of the suggestions concerning the wording of the email invitation helped me adjust the invitation to be more user-friendly, although the main questions were not changed. In the research study, some additional questions and open-ended questions were used to give the participants more opportunities to expand and relate their experiences.

Procedure

　　The Deans of Social Science departments that offer Online Doctoral Programmes were approached for potential names of participants (see Appendix A). As the study focuses on those doctoral students in the social sciences, the Social Science Citation Index of Thomson-Reuters was used to demarcate the scope of social sciences in this study (Can, 2009). The survey instrument and a simple instruction sheet was sent to the Deans who had agreed to distribute the survey. There were some data protection issues, and not all universities were able to comply with this request. Due to the limited response, I then did a Google search review of universities with online social science doctoral programmes. Some of these universities had the names and email addresses of the students in the public domain. I contacted these students directly and gained their voluntary permission to forward them a survey (see Appendix C and D). 3815 emails were sent to bone fide online PhD or doctoral students.

　　The biggest challenge during the survey phase was to ensure that the research participants in the online survey met the research requirements, namely that they were both online doctoral students and NNES speakers; hence the need to use verifiable means to ensure that the participants were bone fide online doctoral students. What could not be accounted for was the pass-along effect, where the email invitation to complete a survey might be forwarded to others outside the intended sample (Norman & Russell, 2006; Phelps, Lewis, Mobilio, Perry, & Raman, 2004). Thus, the completed surveys had to be manually screened and in some cases further information was sought from a particular university to ensure that the doctoral programmes were indeed delivered in an online mode.

　　To calculate the response for the sample *the American Association for Public Opinion Research Standard Definitions* (7th ed., 2011) were used. The formula consists of the number of complete surveys, divided by the number of complete surveys plus partially complete, refusal and log on without completion. In this study the response rate was 83% [85/ 85 +18 = 83%].

The survey included an introductory section with information about the study and contact details of the researcher (see Appendix D). Also, the participants had to consent to complete the survey by using an electronic button on the feedback form (see Appendix E). Only those that consented could move to the next phase of completing the online form. The survey was made available online via Survey Monkey®. The survey and the responses were password access only. 103 participants attempted my survey instrument to measure online doctoral students' attitudes and perceptions towards written feedback (see Appendix F). The participants had to self-report whether they consider themselves Non-Native English Speakers (NNES) or Native English Speakers (NES). I chose to focus only on the responses from the NNES students, as they represented the target population of my study. Participants were invited to indicate whether they would be available for a semi-structured interview.   .

Ten participants were selected from those who completed the survey that met the criteria and indicated that they were willing to engage in an interview. The students were from a range of subjects in the social sciences and included both Ph.D. and practice-orientated doctoral programmes. The participants for the semi-structured interviews represented different phases of doctoral students, including those writing papers for modules, and then, with some, their research proposals, and dissertations.   Once the interview participants agreed to take part in an interview, via telephone or Skype (audio), the interview protocol was emailed beforehand to the participants (see Appendix J). I used the Skype (audio) interface even for the telephone interviews, as the interview recording system was supported by the Skype interface. Given the fact that NNES online doctoral students were not campus-based and located at a specific geographical place as in Can's (2009) research, telephone/Skype interviews were considered to overcome the issue of distance. Skype (audio) was useful as it made sense for its flexibility, accessibility and low-cost implications (Evans, Elford, and Wiggins, 2008). The telephone option had to be available as Skype is banned in some countries, which would limit access of potential interviewees. Hanna (2012) seemed positive about the use of Skype, but also reported that technical failures might hamper the data collecting.

Using Skype (audio) or telephone interviews might raise the issue of authenticity of this approach as opposed to personal interviews. Janghorban, Roudsari, and Taghipour (2014, p. 1) referred to the fact that with Skype one has the opportunity to consider verbal and non-verbal cues but this was not the case in this study. I did not use Skype (video) due to bad connections in some parts of the world. Thus, verbal cues and pauses were recorded, which lent some authenticity to the interview.

During the semi-structured interviews, the interviewees had the opportunity to expand on a point or not respond. Some of the questions were open-ended so that respondents could add information, if desired. Primarily during the semi-structured interview participants described their experiences of learning to write in Academic English, including their view of what constitutes academic writing and their understanding of various academic writing conventions in both their native language and English. Questions about current writing tasks and written feedback received were used to encourage rich descriptions.The interviews lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. The interviews were transcribed by me by listening to the recordings and typing the words near verbatim (Davidson, 2010). The draft transcripts were emailed to the participants for their comments and to check their veracity (Mero-Jaffe, 2011). The participants emailed their consent and/or comments back.

The consistent process of data collection was followed across all interviews. The interview protocol included some demographic information to ensure that the interviewees did fulfil the selection criteria. All interview participants self-reported that they were completing their doctoral studies via an online mode and that they were NNES online doctoral students. The interview protocol in the semi-structured interviews served as a springboard for a conversation about the different aspects concerning written feedback.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to analyse the data. Coding began once the participant's agreement, responses and comments had been received. After I had coded the transcripts, anonymous transcripts were sent to an independent second coder, a licensed psychologist with a special interest in Learning Theories. A second coder was used to ensure that bias of the researcher was minimized. The second coder supported my choice of coding, allowing for the analysis to be complete (see Appendix K).

Survey data analysis

Quantitative data analysis was conducted on the responses collected via SurveyMonkey®. Basic descriptive statistical analyses were used to describe the participants' responses to different questions in the survey (Newton & Rudestam, 2013). Descriptive data analyses were executed by using the PSPP programme, which is a free clone of SPSS (Stover, 2010). The descriptive data analysis in this study consisted of the calculation of the medium, mode, frequencies and percentages. These findings build toward the qualitative semi-structured interviews.

Interview data analysis

Once the transcripts received approval by the participants, they were thematically coded for purposes of identifying themes. Yin (2009, p. 122) emphasizes the importance of keeping track of this chain of evidence to be maintained, to ensure the reader of the study follows the evidence base of the research (see Appendix G). The qualitative data analysis consisted of three analyses, namely Structural Coding (Saldana, 2009, p. 66), In Vivo Coding (Saldana, 2009, p. 74) and a thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The purpose of the analysis was to identify themes, key words and contextual factors and compare the findings in the light of the theories. The transcriptions of these conversations were repeatedly reviewed. I noted my tentative findings and requested a second coder to review the coding of the transcripts. The process often forced me to rethink the usefulness of the theoretical lenses.

Ethical considerations

  I considered ethical behaviour in this research as being as important as in any other field of human endeavour (Welman, Kruger and Mitchell, 2005, p. 182), and so ethical approval was gained before the outset of the project (see Appendix H). The study was deemed to be of minimal risk to participants. As mentioned the data were collected by an online survey, where participants had to give their approval before they could participate in the survey (see Appendix E). Also, before the telephone/Skype interviews were conducted a further verbal approval was gained from the participants. The participants were informed about the nature of the study and the fact that participation was voluntary. It was clear in both the survey and interviews that participants could withdraw at any stage. It was clearly stated in the documentation provided and orally during the interviews that confidentiality of the recorded data would be maintained at all times. It was also disclosed who would have access to the coded data. It was stressed that the identification of the research participants would not be made available during or after the study.

Chapter 5

Survey: Findings and Discussion

I have used Cans' (2009) survey as it was an established survey that had been validated and used in an important study on doctoral students and written feedback. It is important to note, that I wanted to use the survey with a different student population, namely Non-Native English Speaking (NNES) doctoral students; and in a different context, namely the online context. The main reason why I used the survey was that I wanted to distribute it to a different population, to establish if these NNES online doctoral students had different perspectives than had been identified by Can (2009) in her study with campus-based Native English Speaking (NES) doctoral students. Given the different doctoral student population and study environment, it was important to reconfirm that some of the themes that Can (2009) had spoken about did indeed exist for the population of this study, namely the NNES online doctoral students.

An initial review of the statistics and statistical comparison between the survey and Can's survey results reveal that there is little variation between results and similar patterns emerge. The outcome of this analysis is useful to establish that the semi-structured interview protocol would solicit sufficient depth on the themes included in the study design. Firstly, the finding depicted in the statistical averages of mean and medium will be discussed; followed by the findings presented in percentages.

General Survey Demographics

The survey respondents reported represented seventeen distinct first languages, namely Afrikaans; Arabic; Chinese; Croatian; Dutch; French; German; Italian; Malay; Malayalam; Mandarin; Portuguese; Romanian; Russian; Spanish; Swedish; Turkish. The fact that the survey respondents represented a range of languages, over several continents, makes this study different from other studies. Given the small sample size, no comparisons between language groups was possible.

Table 1

NNES students view of their English writing abilities
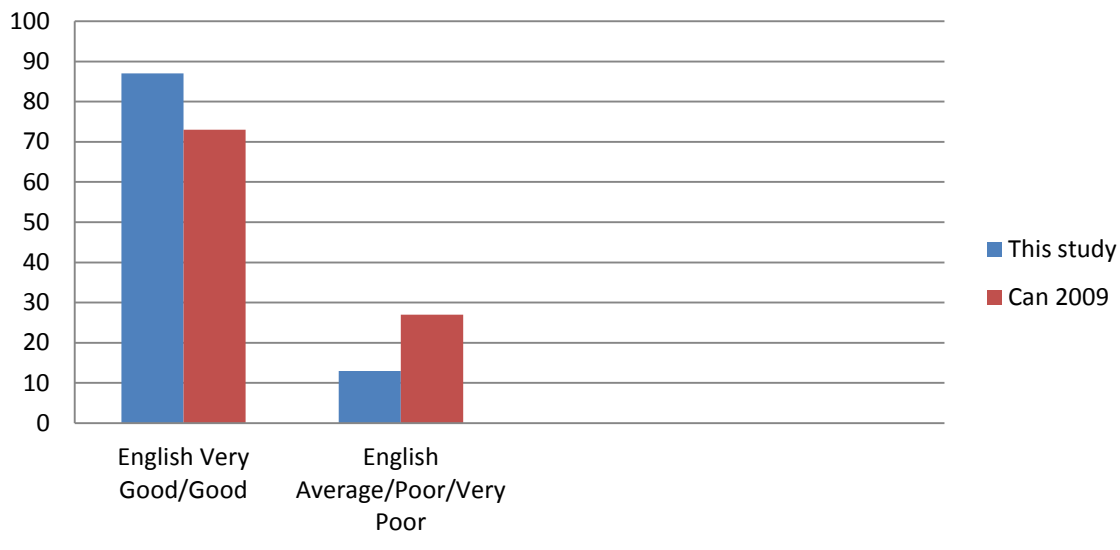
87% stated their academic English skills as very good/good and 13% as average/poor/very poor. Can's study results (2009, p. 105) show that 73 % stated their academic English skills as very good/good and 27% as average/poor/very poor. It seems that the NNES online doctoral students in this study sample rated their Academic English writing ability more highly than the participants in Can's study.

Table 2 shows that 85% of the NNES online doctoral students in this study had spent three years or more on their respective doctoral programmes. In Can's (2009, p. 42) study sixty-two percent of doctoral students had been on the programme for three years or more.

Table 2: Years that respondents are on their programmes

Number of years on the doctoral programme	*f P*	
First-year	2	(5%)
Second year	4	(10 %)
Third Year	10	(24%)
Fourth Year	11	(27%)
Fifth Year	11	(27%)
Sixth Year	3	(7%)
Total	41	(100%)

Note. Percentages may not add to 100 or exceed 100 due to rounding. This is applicable to all the tables in this document that include frequencies.

Detailed Selected Survey Findings by Theme

Academic writing

In Qns 13 and 14 the participants were asked to rate their views on academic writing (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3: (Qn 13) Attitudes Towards Academic Writing

Attitudes Toward Academic Writing:	Mode	Median
I enjoy writing academic papers	3.00	3.00
I enjoy writing academic papers with others	3.00	3.00
I have confidence in writing academic papers	3.00	3.00
I need someone to push me to write academic papers	2.00	2.00

[Note: 1.00- Strongly disagree; 2.00- Disagree; 3.00 – Agree; 4.00- Strongly Agree]

Table 4: (Qn 14) Motivation for academic writing

My motivation for academic writing is:	Mode	Median
To meet graduation or occupation requirements and expectations	3.00	3.00
To build up my vita	3.00	3.00
To gain a promotion or get into a good job in the future	3.00	3.00
To gain experiences, skills, and knowledge as an academician	3.00	3.00
To have recognition in the field	3.00	3.00
To share my ideas or findings with others	3.00	3.00
To contribute knowledge to the field	4.00	3.50

NNES online doctoral students in this study enjoy and have confidence in writing. The findings correlate with Can's (2009, p. 108) findings with campus-based doctoral students. The main motivating factor for academic writing was to contribute to new knowledge in their respective subject. It was a given that to be able to have a doctorate level degree conferred the student needed to contribute new knowledge to their respective discipline. What was not clear from the survey response was what the NNES online doctoral students understood by contributing new knowledge. Given different academic traditions this might be interpreted differently in different parts of the world. This response led me to include an additional question in the semi-structured interview question protocol, to explore the notion of how they understand that contribution, for example, as something totally new or expanding on others' works.

Program

In Qn 15 participants were asked to describe the experiences in the doctoral programme itself (Table 5).

Table 5: (Qn 15) Experiences in the doctoral programme

In my program	Mode	Median
I feel like I am treated as a peer and a colleague here by the faculty members	3.00	3.00
The faculty members push doctoral students to write and publish a lot	2.00	2.00
The faculty members are very productive in terms of the quantity of publications	3.00	3.00
The faculty members' academic writing standards are very high	3.00	3.00
The faculty members often write academic papers with their students	0	3.00
The faculty members invite me to write academic papers together with them	2.00	2.00
I ask faculty members to write academic papers together with me	0	2.00
There are a lot of opportunities to write academic papers with faculty members	2.00	2.00

The ratings indicated that NNES online doctoral students lacked the opportunity to write and publish, neither with their doctoral feedback providers, nor were they encouraged to write and publish as doctoral students. Can (2009, p.102) found campus-based students also highly rated the writing ability and publishing record of the doctoral feedback providers. The difference between these students and those following online programmes was that Can reports that the campus-based students seemed to have more opportunities to publish with their doctoral feedback provider.

Given the online environment, it was interesting to note that the NNES online doctoral students felt that they are treated as peers, despite the transactional distance between the student and feedback provider. One might speculate that text-based online communication has the ability to communicate in such a way that NNES online doctoral students feel that they are seen as peers in the relationship between the student and the doctoral feedback provider.

Requesting written feedback

The participants were asked to give the context in which they will request written feedback (Table 6). The NNES online doctoral students' willingness to ask for feedback leads to more interaction between the student and the feedback provider. These responses seem to indicate that transactional distance can be overcome through text mediated communication. The students were comfortable to ask for further information or guidance from their feedback provider. The fact that they do not meet face-to-face does not seem to impact negatively on their relationship. This led me to want to further explore in the semi-structured interviews, from whom they will request feedback and if it mattered whether the feedback provider is a NNES or NES person.

Table 6: (Qn 16) Attitudes Towards Asking for Written Feedback

Attitudes Toward Asking for Written Feedback	Mode	Median
I ask others for written feedback on my academic papers	3.00	3.00
I look for several people to give me written feedback for my papers	3.00	3.00
I look for several written feedback occasions at different stages of my papers	3.00	3.00
I ask for written feedback only when I come to a point where I can't improve my paper any further	2.00	2.00
I don't ask for written feedback if I am confident with my paper's quality	2.00	2.00
I don't want to expose myself to others by asking them to give me written feedback if I am not confident in my paper's quality	2.00	2.00
My pride has a lot to do with my decisions to not ask for written feedback	1.00	1.00
I feel comfortable asking for written feedback from professors on my committee	3.00	3.00
I feel comfortable asking for written feedback from professors outside of my committee	3.00	3.00
I feel comfortable asking for written feedback from other doctoral students	3.00	3.00
When asking for written feedback from others, I tell them what aspects of the paper I want them to look at	3.00	3.00

Characteristics of the feedback provider

The students were asked about the characteristics of the feedback providers that would influence their decision to request written feedback from them (Table 7).

Can (2009, p. 88) found that for campus-based students the fact that the doctoral feedback provider was from the same discipline or subject as the student's field of study was one of the top three most important characteristics. In contrast, the online students did not rate the discipline of the feedback provider as one of their most important requirements. Furthermore, that online doctoral students rate the proximity of the feedback provider low can be understood due to the online environment that by implication implies distance. Can (2009, p. 88) also reported that campus-based students rate distance low. However, it might be not an issue for campus-based students as they assume the doctoral feedback provider has an office on campus, so they can be contacted if needed.   Question 24 required the participants to rate external factors that they perceive influenced how written feedback is provided   (Table 8).

Table 7: (Qn 17) Characteristics of provider determining whether or not to ask for their written feedback

How important are the following characteristics of a person to you when deciding whether or not to ask for their written feedback?	Mode	Median
Whether the person is younger or older than I am	1.00	1.00
Whether the person lives/works/studies close to me in terms of location	1.00	1.00
His/her being in the same discipline or not	3.00	3.00
His/her knowledge level in the content area that my paper is about	3.00	3.00
His/her interest level in the content area that my paper is about	3.00	3.00
Whether he/she thinks my paper is important	2.00	2.00
Whether he/she has a decisive role in my degree completion or publication	0	2.00
His/her publication experience	4.00	3.00
His/her writing skills	3.00	3.00
His/her writing style	3.00	3.00

His/her thinking, organizing, and analyzing skills	4.00	3.00
Whether I like his/her personality	1.00	2.00
Whether he/she is a responsible person	2.00	3.00
Whether I trust him/her as a person	3.00	3.00
Whether we have a good social relationship	3.00	2.00
Whether I have a mutual feedback relationship with him/her	3.00	2.00
Whether I feel that he/she will be willing to help	3.00	3.00
Whether I feel that I won't be a burden to him/her	3.00	3.00
Whether I think they have time to give me feedback	3.00	3.00
His/her reasons/incentives for giving me feedback	1.00	2.00
His/her expectations of the quality of my paper	1.00	2.00
My previous experiences with his/her feedback	3.00	3.00
Others' previous experiences with his/her feedback	2.00	2.00
Whether I think he/she will give feedback quickly	2.00	2.00

Table 8: (Qn. 24) Factors influencing how feedback is provided

	Mode	Median
I think that written feedback is influenced by the personality of the feedback provider	3.00	3.00
I think that people I have a close relationship with (e.g. family, good friends) avoid giving me critical/negative written feedback	2.00	2.00
I think that feedback providers have high expectations of me when they give me critical/negative written feedback	3.00	3.00
When feedback providers give me written feedback mostly about grammar, sentence structure, format, etc. I think that they are not interested in my paper	2.00	2.00
When feedback providers give me written feedback mostly about grammar, sentence structure, format, etc. I think that they are not knowledgeable about the content topic of my paper	2.00	2.00

In question 24 participants were required to rate how doctoral feedback providers' characteristics are perceived by the students. The statement that attracted the highest rating was that written feedback is influenced by the personality of the doctoral feedback provider. It was interesting to note that the students perceived that personal preferences of the doctoral feedback provider played such a pivotal role in the type of feedback that the NNES online doctoral student received. What is not clear was whether feedback providers' preferences and feedback providers' bias were seen as distinct entities or as the same. That negative or critical feedback was understood as positive was an unexpected finding. The fact that the students rated negative feedback highly might indicate that they perceived that doctoral feedback providers act in the students' interest.

The context of text based communication within which the students formed their perceptions of their feedback providers might have some implication on how doctoral feedback providers establish the type of relationship that allows the students to accept negative feedback in a positive light. Thus, when working online it would be important for the doctoral feedback provider to establish an increased presence, which is a combination of social and academic presence online, as a way to mitigate any potential negative feedback delivered through a text based medium.

Written feedback preferences

The students were asked their preferred frequency of receiving written feedback (Table 9, Qn 20).

Campus-based students also rated receiving feedback on their arguments and justification with the highest score (Can, 2009, p. 141). Furthermore, they also rated straightforward feedback highly (Can, 2009, 70). What appears from a comparison between the campus-based and online doctoral students is that their preferences seem to correspond. In this case it did not seem that the different language or context influenced their need for specific feedback. The general written feedback practice seems to be the same for both. The weakness of the survey in this study was that it was not clear what NNES online doctoral students expected the written feedback to include. It was furthermore not clear how to interpret their identified need for straightforward feedback. The latter two aspects might be further explored in the semi-structured interviews.

Table 9: (Qn. 20) Desired frequency of feedback

When writing academic papers, how frequently do you feel that you need written feedback for the following aspects of your papers?	Mode	Median
Conclusion	4.00	4.00
Arguments and justifications in my paper	4.00	4.00
Grammar and sentence structure	4.00	3.00
Introduction, purpose and significance of the paper	4.00	3.00
Clarity and understandability of the statements	4.00	3.00
Logical order and organization of information and ideas	4.00	3.00
Consistency in the overall paper	4.00	3.00
Inclusion or exclusion of information	3.00	3.00
Transition and flow between sentences, paragraphs, or sections	3.00	3.00
Formatting (tables, figures, page design, fitting APA style, etc)	2.00	2.00
References and literature decisions	2.00	2.00

Table 10: (Qn 26) Revision decisions related to written feedback

If I don't agree with a written feedback comment, before deciding to ignore or use that comment for my revisions I ask myself:	Mode	Median
Am I confident in what I wrote?	4.00	4.00
Is there any justification for that feedback?	4.00	4.00
Is there really a need to make the change?	4.00	4.00
Will there be some kind of punishment for not revising this way?	3.00	2.00
Will there be some kind of reward for revising this way?	3.00	3.00
How much will this revision affect my paper's direction?	3.00	3.00
Is it hard or easy for me to make the revision?	3.00	3.00
Will I lose my voice and writing style if I accept this change?	2.00	2.00
What is the knowledge and experience level of the person who gave me this feedback?	3.00	3.00
What kind of authority-power relationship do I have with the person who gave me this feedback?	0	3.00
What kind of motivation or agenda might this person have for giving me this feedback?	3.00	2.00
Did the person really understand what I wrote?	3.00	3.00
Should I ask that person about the feedback?	3.00	3.00

Table 11: (Qn 27) Factors that influenced students to action written feedback

	Mode	Median
If feedback providers start their written feedback with critical/negative comments, I feel less open to the rest of the comments	3.00	2.00
If I sense an authoritative tone in the written feedback, I feel resistant to use that feedback in my revisions	1.00	2.00
If I catch a big mistake among the written feedback, I tend to disregard the other feedback comments that person gives	2.00	2.00
If I dislike the personality of a feedback provider, I tend to disregard his/her written feedback	0	2.00

Question 26 presented the survey participants with a range of statements that they had to rate on possible questions they will ask themselves when considering written feedback (Table 10). The issues that were rated the highest were whether the students were confident about what they wrote, whether there was any justification for the written feedback and whether the student really needed to make the changes required. Thus, these two questions focus on the participants' perceived willingness to make changes to their work, and the type of questions they needed to be able to answer before they could bring about the changes. Question 27 further considered factors that influenced the NNES online doctoral students to action written feedback (Table 11). The issue that was rated the highest was that if the written feedback provider starts with the negative the NNES online doctoral student would be less receptive to making the suggested changes.

The fact that the participants self-reported that they would change their written work in light of the written feedback received could indicate the importance NNES online doctoral students give to written feedback. Furthermore to question 26, Can (2009, p. 96) reported that the same three issues were mentioned by campus-based doctoral students. However, the order was different. The campus-based students highlight that their primary concern was the justification to make the changes. This contrasts with the NNES online doctoral students stating their own confidence with their writing as their main concern.

Question 18 asked about preferences for mode of sending academic work (Table 12) and receiving written feedback (Table 13)

Table 12: (QN 18) Preferences for mode of submitting work

Specific survey statement	Percentage Response
[Item 75] I prefer sending my paper electronically, such as through email	53%
[Item 76] I have no preference	37%
[Item 77] I prefer handing in my paper personally, face-to-face	6%
[Item 78] Not answered	4%

NNES online doctoral students need to engage with the asynchronously written feedback that they receive by means of an electronic device. This raises the question of whether the electronic mode was the students' preference. Can (2009, p. 70) reported that 41% of campus-based students preferred to receive written feedback electronically, while 53% of the online respondents preferred online written feedback. According to Can 27 % of the campus-based students had no preference while 37% of online students had no preference. In addition, 9% of the campus-based doctoral students' preferred feedback to be handed back in a face-to-face situation while 6% of the NNES online doctoral students' preferred written feedback handed to them personally in a face-to-face feedback situation. These are small samples, but it seems that there are no major differences between campus-based and online students' preference for online feedback, nor that the delivery format matters to them.

Table 13: (Qn 19) Preferences for mode of written feedback

Specific survey statement	Percentage Response
[Item 72] I prefer receiving written feedback electronically, such as track changes in Word, comments on the computer	58%
[Item 73] I have no preference	33 %
[Item 74] I prefer receiving hand written feedback, such as comments handwritten on my paper	9%

The findings suggest that there are still a small number of NNES online doctoral students that preferred hand-written feedback and had a need for face-to-face interaction. Unfortunately the questionnaire does not fully address this issue for students in an online environment. The questionnaire, as previously mentioned, was developed for campus-based students, and as such makes a distinction between receiving feedback face-to-face or electronically and another distinction between typed feedback and hand-written. Thus, the questionnaire gives one hints that use of electronic of the feedback needs further exploration. Furthermore, the type of electronic feedback the student preferred could be further explored in the semi-structured interviews, for example, if they prefer written comments on a different page, comment bubbles; or edits on the text. As face-to-face meetings and hard-copies with written notes are not usually associated with online learning, this issue might be further considered from the Transactional Distance Theory perspective. One might speculate that this need for face-to-face contact might become the single most important aspect of the online doctoral students' choice to persist with the programme.

Qn 22 explored specific types of feedback comments (Table 14).

Participants rated as the most appropriate the comments from doctoral feedback providers that indicated which parts are really strong and when the feedback provider provides them with specific articles. Can (2009, p.84 -85) noted three responses that were important for campus-based doctoral students. They highly appreciated the doctoral feedback provider pointing them to an article that supported what they were writing about. Then the campus-based students preferred specific advice on where to present information in tables or lists, and where to position sentences to bring out stronger meaning. Comments on whether a specific piece of writing was strong dropped to the 8th spot on the ratings of campus-based students. It was not clear why students appreciate the articles sent by the doctoral feedback providers, given that the doctoral student is supposed to be an independent researcher. This aspect is fully explored in the semi-structured interviews.

Table 14: (Qn 22) Specific feedback practices

I appreciate written feedback comments similar to this:.....	Disagree $f(P)$ (note 2)	Disagree $f(P)$	Agree $f(P)$ (note 2)	Agree $f(P)$	Missing $f(P)$ (note 2)	Missing $f(P)$
Here is an article that supports what you're saying here.	0	0	100%	91%	0%	9%
Maybe you need a table here, listing X with each column showing Y. Just an idea.	3%	4%	97%	87%	0	9%
I think this sentence should be said much earlier. It is important	3%	6%	97%	85%	0	9%
Have you thought about adding one more section to your paper about X literature?	5%	4%	95%	85%	0	11%
Break this into smaller, more focused paragraphs	5%	9%	95%	83%	0	9%
This argument is unsupported. You need to cite more references	5%	2%	95%	89%	0%	9%
You're on the right track, this is a well-organized paper.	7%	11%	93%	81%	0	9%
This section is really strong.	7%	13%	93%	79%	0	9%
It is not clear how this paragraph addresses your research question. You need to show links to the research question.	8%	4%	92%	85%	0	11%
Explain why you're focusing on these dimensions. Not clear to the reader.	9%	4%	89%	87%	1%	9%
This section is a bit dense, with lots of details. Are they all necessary?	16%	17%	84%	74%	0	9%
Check the APA manual for this citation.	17%	17%	82%	72%	1%	11%
A bit of wavering focus from this paragraph to this paragraph. Check for consistency throughout.	24%	19%	75%	72%	1%	9%
I don't agree with this paragraph. I think, ...	34%	15%	66%	77%	0	9%
I have a hard time following this section.	39%	34%	61%	57%	0%	9%
I'd like you to go in a little different direction, like this....	52%	26%	48%	66%	0%	9%

Notes.1) Percentages may not add to 100 or exceed 100 due to rounding. This is applicable to all the tables in this document that include frequencies.

Table 15: (Qn 23) Attitudes Towards Critical/Negative Written Feedback

	Disagree f (P) (note 2)	Disagree f (P) Online	Agree f (P) (note 2)	Agree f (P) Online	Missing Online
I re-write my paper if I receive very critical/negative written feedback from someone with more knowledge and experience than I have	27%	32%	73%	57%	11%
Critical/negative written feedback affects me emotionally	38%	49%	62%	43%	9%
Having critical/negative written feedback makes me feel embarrassed	62%	77%	38%	15%	9%
I lose self-confidence when I receive critical/negative written feedback	66%	68%	34%	23%	9%
I am scared to get critical/negative written feedback	75%	77%	25%	15%	9%
I lose my motivation to work on my paper further when I receive critical/negative written feedback	76%	77%	24%	15%	9%
I feel that it is a personal attack when I receive critical/negative written feedback without suggestions	74%	77%	26%	15%	9%
I give up on my paper if I receive very critical/ negative written feedback from someone with more knowledge and experience than I have	93%	81%	7%	11%	9%

Note. 1. Percentages may not add to 100 or exceed 100 due to rounding. This is applicable to all the tables in this document that include frequencies.

NNES online doctoral students highlighted that negative feedback affects them emotionally and that they will review their work and make the changes after they receive negative or critical feedback from more knowledgeable feedback providers. Campus-based doctoral students also rated highly that negative feedback affects them emotionally, as well the fact that doctoral students will revise their work if they receive negative feedback from more knowledgeable feedback providers (Can, 2009, p. 85). Can (2009, p.22) stated that personalized face-to-face meetings help campus-based doctoral students to overcome the effect of negative feedback and promote the doctoral students' confidence. This raises an issue in an online environment that lacks the opportunity to meet face-to-face. The top two statements were the same for online NNES and NES doctoral students. It was interesting that when there was a face-to-face element there seems a trend in the sample for students to feel more embarrassed. For students for whom English is not their native language, they seem to lose self-confidence. The reason to lose self-confidence might be linked to NNES online doctoral students' insecurities about writing in English.

If survey results suggest that negative or critical feedback affects NNES online doctoral students the impact of transactional distance needs to be considered. If campus-based students can overcome the effects of negative or critical feedback by a face-to-face meeting, how does the NNES online doctoral student overcome the impact of negative feedback? Can the social presence of the doctoral feedback provider serve as the bridge builder or the relationship builder that gives the student the confidence to take negative or critical feedback and clarify it with the feedback provider?

Question 25 refers to revision decisions.

Please check one of the following.
I revise my paper to some degree after receiving written feedback **100 %**
I don't revise my paper after receiving written feedback **0%**

In response to question 25, all participants reported that they revise their work to a degree, once they received written feedback.

Question 27 highlights an important aspect of the use of tone in the written feedback and the structure of how the feedback is given.

Language issues and transactional distance seem to be issues that influence revision decisions. The self-questioning when NNES online doctoral students receive the written feedback might reflect the inherent insecurity of NNES online doctoral students about their language ability. In addition, transactional distance does not directly impact on revision decisions, although the tone of feedback might impact negatively on the willingness of the NNES online doctoral student to action written feedback, because of the bluntness if communicated online, without other opportunities and/or body-language to soften the impact of the critique.

Table 16: (Qn 28): Attitudes to the written feedback process in general

Please rate the following statements according to the extent to which you agree or disagree:	
Specific survey statement	Percentage Response
The feedback process is a good learning experience	55%
I get upset when I am not given another opportunity to submit my paper after receiving written feedback	15%
I get upset if I wait for written feedback for more than two weeks	11%

NNES online doctoral students described in question 28 that the written feedback is a good learning process (Table 16). Other issues that were listed in order were that they were rarely surprised by the feedback they got, they felt upset if they did not get another chance to submit and if they did not received any feedback within two weeks after they submitted their work.

Can's (2009, p. 113) findings concur that the important issues listed for online doctoral students were found for campus-based students. Thus, both groups experience written feedback as a good learning experience. What was not clear from the survey was what the NNES online doctoral students understand as a good learning experience. If written feedback leads to good experience, how that is understood in terms of transactional distance and language issues need further exploration.

Using the survey findings to inform the interviews

The purpose of the survey was to develop the semi-structured interview questions. Can (2009) developed the survey from her survey as a result of her semi-structured interviews, with the intention to provide an explanatory relational model that describes students' perceptions, attitudes, revision decisions, and other significant aspects and she focused on the following key areas:

- Academic Writing
- Program
- Requesting Written Feedback
- Written Feedback Preferences
- Critical/Negative Written Feedback
- Feedback Providers
- Revision Decisions
- Feedback Process in General

Given that my semi-structured interviews followed the survey, there are some similarities between my study and Can's (2009, p.177) interview protocol; however I further developed my interview protocol in the light of the survey responses I received. The 28 main questions that Can (2009) used were maintained in the pilot and the main research study. The survey results confirmed the need to include some general questions in the semi-structured interviews to give the survey participants the opportunity to answer open-ended questions to elicit some rich descriptions of their experiences. The survey findings also lead me to add some additional questions to the semi-structured interview protocol to explore some issues in more detail. The differences were mainly in the following areas:

- General information
- Perceptions and attitudes towards academic writing and written feedback in particular
- Exploring how they reasoned about a potential course of action in response to the written feedback that they received.

In the following few paragraphs I will summarize how the survey questions influenced the questions posed in the semi-structured interview questions. For a specific and detailed comparison between Can and Olivier see Appendix J. I chose to repeat the question in the semi-structured interviews as to whether the participants considered themselves as NNES to further strengthen the reliability of my data.

I added a generic question in this section of the semi-structured interview protocol, namely what they would do with written feedback when they received it. This was an open-ended question at the beginning of the interview that gave the participant a chance to relate their own experiences. It also allowed me to gain the participants' view on the matter, which could then be further explored in the interview. This then set the scene for the discussion. From the survey response it became apparent that the feedback process was identified as a good learning experience for NNES online doctoral students. This observation was then added as an additional question to set the scene.

The second group of questions addressed the NNES online doctoral students' perceptions and attitudes towards academic writing and written feedback in particular. In the main questions on academic writing, I did extend the discussion further by adding a question about their motivation to write and the support they need. For example, "Do you need someone to push (encourage) you to write academic papers?" and "If your motivation for academic writing is to contribute to knowledge in your field, how do you understand that contribution - something totally new or expanding on others' work?"

The third group of survey questions was about NNES online doctoral students' perceptions and attitudes towards doctoral feedback providers. Upon reflection questions were added to the semi-structured interview protocol. A subsequent question was added as to whether the native language of the feedback provider influences the NNES online doctoral student in deciding whether or not to ask that person for feedback. Thus, the interview protocol questions further explored the influence of language on the participants' choice of potential feedback providers. This was added as an additional question as it was not clear from the survey if the native language of the feedback providers influenced the NNES online doctoral students' choice of feedback provider.

Additional questions were also included to understand the impact of the online context on the actions of NNES online doctoral students. A subsequent question was added to the question about feedback preference. The subsequent question addressed the online context in more detail. It was highlighted in the survey, but to get fuller understanding of the students' preferences they were asked to discuss their specific feedback preferences within an electronic environment, namely "What type of electronic feedback to you prefer, for example written comments on a different page, comment bubbles, edits on the text etc.?"

The fourth group of questions related to the participants' specific feedback experiences. In this group of questions two additional questions were added. The first was to clarify what NNES online doctoral students mean if they say that they appreciate straightforward written feedback. The second additional question was to explore whether the students appreciate it if their tutor or supervisor provides them with an article to support what they have written.

The fifth group of questions was about the emotional responses that written feedback might elicit in the students and what the student does with the feedback. This section was concluded with an open-ended question seeking the participants' advice to NES doctoral feedback providers about how to make the written feedback more accessible for the NNES online doctoral student.

In the next chapter, the findings of the semi-structured interviews will be reported and and discussed.

Chapter 6

Semi-structured interviews: Findings and Discussions

This chapter describes and discusses the findings from the semi-structured interviews. There are three parts in this chapter, firstly a description of the sample; secondly a description and discussion of the online environment, and lastly a description, discussion and interpretation of four themes, namely written feedback, relationship, language and student action, in light of the theoretical frameworks presented in Chapter 3.

The sample and its characteristics

Short pen-pictures of the interview participants are presented to assist in context setting for the main themes. Ten survey participants took part in the semi-structured interviews. The ten participants represent eight distinct native languages. Six participants indicated that they had completed their first degree in their native language, whilst the other four completed their first degree at English language universities in their home-countries or abroad. For all ten interview participants the structure of their studies followed a two-pronged approach, namely they started off with a modular phase and then moved to the dissertation/thesis phase.

The findings reflect that all participants experienced a common process when they receive written feedback. The participants in the semi-structured interviews self-report that they produce written material in English, such as a dissertation chapter or an assignment. The written pieces are then sent off for grading and comment. Doctoral feedback providers will review, grade and comment on their written work. Comments are returned to the doctoral student in electronic format. The NNES online doctoral students will read the comments on an electronic device, such as a computer or laptop. The student will then consider the feedback. After reflection, the NNES online doctoral student would then decide their course of action. To protect the identities of the participants I have chosen English-sounding pseudonyms, rather than the students' real names.

Barry is a male student in his thirties. English is an additional language for him; he completed his undergraduate degree at an English medium university in his home country. He is currently in the dissertation phase of his studies.

Charles is a male student in his forties. English is an additional language for him. He completed his undergraduate degree in English, as a foreign student in the USA. He is currently working within the dissertation phase of his doctoral programme.

Martin is a male student in his forties. English is an additional language for him. He completed his undergraduate degree in his native language. He has completed the modular phase of his doctoral programme and is considering his research proposal.

Charlene is a female student in her forties. English is an additional language for her. She completed her undergraduate degree in her native language, in her home country. She is in the modular phase of her doctoral programme.

Anne is a female student in her thirties. English is an additional language for her. She completed her undergraduate studies in her native language, in her home country. She is currently in the dissertation phase of her studies.

Russell is a male student in his thirties. English is an additional language for him. He completed his undergraduate studies in his native language, in his home country. The modular aspects of this study are completed and he is currently working in the dissertation phase of his research.

Derrick is a male NNES doctoral graduate in his forties. English is an additional language for him. He completed his undergraduate studies in English, in his home country. He has completed his online doctoral studies.

David is a male student in his forties. English is an additional language for him. He completed his undergraduate studies in English in his home country. He is still working on the modular phase of his doctoral programme.

John is a male student in his fifties. English is an additional language for him. He completed his undergraduate studies in his native language, in his home country. He has completed the modular phase of his doctoral programme and is preparing his research proposal for his dissertation.

Eleanor is a female student in her fifties. English is an additional language for her. She completed her undergraduate studies in her native language, in her home country. She is in the dissertation phase of her studies.

Description and discussion of the online environment

This section describes the participant experience as it relates to receiving and responding to written feedback in an online environment. Participants mention that in an online environment written feedback is the only vehicle for engagement with their doctoral supervisor and they do not experience physical person-to-person contact. Consequently receiving written feedback in an online environment results in a lowered sense of personal connection, as John mentions:

> ...do you think that you receive this feedback online...and not in the professors' office or a class make a difference? (*Interviewer*)...yes....the difference that it makes ...that it is more clinical and more impersonal... *(John)*

John's reference to the "impersonal" dimension of receiving feedback online in comparison with physical face-to-face feedback draws attention to the impact of the transactional distance in an online context. Furthermore, the use of the word "clinical" indicates that the geographical and psychological distance involved in receiving written feedback in an online environment potentially has an effect on him. Asynchronous online written feedback is lacking the important ingredient of social interaction, such as the non-verbal aspects of body language and emotion. Physical person-to person interaction usually facilitates non-verbal cues where demonstration of emotions and body language or short verbal explanations can be used if the feedback provider can read a concern on the student's face. Written feedback depends completely on choice and ordering of words to convey the communication message which can be problematic in an online environment if it is not coupled with other aspects of communication, such as emotional cues. In addition, for a NNES online doctoral student written feedback is further complicated as it is not written in the students' native language, which in turn increases the potential misunderstanding of the feedback provider's messages.

Description, discussion and interpretation of the four themes

      Written feedback: As a central tool in doctoral teaching and learning, written feedback provides guidance to the doctoral student and is the sole mechanism to stay connected with feedback provider:

> Of course...I think it is a really important part of the process, and actually it is very hard to write a good paper on your own...you always have to have someone read it...in American academia everyone share...right even if you are a very important professor...you still get someone to read your paper...your article draft or your book draft... *(Anne)*

> ...I can adapt...I can change...if I can use an example...if you water the garden it will grow...and if you give them some food it will grow green...I think written feedback or feedback is kind of the water...that waters the academic writing...and it feeds the skill of the learner or the student. I think that feedback is so necessary to deliver a high quality end product...so I think it is very useful...but sometimes it is very difficult to receive this feedback because sometimes...it could be emotionally very harsh...on yourself and this feedback could ruin the process...but when you consider it...go down and think and re-think...and re-write, maybe it should be a whole chapter that should be re-written, but I think just keep the end in mind...and the quality of your stuff...and of the research...I think the end product would be better...but without the feedback I think it would be only your view point...then the end result will not be as good as it should be...without feedback... *(John)*

> This is how. How I see it...I will give you a similar...an analogy...if you are doing some workout …You will go and change the workout otherwise you will hurt yourself...a certain move...or lifting the weight…in a certain way will harm yourself. The same is true from writing…If you get a specific comment from your supervisor, you need to change what he or she said to be changed. Otherwise you will get the same grade; this is how I see it. *(Barry)*

Anne emphasizes the importance of written feedback as guidance:

> Do you think that feedback is a good learning experience or is it sometimes hindering your progress. *(Interviewer)* …Well, I think it is a great idea...I think it is the only way to work on your text... *(Anne)*

Written feedback is the main source of guidance. However, it is written in a language other than the students' native language. Given the transactional distance and the potential language barrier, this adds to the challenges to a feedback provider to frame feedback for this population so that learning can take place. However, in a solely online environment written feedback is not only about learning about their progress; written feedback takes on a more comprehensive role, such as information transmission, dialogue and maintaining connections. Written feedback fosters a connection between the doctoral feedback provider and the NNES online doctoral student, it breaks their solitary experience and helps overcome the transactional distance. The comprehensive function of written feedback is important as the literature showed that those students who stay connected have a greater chance to persist on a doctoral programme (Wyman, 2012, p. 94). Furthermore, if the connection with the feedback providers is based on written feedback, this exchange might be understood as a social practice in academia (Kamler & Thomson, 2006). Social practice refers to the notion that academic writing and written feedback are not merely referring to the academic writing skills required, but also include the social practice of writing in a particular discipline for a specific academic community (Kamler & Thomson, 2006).

Relationships. Written feedback serves as more than a connection in an online environment, but informs the relationship between the doctoral feedback provider and the student. Written feedback does not only give instructions, but it is in most cases the only way students could form a perception of the doctoral feedback provider, based on a written text in English.

> ...It is a very friendly student-instructor relationship… well ...when my advisor gives me feedback, I know he is knowledgeable, although sometimes I disagree, and we argue, and sometimes he can be really pushy...and then I think ok...I will do it the way you want...so he does not blame me for not getting a grant...but he can be really...I know from other students ...he can be a little bit pushy... *(Anne)*

> ...it was definitely an instructor – student relationship...but they were very friendly...and did not condescend ...and related to me in a way that they respect that I was a professional...and that the quality of the work that I was producing was of a high standard... *(Derrick)*

...it depends...in some instances one can realise that they see you as a peer...but I think in most instances they are the instructor...and they write you notes which make you feel that you are the learner...or not a peer...you need learn much from the academic field ...and sometimes you feel inferior towards what is said...*(John)*

You know what…they are my colleagues …that when they give feedback…they give it to me as if I am on their level…so they do not act as if they are this superior person that knows everything…but then I must say both of them are very humble…that is perhaps why…but they share it as if I am a colleague of them… *(Eleanor)*

Furthermore, written feedback also serves to inform and sustain their relationship to their doctoral feedback provider. Their lived experience speaks to the importance of feedback: Anne mentions the importance she assigns to receiving feedback:

...often when I get an email from my advisor...I read it immediately...even if I am in bed...or I am going to bed...I will just read it because I am very curious...but then when I have time, I will work on it...*(Anne)*

One participant describes the need for some communication from the doctoral feedback provider to know that the relationship is still in good stead:

…or the professor could just in one sentence ...say I have received your proposal or what you have written...I have received your email...I will be back to you in 3 days or whatever...I think any communication would be useful... maybe just the one sentence ...then you can relax to know the professor has found your email accessible or acceptable...but will give in due time some feedback...

...but no feedback is very horrible; also delayed feedback is not helpful in the process...so for instance...if the professor would answer my email in 3 weeks time...then I lose interest and motivation...or that kind of delayed feedback in the sense of ...write something down...and then I have lost the plot and I have lost time to work on it...what I like is instant feedback, what I don't like is delayed feedback...*(John)*

What this student highlights is that written feedback is not only feedback on the work submitted, but managing and responding to feedback is part of the student – doctoral feedback provider relationship and how it is being maintained. John's comment is that no feedback or delayed feedback was deemed de-motivating in this context, and highlights the important role written feedback plays in the relationship, as he might question the quality of his relationship with the feedback provider, based on delayed feedback. Thus, it is not merely a broken connection between the student and the feedback provider, but lack of feedback can undermine their working relationship, that ultimately impacts on the student's willingness to action written feedback.

The tone of the written feedback influences how the NNES online doctoral student reflects on the written feedback. Online learning is characterized by structure and dialogue (Moore, 1993). The participants reflect a range of interactions via the feedback mechanism: from being accepted as colleagues, through an amicable student-feedback provider relationship to a student-feedback provider relationship with a "do-as-you're-told" tone. The latter negatively impacts on the dialogue that could foster trust and positive learning experiences.

Lee (2008) identifies the importance of a quality relationship in doctoral supervision. In addition, Eyres et al. (2001) report that on the whole doctoral students consider the feedback providers' motivations while examining feedback. In general, doctoral students appreciate feedback when they perceived that the feedback provider was trying to be helpful. The influence of the helpful attitude of the feedback provider highlights the social aspect of written feedback that goes beyond the guidance to produce a better-written document. Participants felt that communication between NNES online doctoral students and doctoral feedback providers is a dialogue. The receipt of feedback provides the opportunity for doctoral students to debate comments and introduce their own views:

> ...if I believe the feedback is accurate...I will make the changes ....without questioning...if it is not...then I will engage with the person giving me feedback...try to either get more clarification...or convince that person that they are incorrect in the feedback that they are giving me... *(Derrick)*

you can definitely discuss...see it is a doctorate stream...so sometimes the tutor said...she is from a PhD and all that...so when she gave feedback...she would basically asking for a confirmation or discrediting...But if you give a very good logic back...and say this is what I considered and these were my assumptions...this is my logic...and this is what the existing knowledge says...then the tutor will ((recording not so clear))also accept that ...Because it is not a one-way conversation...it can go both ways...Ok and one more point...as this is a doctoral programme...I should know the content of my research better than my supervisor...but that means ...that on the approach the tutor can give me feedback...but the actual content and the process I should be knowing better...otherwise there is no point being a doctoral student... *(David)*

Shearer (2009, p. 5) extended Moore's definition of transactional distance and believed that dialogue not only facilitated understanding, but also supported social presence in an online setting.   One of the participants in this study, Russell, also indicates that the written dialogue between him and his doctoral feedback provider not only guided him but also promoted a relationship with his doctoral feedback provider. Russell's comments refer to feedback as evidence of supervisor care and concern for online doctoral students:

...what do you think is the motivation or reasons for your supervisor to give you feedback...*(Interviewer)* ...I think there is a point that I did not mention...she takes very good care of her students...*(Russell)* ...ok so you say she is taking good care of you...but she is not in New York...so she is doing it via her feedback online... *(Interviewer)* ...it was via Skype once...but mainly via email... *(Russell)*

These self-reports confirm the notion of dialogue in the literature that written feedback is not just a monologue or a list of instructions from the doctoral feedback provider to the student, but a dialogue (Bloxham and Campbell, 2010; Nicol, 2010). The concept of written feedback as dialogue stems from the notion that in general terms, for written feedback to be effective it is advisable that the written feedback is based in the feedback activities shared by the feedback provider and the receiver; driven by the assumption that the role of feedback is to develop the student's ability to monitor, evaluate and regulate her or his own learning (Nicol, 2010, p. 504).

Fernández-Toro, Truman & Walker (2013, p. 817) extend Nicol's concept of dialogue by including the caveat that achieving this dialogue is more difficult in distance learning, including online learning, than in campus-based universities. Although written feedback is conceptualized as a dialogue in campus-based as well as online environments, there is a qualitative difference. Both campus-based and online doctoral students have the option to write back to the doctoral feedback provider to comment on the written feedback received. However, campus-based

doctoral students have a further option to make a face-to-face appointment to discuss the written feedback in more detail. For online doctoral students there is less opportunity for face-to-face appointments, even with the possibility of using more advanced technologies such as Skype.

Using the lens of Transactional Distance theory, the lack of this option might put the online doctoral student at a disadvantage, implying that the optimum position for communication is the face-to-face dialogue. In certain circumstances, transactional distance inhibits students from engaging in a dialogue (Russell's comments), but students are also able to overcome the transactional distances by using the advantages offered by the asynchronous context for further reflection.

> ...see they challenge us to be critical...to take apart the logic of your thoughts...so that is most applicable...for example if I write my own experiences...subjectively...nobody can criticize...because that is what I am writing...or even the descriptive part...but when I apply existing theory on that ...then there can be criticism on the logic...on the approach itself...that is what is more valuable to me...that helps me to fine-tune ....so it challenges my assumptions or bring up more viewpoints...you know that create the double-loop learning...that is more valuable to me…(Martin)

Charlene emphasizes the role of credibility and respect in the relationship between the student and the supervisor as a critical aspect of how written feedback is received.

> …someone that I don't respect…that they are good enough to evaluate my work…Personality is also important, even if that person is someone I respect in terms of knowledge, skills and expertise…even if I do not like them then I will not ask…*(Charlene)*

Students not only relate to the feedback provider, but the actual feedback as it serves as guidance. Factors such as social presence help to facilitate the relationship, but the format, clarity and accessibility of the feedback should provide a sense of ease so that a student will want to relate with the feedback and the guidance it represents. Bitchen, Basturkmen, East and Meyer's (2011, p. 5) findings from campus-based doctoral feedback providers that "…direct or 'to-the-point'" feedback is easier to understand and act on. Feedback as guidance is thus central to all doctoral students, but given the geographical distance, clarifying unclear guidance compound the complexity of making sense of the guidance receive. For an online doctoal sudent there is less opportunity to, for example, to arrange for drop in session or a quick conversation in the cafeteria to clarify feedback. In most instances clarification is sought via the use of the

written text sent via the online envirnonement. As Russell states below that he is not comfortable to keep on prodding until he receives more clarification on specific aspects.

> Yes, I send emails and ask if you could look at this or that....sometimes I do not get any feedback at all...that is a problem not with my advisor, but with the other faculty...I was suppose to receive feedback and I have to poke them...and I am not that kind of person...if I send an email and people ignore me, then I am not comfortable to send another email...to say ''give me the feedback''...but they never give you feedback regarding you requesting...*(Russell)*

John describes how he finds cryptic written feedback difficult to action:

> ... I think the way it is put...I think when it is a leading question...I will follow that ...but if it is just critical or cryptic ... it influences me...because one word with a question mark...sometimes that is enough...but most of the times it is too cryptic...because I would expect that the professor...who is leading...or helping or facilitating ...mediating the student...would be more thorough in giving feedback... So cryptic would be the not good response...or for instance making a judgement or choice...or maybe you should think about this...or maybe you should elaborate on this...or whatever...and then just give some indication in what direction it would be useful... *(John)*

John's comments reminds us that if written feedback is the main source of guidance and is not delivered in the students' native language, the potential remains that the student may experience a type of language barrier. This might be the same for campus-based students, but, for the online doctoral student, the process of gaining clarification is compounded, which means the student have to go back and report that the feedback received is not sufficiently complete for them sufficiently understandable. The campus-based NNES doctoral student has a range of opportunities to discuss and clarify with the doctoral feedback provider, whereas the online NNES doctoral student needs to use the written word to gain clarification.

Language: Written feedback in an online environment is dependent on language and language construction. Written feedback in English is not unique to the online environment, nor NNES doctoral students, but the combination of online environment and using a language different to the students preferred language, makes this a central issue for this online NNES doctoral students. The online NNES doctoral students, although not a homogenous in their English language abilities, are not native speakers and may not reside in an English language speaking country during the duration of their studies. Furthermore, the student might be familiar

with a specific dialect of English, for example for Australian English, but not American English, but it may be different from the dialect of English in which the doctoral studies are conducted. Language differences influence how NNES online doctoral students experience the written text of the feedback they receive. Barriers created by different language traditions are not limited to the language-specific attributes, but also include academic traditions. Given the potential language barriers, the students need to understand unambiguously what the feedback statements mean. Cryptic or unclear signposting to which part of the document the feedback referred adds to the confusion. Clarity seems to be helpful, whether it is a one-page document or in-text comments. Thus, the written feedback needs to indicate which aspects of the text it addresses and what changes are suggested.

Participants commented on the way feedback can be made more accessible for them:

My advisor actually read my draft that is very nice of him, and he comments ...on a word document on the side. ...and then I try to do what he tells me to do...most of the time...well the good part of written feedback is that it is there...and you could look at it...think about it...when you listen to someone talk...you can take notes, but you can never get it 100%...oral is also helpful with the advisor...when you do not agree. Or not sure what you mean...so then it is useful to have oral... *(Anne)*

...I prefer when I receive feedback from faculty...the bubble comments on the document ...I usually don't like the one page comments... *(Russell)*

... I prefer a separate page where they actually tell me what changes they would like to be made...because I find there is more detail in that kind of feedback...if it is in a column or in bubbles on the original document...I find that the feedback is often too brief...or obscure...because it is limited by space...so I would personally prefer a separate document that I can open with that document...read the comments ...and why they did not like it...and explain to me what they actually want... *(Derrick)*

So if they give you these technical tips or guidelines, then you would know what to do...and how to go about it from the beginning...(*John*)

…there are specific guidelines that the supervisors will share with you…when you do writing…the structure for example…for a doctoral thesis is set out…with variations here there…for example the introduction of the chapter…the specific wording…that is required…and the same for the conclusion part…that would be the things that they will share with you…and the chapters that will follow each other…that is not a list of criteria, but a type of guideline that they will give you...for example... the introductory section of a chapter is a specific wording with slight changes to suit the specific chapter. The same for the conclusion part of a chapter. (*Eleanor*)

Clarity of expression is advantageous to NNES students to decode, comprehend and respond to feedback.   Gunawardena and McIsaac (2004), in their extensive review of distance education in a cultural context, have argued that NNES students might have disadvantages participating in online discussions. The disadvantages arise between NES and NNES students because of "linguistic difference" and "cultural otherness" (p.384). Similarly, Zhang and Kenny (2010) found evidence that NNES students experienced language difficulties as non-native speakers; the language barrier may lead to difficulties in understanding. This might lead to social distance, to borrow Schumann's term (1976), between NNES and NES students, but also between NNES online doctoral students and doctoral feedback providers. Martin refers to his experience in an online working group and relates that it was easier for him to follow a comment from NES students than a comment from NNES students:

> It may…Yeah, I think it may…If I think of the experience that I had in the modules…I think that native English speakers express themselves more clearly…so for me it is easier or more convenient that I can read the feedback that I can understand well…And if I remember…even in the forum… I would respond more to some doctoral students whom I thought were writing well…I tend to find their posts more interesting… But sometimes I was also influenced by the style of writing…And the capacity to raise the interest with their writing style… *(Martin)*

The NNES doctoral students self-report that a good grasp of the language dimension is central to the successful completion of their doctoral programmes. Russell comments on the helpful advice on English academic writing from a NNES doctoral feedback provider that shares a common native language with the doctoral student. He did find the comments from the NNES doctoral feedback provider on language issues helpful:

> …I got once..." your English writing has a very very long way to go"... I know that ... I appreciate that they say I have to be better...it is a sign to correct...but I do not know   how ...or what should I do... *(Russell)*

> …right now I write short sentences...but if I had to translate that into *(his native language)* and I read it ...anybody would say that is how children write...but I discovered in English this is more acceptable...this Non Native English Speaking faculty ...told me go and look for these authors that write like that...Raymond Carver ...it was like an awakening for me ...I start reading his works and it was amazing...and Ernest Hemmingway...I was not aware that you could write in English in that way...and be taken seriously by other people

...so this was one particular helpful comment that I received from a Non Native English Speaker...*(Russell)*

With regards to feedback on language and conceptual issues Russell stated that he might need both, but also the language that the feedback was crafted in needed to be accessible to him:

I would say it is both...it could just be a conceptual issue if it was written more extensively...but as it was written very concisely or very shortly...to me it was also a language issue...I believe a Native English Speaker would not have this issue that I had...*(Russell)*

Anne, in response to the question on whom she would ask for feedback, stated that she would ask a friend, who was a NNES lecturer and widely published in English, to comment on her work. Anne, a history specialist, found that receiving particular comments on language issues were conducive to produce a better text in English. However, she did not always appreciate comments on the content of her written material if what she wanted was only to be proofread:

...when I work on paper I usually send the finalized draft to someone to proof read it as a native speaker...I have stopped sending that to other historians...they just not get it that all I am asking ...if I have my commas and all that in place...they start to add their stuff...this is work you have to do here...and would say... there is work that you have to do here blah blah blah...all I want them to do is proofread...I just send it to someone in comparative literature...*(Anne)*

The doctoral feedback provider assumes academic English proficiency of the NNES online doctoral student to be able to decode and understand the written feedback in English. Language decoding does not happen in a vacuum, but within a socio-cultural context (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 92). One might argue that the fact that the student can decode the words, phrases or sentences does not necessarily mean that they understand the intention of the written feedback. There are different academic traditions in relation to decoding language. To give an informed response to the written feedback NNES online doctoral students may first need to understand the academic traditions and the implied social contexts, before they can accurately decode the written feedback they receive. Thus, it puts the written feedback into a broader context than mere comprehension of instructions in English. The wider context, as well as the NNES online doctoral student's personal history and academic writing experiences, has implications when the students are required to make sense of the written feedback that they receive. SLA theory cast the net wider in terms of the language issues for NNES online doctoral students. The socially and culturally situated learning from the written feedback received is

fundamental to the NNES online doctoral students' sense of agency in co-constructing meaning (Kern, 2006). The NNES online doctoral students need to understand the message to be able to act upon the written feedback.

The nature of how the written feedback is written is a critical component of enabling the action that the students will or might take. NNES online doctoral students are aware of the influence of the language and language construct in their progress. What follows explores an example where the language constructs impact on the students' experiences of written feedback.

> Yes, it does...in the first place I would consider my work ethics...so I will slowdown and I will rethink...and then go through the processes of evaluating my work...and then evaluating myself...I think I need to be very very aware of the fact ...that when something is written down...and I read some negative feedback about that ...it is not about me...that the feedback does not reflect my own identity...
>
> But the feedback reflect a skill or something that I can do better...so I need to distinguish between academic writing and who I am...you cannot loosen...you cannot divorce the two from one another...but the feedback is not about me...but it is about the academic writing...*(John)*

Anne and Eleanor reflect on the different academic writing traditions and how that difference influences their own writing:

> There are two things here: First of all I do consider all preliminary work not important; so I don't invest much in it...so it is a proposal...and the actual text aren't going anywhere...so I do not think it is that much...but I also ...it is the expectation...sometimes it is so difficult to do this argument driven writing...to put everything in the beginning and things like that ...so you are expected to submit some research papers....like 7 pages...but often I write my stuff and cut the beginning out...so usually the first page is not the best one... *(Anne)*
>
> ...do you think that that has to do with the style that you would write in (Anne's native language)? ... That influences it ...or is it just your personal writing style? *(Interviewer)*
>
> I think it could be both...but coming from a different writing tradition has something to do with it...or it is just a lame excuse ... *(Anne)*
>
> to improve my own abilities in the writing skill…as not being an English Native Speaker …it is really difficult…if I could have done it in (Eleanor's native language) …I could have published a lot of articles…because it is easier for me…it just comes out...*(Eleanor)*

There is an identity associated with both the context of language and identity established with using a language (Byram, 2006, p. 5; Norris , 2007, p. 657). The NNES online doctoral students have to lose/change their language identity to make sense of the written feedback in English. Language is an issue for NNES online doctoral students, as they might have to lose or suppress their native language identity to be successful in an online English doctoral programme context. In addition, NNES online doctoral students may have to change their academic tradition identity to make sense of the written feedback in an English academic tradition. The change of language and academic tradition leads to a change of identity. It appears that the loss of their native language identity impacted on the confidence of NNES online doctoral students to express themselves academically in their adopted language:

> I also have trouble writing in (*Anne's native language*), especially academic text now...because all the   academic conversation I had in the last three years had been in English...and all the academic text I had been written had been in English, and now I am back in (*Anne's native language*), ...and had to do some work in (*Anne's native language*),...so ...you cannot use your language as an excuse for everything...*(Anne)*

> Yes,....I had to write in (*Russells' native language*), a few months ago and I struggled because, I was then used to write in my new English style...and I had to make the transition back...and it was   painful to write again...as I used to write in (*Russells' native language*),...(*Russell*)

> …. Always room for improvement! My language proficiency does hamper me …to improve my own abilities in the writing skill…as not being an English Native Speaker …it is really difficult…if I could have done it in (*her native language*),   …I could have published a lot of articles…because it is easier for me…it just comes out…but my English writing is more difficult*,… (Eleanor)*

Wang and Li (2011, p.104) found in the research literature, in general, less focus on the Non-Native English Speaking international doctoral students and their particular issues with English academic writing, than Native English Speaking students. Students' awareness of their English Academic Writing skills were apparent in comments like those of Russell and Eleanor:

> Yes, I have a mixed experience...I like writing, but since my instruction in English was never formal and I had to learn English by myself...it is always a struggle and a pain...I had a very hard time writing in English particularly...but I like writing in general... *(Russell)*

Eleanor related her strategy to deal with the problems she experienced with English Academic Writing skills:

> Correct language is an issue for me, but that is why I have the language editor…for me the issue is to write down what you want to say…just write it down…and then, the flow of argument… to address the flow…so that the message that you try to convey …everybody can understand it... *(Eleanor)*

These NNES students find on the whole that writing in English hampers their ability to express themselves and publish as extensively as they should in their native language. Nine of the participants were aware that they needed support with their Academic English. They search for help from their doctoral feedback provider, a language editor, an NES family member or a friend. Given the awareness of NNES students that their Academic English needs further development, it seems important to establish the level of the novice doctoral student's Academic English and how the doctoral feedback provider or other support groups in a university could assist the NNES online doctoral student to reach proficient skills in English academic writing.

Competence in academic English implies a conscious transition from their native language to English and adaption to the British or American academic conventions and traditions. In addition, the literature reports that even standard checks like the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) of a person's language ability to write in English might not be sufficient to establish their ability to complete doctoral-level work in an English speaking environment (Canagarajah, 2002, p.6). This researcher wholeheartedly endorses Canagarajah's (2002, p.6) distinctions among conventions that influence academic writing, namely the communicative as well as the social conventions. Thus, this researcher postulates that there is more to doctoral level work in an English-medium university than language usage, namely the academic conventions and traditions.

This raises the question of whether this adoption of a new language identity has been adequately considered when an institution includes students from a context where the language and academic tradition is different from the one used in the doctoral degree programme.This might suggest that the NNES online doctoral student will encounter structures and requirements which might become so overwhelming that the students lose their sense of agency and voice, and subsequently leave the programme:

...there are standards of the discipline and the writing tradition, as well...like writing in the US has to be argument driven...you know all that kind of stuff...it has to have a thesis...for example there is no such a thing in (Anne's native language)..We have a different writing tradition... *(Anne)*

...yes, once I got feedback that said that I should explore a variation of a particular model of mine, but it was not clear in what way I should do that ....because I work with Game Theory so there are many ways you can model a particular game...and the smallest differences give you completely different results...so I was not clear what I was supposed to do with that... *(Russell)*

The NNES online doctoral student had to change their academic tradition identity to make sense of the written feedback in a foreign academic tradition. During this process of getting used to the English academic conventions and traditions, NNES online doctoral students need to subjugate their native academic tradition. Participants reported about the process of adopting a new academic tradition. The impact on the students' learner identity is encapsulated in their self-reports that it is difficult to revert back to writing in their native language and academic tradition after they had been writing in academic English for some time.

Even within Academic English traditions, there are differences: British Academic English traditions are not the same as those of institutions of the United States. After NNES doctoral students have spent some time in an English academic environment, they have to relearn to write in their native language and academic tradition. The result is not only the development of the identity of a doctoral scholar but the stripping of their language and academic traditions; they develop a whole new language and learning identity. This new language and learning identity might not yet have fully developed by the time the NNES online doctoral students engage with the English language online doctoral programme. The latter has a direct influence on the students' ability to comprehend and action written feedback. Thus, if socialization is paramount in learning, then written feedback is central in an online environment to foster and facilitate the development of this new learning identity of NNES online doctoral students.

The literature also highlights the different academic traditions that the NNES student brings to an English speaking environment. Butler et al. (2014, p. 203); Butler, Zhou and Wei (2013), Reichelt (2003) and Snively (1999) referred to the fact that international students bring different cultural norms and literacy practices when writing academic papers for higher education degrees at English speaking universities. The fact that the NNES students bring a different academic tradition to the English speaking environment is apparent from the evidence in this study as Derrick relates his experience:

> ... I usually read through it very carefully what that person is saying...and try to see it from their point of view...I am very open to criticism and want to improve so...so I am very keen to see any criticism that anyone has to have...

> ...academic writing is a formal style of writing...which usually follows one of the accepted forms of academic styles...like APA for example...it ensures that one follows either British or American English to the 't'. That the grammar is completely accurate...and that no informal terms are used ...as we would in more conversational writing...or narrative writing...

> ...the committee member that I mentioned was actually an English teacher...and she felt that there were certain stylistic issues ...from an American perspective...but I feel that those stylistic issues did not involve...grammar, even according to American rules...so it was a personal style that she preferred... *(Derrick)*

Action: NNES online doctoral students take a range of actions in response to written feedback that they receive. Firstly, they read the feedback, try to understand and think about potential action:

> ...I had a fairly systematic approach where I will start from the beginning...and go through to the end looking at both the positive and negative feedback...positive feedback I will embrace...and obviously enjoy...and the negative feedback...I will critically analyze ...and look exactly what the lecturer is saying...and try to understand for myself if the comment is valid...I have find in my experience that sometimes the comments are not valid...for a number of reasons...including that the lecturer has misunderstood what I have written...or there is personal bias on the part of the lecturer...*(Derrick)*

> Well if there is a conceptive one...like go for a different direction...I will go for it...sometimes there is a criticism on the approach that you are taken...it is not critical...or it is just a copy ...then you go back and try and see...what can be... I try to find the reason...and understand the instructors' way of thinking...and the basic assumption here is that he knows much more than me... *(David)*

Well, I would read through it critically and then I will decide what to accept and what to do with that information. In some cases there are things that the person suggests and I will then decide to investigate further. To make a change, if necessary, if I had to make a change, what I need to write…whatever… *(Eleanor)*

Derrick, David and Eleanor's comments reflect a very personal decision-making response to written feedback*.* Their personal response seems to indicate that NNES online doctoral students have a sense of agency to influence their response to the feedback they receive and often did not feel compelled to do as they were told. Lantolf and Pavlenko's argument from the socio-cultural perspective that students are 'more than processing devices' refers to the fact that students exercised human agency that enables them to 'actively engage in constructing the terms and conditions of their learning' (2001, p. 145).

They reflect upon it and agree with the written feedback and decide upon a plan of action. Taken within the context of this study, NNES online doctoral students present themselves as active agents, who respond to what they see as valuable and useful and to people they regard as engaging and credible:

> ...that is purely my prerogative ...what is good I take and make part of my practice...and what I feel is not benefitting I leave... *(David)*

> Well, it depends where I receive it from. There is one thing if I receive feedback from my advisor, and I have to take that seriously, right. And then I also share my work with colleagues, you know, like other graduate students.......yeah...... you know in the US, I guess it is the same in Britain, you have to re-write your stuff over and over again...a number of times...so when it is something serious like an article or dissertation proposal. My advisor actually read my draft, which is very nice of him, and he comments ...on a word document on the side. ...and then I try to do what he tells me to do...most of the time...If I get feedback from other graduate students, I might follow their advice, I might not...that depends … *(Anne)*

> ...actually we use to have this lady in the cohort, look she uses to have the greatest heart, she is the sweetest person ever, however when she gave feedback, she was so vague, she was so general. I am very practical person, tell me to change that and that is it…she goes in circles, she was not so direct...she was basically think she would hurt us or something…so certain people might think if they gave feedback straight to the point it might hurt, no actually, I am just the opposite, I am really happy to take it, so this lady was really vague and she always used some feedback. She just gave me vague feedback, and to be honest I just ignored it… *(Martin)*

They make the changes to the text as instructed. The participants would reflect and action if the written feedback will improve their work:

> …when my advisor gives me feedback, I know he is knowledgeable, although sometimes I disagree, and we argue, and sometimes he can be pushy...and then I think ok...I will do it the way you want...so he does not blame me for, not getting a grant...*(Anne)*

> …if this feedback can improve what I try to say…I am A-for-a –way…I am fine*... (Eleanor)*

> …Yes, I do. Revise, meaning I go back and look at it and try to understand what   the tutor has said… *(Charlene)*

> Well in the first instance I will read it carefully...and then re-read it...and then go back to my assignment or my chapter that I had to write...so I would see the context of the comments that were made...then I will read it again and again...till I fully comprehend what is meant by the tutor...or the professor... *(John)*

> ...I had a fairly systematic approach where I will start from the beginning...and go through to the end looking at both the positive and negative feedback...positive feedback I will embrace...and obviously enjoy...and the negative feedback...I will critically analyze ...and look exactly what the lecturer is saying...and try to understand for myself if the comment is valid... *(Derrick)*

> Well, I would read through it critically and then I will decide what to accept and what do with that information. In some cases, there are things that the person suggests, and I will then decide to investigate further. To make a change, if necessary, if I had to make a change, what I need to write…whatever*... (Eleanor)*

In 2011, Wang and Li's paper describes ten NNES doctoral students' supervision experiences at a campus-based university in Australia. They find a spectrum of feedback experiences, from those students who just want to be told what to do, to those who appreciate guidance. Hattie and Timperley (2007, p. 82) state that the response to feedback is a personalized matter for different students. One might speculate that transactional distance influences the students' openness to consider the feedback. If the feedback is structured in an accessible manner the students consider it in a more positive manner.

The findings suggest that there is in most cases a very open relationship between the doctoral feedback provider and the NNES online doctoral student. Participants self-report that as NNES online doctoral students they experience that the doctoral feedback providers are open to dialogue about the feedback. While these open relationships are not unique to online doctoral students, creating this type of relationship is more difficult to establish given the geographical and psychological distance in online learning. The NNES online doctoral students can debate comments and introduce their views. Furthermore, the findings from the online NNES doctoral students' experiences in this study concur with those of the online students in Wang and Li's study, representing the spectrum of responses, from doing as they were told to requesting further guidance:

> Yeah, sometimes my advisor can be very esoteric... ((muted laughter)) ...but I ask him questions... *(Anne)*

> …I will make the changes as soon as possible…but I will also say to them sometimes, but…if we do not agree on something…I will let them know….sometimes it is just something that they have missed out on… sometimes they might have read over it and did not see it…so yes, I will talk to them…but if it can improve my argument…then I will change it. *(Eleanor)*

> ... I will not make any changes...till that person can convince me further ...of the need to make that change... *(Derrick)*

Anne, Eleanor and Derrick's response are an example of "scholarly behaviour" to describe the doctoral students' actions of considering feedback, but on occasion challenging it (Foss and Waters, 2007, p. 318).

The students asked for further clarification from the feedback providers and then action the feedback. The act of asking for further clarification can be illuminated by Lantolf's Second Language Activity Theory and its use of the concept of a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), informed by Vygotsky. In this study one can understand it as the novice NNES online doctoral student being guided by the expert, the doctoral feedback provider, to develop as an expert in their field. Seeking further clarification and explanation is part of this process. However some participants report that doctoral feedback providers were not that forthcoming with additional information. Furthermore, the NNES online doctoral students do not always feel comfortable to ask the doctoral feedback providers to supply further information:

Things that I had to adhere to …I cannot do anything about…but as I have said earlier I will not follow them blindly…and will clarify things if I am not sure what they really expect from me…although they really give comprehensive feedback…I will tell them if I do not agree…and I will tell them how I see it…sometimes they will give me a suggestion. But sometime it has to do with language and the way…I have tried to say this thing…to bring it across…and sometimes that is the issue… *(Eleanor)*

...I was supposed to receive feedback, and I have to poke them...and I am not that kind of person...if I send an email and people ignore me, then I am not comfortable to send another email...to say ”give me the feedback”...but they never give you feedback regarding you requesting...*(Russell)*

NNES online doctoral students did not understand the feedback, became confused and did nothing. Doctoral feedback providers whose feedback represents their personal biases and are closed for alternative views make NNES online doctoral students despair and raise self-doubt if they would ever be able to complete their doctoral programme successfully:

...but sometimes I am overwhelmed and it takes a day or two just to recover from that... *(John)*

I have find in my experience that sometimes the comments are not valid...for a number of reasons...including that the lecturer has misunderstood what I have written...or there is personal bias on the part of the lecturer...

...when a lecturer would preference the comment with ...things like...”I think...” and then tell me what they think...or use the word “Perhaps .....” where they kind of leave it in the air and did not give me a definite instruction...

... I had one committee member who showed extreme bias...against my central thesis...and I eventually stop questioning what she was saying...or simply made the changes or ignored what she was saying... *(Derrick)*

I get discourage at first, I feel bad, depressed…couple of days, or hours, depending on how much time I have…((muted laughter))…then I sit down…rationalize it..And I try to make sense of it...and if I believe that I should improve that area, I go for it…I don’t quit …I am not a quitter... *(Charlene)*

In other words, the impact of confusion and the decision not to do anything requires further exploration. In general terms, feedback providers position students in particular ways by their feedback and students selectively respond to this as they try to make sense of their learning. It is not surprising therefore that research shows that comments that are vague, cryptic, authoritarian and generic fail to engage this kind of selective response and neither inform

students nor motivate revisions (Ferris, 1995; Straub, 1997). The choice of inaction leads to NNES online doctoral students showing evidence of being distressed and disoriented, leading to inaction. This is true of campus based and online students, the difficulty for NNES online doctoral students are that they can easily hid and not answer any emails or online communication. Furthermore, if they are insecure about their use of academic English and the conventions, they might not have the courage to approach the feedback provider in written English to state their case.

> ...the committee members where having discussions behind the scenes...throughout this process...and it reached a point where two out of three of them...felt that my dissertation had reach a point where they were very happy with it...the third person as mentioned before were still unhappy...but she finally consented due to pressure from the other two that technical academic conventions and issues were completely resolved...so it was simply her opinion that she does not agree with my central thesis ...that was left...and we agree to disagree...*(Derrick)*

Derrick highlights an aspect that feedback reflects the position of the feedback provider. One might assume that if the NNES online doctoral student comes from an academic tradition where it is not acceptable to question ones professors, and due to the online nature they are not expose to the English academic tradition that this is acceptable behaviour for a student to defend their own position, it could be discussed with the NNES online doctoral student. This might also be introduced early in the online doctoral programme to ensure that it expected on doctoral level that one might disagree from feedback providers, but that you should be able to defend your position.

> *They do not understand the feedback, become confused and ask other feedback providers outside the official feedback system to help them make sense of the written feedback, for example, a partner or friend.*

> … And I am lucky to this one as my wife is American

> She has a master's degree in teaching English to second language speaker. I am lucky about it (laughed)...so if I do not understand…I go to her and ask what is this…and she helps … yes, sometimes incomplete feedback make me confused…and made me sometimes submit something without changing it.*(Charles)*

> …my husband is a Native Speaker…almost every week, my discussion questions or important assignments, I get him to proofread them, in terms of grammar   and

punctuation, prepositions, things like that …he does not comment on the content…*(Charlene)*

It follows that confusion about written feedback might compel the student to look for clarification. Other unofficial doctoral feedback providers play an important role outside the official parameters of the respective universities. Those NNES online doctoral students that have access to others report them to be of great help to the student. In addition, those NNES online doctoral students that do not have access to these sources might be put at a disadvantage. Lines (2016, p. 368) refers to the issue of substantive editing in campus-based universities. She raises the issue that although professional editing is allowed, substantive editing is prohibited. Alas, the latter is difficult to detect and the difference between professional and substantive editing is not very clear:

> …sometimes if it was between her and my academic supervisor I try to go with my supervisor…as at the end of the day I am doing the paper for grading…so the tie-breaker was ..Who is going to grade my paper... *(Charles)*

On the one hand, asking for clarification is the only way the students can manage and steer through their levels of confusion in a solely online environment. When they are not clear they referred back to the feedback provider in a cyclical manner. The cycle might be as follows: they receive clarification on their work, they think they understand the written feedback, but then confusion creeps in. Once confused, they ask others such as family members to help in understanding feedback delivered in English. Having received this advice students will return to seek further clarification from their doctoral feedback provider. This cycle might continue till either the doctoral student or doctoral feedback provider chooses to end it.

The consequence of what they are doing is that if the written feedback is effective it is creating learning, about their topic, but also about themselves, their ability to cope, language issues and the student's ultimate concern to be successful. The consequences of effective written feedback to NNES online doctoral students are to create learning opportunities for the student concerning their topic, about themselves, their ability to cope and language issues. Written feedback is intended to coach and give guidance. Guidance is intended to promote change. NNES online doctoral students are learning through the written feedback that they receive, but they are learning as they are trying to adapt to academic English and its conventions. Learning

transitions are characterized by the students' struggle to adapt and cope with doctoral level expectations.

The engagement of the NNES online doctoral students with written feedback creates learning. It is learning in a broad sense, which includes learning about their topic and being a doctoral scholar. In addition, they learn how to cope and adapt in a foreign language and academic tradition. They learn to cope with their emotions and feelings of self-worth, to name but a few consequences. These interactions trigger reflection and inner dialogues about how they negotiate these structures and requirements set by the university and their specific discipline; and their identity, voice and ability to act as a human agent.

The findings demonstrate that the ultimate concern for the NNES online doctoral students is to be successful in their chosen doctoral programme**.** John reflects upon his experience with negative written feedback that he received in English, and the emotional response that it elicited in him:

> ... Mmm...I focus ....and my inner conversation is where I went wrong...and if I agree with what he said...and kind of thinking back to my school days... ((some laughter from the participant)) where I had to do something....and the teacher was maybe not satisfied...and then get a scolding or a hiding...so at school it was a kind of a negative motivation why they teach you...but I think at university or post grad...You are more likely to respond to motivation...so when I read something negative I just pause...the inner conversation it taking me back to school ...or take me back to a situation where I did not do so well...then I should just gather myself...and motivate myself ...and continue...and see the positive in it...but also see the bigger picture...and that is to complete the study ...and that is ...to go for the goal and that is to complete it...in the most successful way that I can...*(John)*

In sum, action and change are intertwined with the students' perception and understanding of the feedback, the feedback provider and the ultimate revision decisions. Academic English writing ability and skills connect to the whole person, their cognitive, affective and conative state. Written feedback addresses the student as a whole. The audience for the written feedback is the NNES online doctoral student. As the reader of the feedback, the NNES online doctoral student engages with the feedback from their personal perspective. Expectations and structures of the subject discipline and institutional rules influence revision decisions. Written feedback aims to facilitate change and development. Thus, the written feedback is not only instruction to change, but in most cases engages the student in a dialogue to reflect upon their work. Self-reports of the participants confirm the notion of dialogue in the literature that written feedback is not just a monologue or a list of instructions from the doctoral feedback provider to the student but a dialogue (Bloxham and Campbell, 2010; Nicol, 2010). Given the transactional distance in online learning written communication could be an effective tool of guidance. However, written feedback in this context could also be received by the NNES online doctoral student as de-motivating, impersonal and confusing.

Chapter 7

Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter reflects upon the findings and possible implications of this study, in terms of practice and further research.

Research Summary

Within the context of a growing number of NNES online doctoral students who complete their studies in English medium universities, online doctoral feedback providers and NNES online doctoral students experience the feedback process as a form of complex communication. In order for the feedback process to achieve the goals of promoting action on the part of the NNES online doctoral student, the nature of the feedback as communication exchange, experienced between student and feedback provider, highlights the conditions necessary for dialogue, influencing interaction, learning and autonomy in an online environment. For this current study, dialogue is defined as an educational conversation with the goal of knowledge exchange and knowledge creation. And while social presence is not defined as dialogue, social presence has the potential to enhance or mar dialogue.

When comparing the doctoral student feedback campus-based versus online experiences, the key difference between these two contexts point to the stark contrast in the environment within which feedback is distributed to the doctoral student. Although campus-based students might also receive feedback in an electronic format, they have multiple options of receiving and clarifying feedback. In most instances, the online doctoral student is limited to a single mode of receiving feedback and it is a significant factor that influences the dialogue process of giving students guidance on how to progress, including elements of motivation and maintaining a feeling of connection with the feedback providers.

Language

The concept of language identity change implies that for NNES online doctoral students, in order to read, understand and take action as a result of the written feedback, they need to do more than simply complete the actions of decoding and coding in a different language. Written feedback is more than guidance, delivered via words and phrases, but rather it represents a complex communication message, oriented towards providing to the NNES online doctoral student specific, helpful information that can be used to support and achieve the goals devised to ensure successful completion of a doctoral journey.

It might mean that students will need to learn to balance their old identity with their new acquired identity, and that the new language identity does not replace their existing identity, in that it does not cause online NNES students to become NES students (native speakers of English). Adjusting their language identity, adopting and integrating an additional language identity empower them to understand and respond to the language and context of the comments rendered. The study shows that NNES online doctoral students saw that the degree of willingness of the NNES online doctoral student and doctoral feedback provider to accommodate each other's language identity lead to greater success, in particular as it demonstrated to the students that their doctoral feedback providers were interested in them being successful.

The NNES online doctoral students experience a wide range of issues as a consequence of the process of language identity change. Issues include the fact that NNES online doctoral students do not necessarily share the same language identity of their feedback providers. Furthermore, there is a pressure to shift their own language identity that could be attributed to the fact that NNES online doctoral students have to adapt to a new academic language. Participants in the study refer to their lack of confidence in English academic writing, but also to their struggle to find their voice in English, that potentially leads to self-doubt of their own ability to be successful. Following from their insecurity about their language abilities they might blindly following the doctoral feedback providers' advice, because of the struggle to express their views and perspectives using English academic language. One possible implication is that the uncertainty NNES online doctoral students encounter about their language identity creates stress and that in turn leads to self-doubt.

As an NNES online doctoral student I experienced first-hand the change in my language identity over the duration of my own doctoral degree programme and wanted to know whether the same was true for other students. What is an interesting discovery coming from this research is that the participants also report the shift in language identify and the struggle associated with learning not only how to adapt to writing in an English academic style, but also communicating using a different language. Participants talk about their experiences as being dynamic, using descriptions similar to how Lantolf and Thorne (2006, p. 240) describe how language acquisition reflects the activity and the importance the students attach to that activity. Thus, in the process of engaging with the feedback, the NNES online doctoral student broadens her or his conceptual tools in English. If reading, understanding and responding to written feedback is problematic for the NNES online doctoral students, it seems that their actively engaging with the written text holds potential as an approach that NNES online doctoral students might use to address the challenge of coping with written feedback and the formation of an additional language identity.

In this study, language identity is not conceived of as a static, unchangeable entity, but rather as a sense of oneself, ones ideas and feelings, created as a result of interaction with others and other roles one has to undertake. NNES online doctoral students do not change who they are, however the fact that they are operating within the online doctoral study environment results in an increased need to adapt and change their language as a vehicle for communication. The online environment requires NNES online doctoral student to modify their language identity. NNES online doctoral students do not view themselves as native English speakers, but they are not mono-linguistic doctoral students either. In order to be able to communicate effectively, the NNES online doctoral student makes significant adjustments, as they cope with the change and the loss of use or recognition of their native language. Given the English language context, the NNES online doctoral students are compelled to adopt an English language identity to be able to make their views clear and that their responses are understood by the doctoral feedback provider.

The NNES online doctoral students ascribe a level of importance to the online presence of their doctoral feedback provider, as shown by Anne's statement that when she sees an email from her doctoral feedback provider, even when she is in bed or on her way to bed, she feels she finds it important enough to read the message because it represents a continuation of the connection she has with her feedback provider. At this moment Anne is not viewing the email as a way of obtaining further guidance, but rather as an opportunity to connect.

While working online, the NNES online doctoral students reside in their local environment where English might not be a common language or even rarely spoken. A NNES online doctoral student experiences the notion of 'going to class' quite differently, when compared to a campus-based NNES student, who uses the physical movement to 'go to class', requiring them to engage solely within an English language context. The online context requires from the NNES online doctoral student to make the language shift whilst they are still in their own environment, including their own language environment. The NNES online doctoral students make an emotional and focus change within the online world, but they are not physically or socially present in that world. Consequently, the online social presence of the feedback provider helps the NNES online doctoral students to make the shift to the English language academic world, while remaining physically present in their own, different language context or environment. In this sense, online social presence and continuous communication might also assist the NNES online doctoral student to recognize and deal with this process of acquiring a new language identity. The personal online presence helps to create the feeling for the NNES student that their doctoral feedback providers care about their students and want the NNES online doctoral students to succeed. We know that social presence helps to overcome the lack of physical face-to-face contact in an online environment. In this study, the existence of a sense of social presence also helps the NNES online doctoral student to manage her or his language identity shift.

It is important to note that the NES doctoral feedback provider may be constrained by the limitations of the country of origin of their native language, as well as the cultural variations within English language dialects (British, Australian, and American) and academic traditions. Given that written feedback is the sole means of communication in an online environment, the language paradigms of both student and feedback provider need to be consciously and openly discussed, and a strategy agreed on how to communicate within the constraints of the particular institution. This implies that the student not only has to acquire the identity of a doctoral student, but also a new academic language identity.

There is a socio-cultural dimension at play with regards to written feedback provided to NNES online doctoral students. As I view it, the socio-cultural dimension as used in its broadest sense addresses what NNES online doctoral students do with the written feedback that they receive in light of the notion for them to change their academic language, conventions and expectations. In the process of change, it highlights the fact that the NNES students do not only read and respond in English, but responds with their understanding of the academic English conventions and their own personal histories and identities.

From a doctoral feedback provider perspective, this insight has some practical implication. It provides questions for further reflection: What does it mean that the NNES online doctoral student has to alter their language identity to understand what the feedback provider tells them? How does the NNES online doctoral student deal with the loss or change of their initial language and academic tradition identity? Is it worthwhile to discuss it openly with the student and made them aware of these processes? Considering the rigour of doctoral-level work in an English language and academic tradition, academic language identity change does not mean that the student can use it as an excuse not to step up to the challenge of doctoral level work. As one participant in the semi-structured interviews self-reflected:

> ...but coming from a different writing tradition has something to do with it...or it is just a lame excuse… (*Anne*)

This study also identifies the significance of timing, as it relates to the process of language and identity. For example, if the NNES online doctoral student is working through the development process of acquiring a new language identity, very critical comments may be perceived as unhelpful. Some of the participants report that to receive written feedback in an online environment by means of a computer screen is very clinical and might be experienced as very harsh. Certain negative feedback may be experienced by the doctoral students as a direct criticism of who they perceive themselves to be at that particular point in their doctoral journey. Similar to what is reported by Can (2009, p 122), the effect of critical/negative written feedback extends directly into the doctoral students' emotions, self-confidence, and motivation. As one participant stated in his interpretation of critical feedback:

> I think that feedback is so necessary to deliver a high quality end product...so I think it is very useful...but sometimes it is very difficult to receive this feedback because sometimes...it could be emotionally very harsh...on yourself and this feedback could ruin the process...(*John*)

This study points to the potential to use of the stage in the NNES online doctoral students' development of her or his language identity in English, as a springboard to focus useful written feedback, that the student can interpret and action. In turn, with the development of a new language identity, student behaviour might change, moving from an approach of just keep your head down and keep going, to one that includes a stronger confidence that with planned interventions and perseverance the NNES online doctoral student might succeed in producing a text in English worthy of doctoral level studies.

Conceptual Conclusions

In this study four conceptual conclusions are identified:

1. The presence of NNES online doctoral students implies a distance between the student and feedback provider; to state the obvious, the notion of "online" implied geographical distance. The geographical distance in turn implies that there is a psychological distance, which impacts on the relationship between the feedback provider and the student.

2.   The multi-layered purpose of written feedback in an online environment was clarified; in addition to providing feedback on academic content, it can also be used to overcome the psychological distance providing a way for the student to connect with the feedback provider and the institution.

3.   The message of the written feedback, including the language it is constructed in, was detailed; to understand the message conveyed in the written feedback does not only require a skill to decode academic English, the feedback provider and the student bring to the table their own socio-cultural backgrounds and academic traditions:

4.   The nature of the communication was defined; the nature of written feedback in an online environment presents a potential dialogue for the online students, deprived of other means of communication to clarify the messages they receive. In this sense an online social presence facilitates a dialogue between the student and the feedback provider.

What have I learned, as an NNES online doctoral student?

Initially, I thought that online learning is just a different delivery mechanism of doctoral programmes that produced the same experience for online as for campus-based students. For example if the student got feedback on a laptop or in a doctoral feedback provider's office, I considered that the only difference was the mode of delivery. I learned that the notion of online had implications other than mere geographical distance that needed to be addressed. Firstly, distance as espoused in "online" learning brings a psychological distance as the student experience is one of distance and removed from the feedback provider and the institution. This impacted the quality and frequency of contact between the student and the doctoral feedback provider. Thus in an online environment the purpose of the feedback was to guide, but also to overcome the psychological distance experienced by the NNES online doctoral student. The matter of overcoming psychological distance was further complicated due to different native languages at play. Written feedback uses language to convey its messages, but the manner in which language is used can either reaffirm distance between the student and doctoral feedback provider, or can set a tone of understanding and support. The way in which the feedback is communicated is as important as the message that the feedback provider tries to communicate. I also now understand that written feedback is more than enhancing student performance, but is a dialogue between the student and doctoral feedback provider.

Exploring Transactional Distance Theory helped me to understand the importance of the concept of connection in communicating written feedback. An NNES online doctoral student needs to be aware of the subtle language nuances, as part of the process of making sense of written feedback in English. Second Language Activity Theory's emphasis on the socio-cultural dimension of language acquisition was especially useful in my analysis of the findings, as it allowed me to think through how the NNES online doctoral students' academic conventions in their native language impacted on writing in an English medium academic environment. To this end, the Second Language Activity Theory's conceptualization of the development from a novice to an expert is crucial for grasping how written feedback can address English Academic conventions to progress the NNES student to become an expert in their writing, as well as the dynamic development of their language identity as proficient scholars who can communicate their ideas by means of Academic English Writing Conventions.

The Social Presence Theory aided my understanding of how to create a learning environment that is conducive for NNES online doctoral students to act. The participants reported their experience of their online feedback providers as authentic expressions of concern. Some participants in this study also described differing degrees of social presence, which reflected the range of behaviours of doctoral feedback providers. Some feedback providers were more 'present' in their studies, by setting up a schedule of regular meetings, or responding promptly to their emails or submissions, or by acknowledging receipt of submissions. Participants in this study were also aware of their own role in the 'social presence' interaction. One might speculate that not all online doctoral students grasp the importance of their own social presence in an online environment. Online social presence facilitates dialogue, and the learning environment that builds the relationship between the NNES online doctoral student and the doctoral feedback provider becomes paramount. Social presence enables the building of a relationship of trust and understanding. It helps to re-direct focus in the online doctoral environment, from an interaction with technology to a more human activity. Social presence in the current study, when it worked well, led to relevant and meaningful interactions.

Reflection on the Research Questions

The research looked at the perceptions of NNES online doctoral students towards written feedback. Students viewed the written feedback seriously if they could make sense of it. This finding pointed to clarity as the most important component to enable NNES online doctoral students to action written feedback. The manner in which written feedback was presented could be an obstacle if it was given in an indirect manner not to cause offense, as it could be so unclear that the student did not understand what to do. Similarly, if written feedback tried to be positive, it often failed to highlight problems that needed to be addressed in the work submitted by the student. The respondents preferred written feedback which was straightforward, gave clear instructions on how to revise their written work, provided suggestions for improvement, strengthened the direction of the paper, had a suggestive tone more than an authoritative tone, and was not given because of a personal preference or bias.

Written feedback formed the basis of revision decisions. Furthermore, the academic expectations of their institution or discipline and the students' reflection and understanding played an important part in revision decisions. The feedback processes were viewed as a dialogue, in which the student participated. Participants were more willing to take feedback seriously if it added value to their work and enhanced their argument. For NNES online doctoral students to be able to apply feedback, they need to understand the meaning of the written feedback.   Furthermore, in their decision making process, the NNES online doctoral students need to identify the particular aspects of their work that needed attention. The NNES online doctoral students expect to receive guidance through written feedback without the guidance being prescriptive. They did not necessarily expect the doctoral feedback provider to correct all language-related issues. One participant was clear that the content and arguments were the focus for the doctoral feedback providers, and did not expect spelling and grammar corrections from the doctoral feedback provider. Another participant stated that he understood that the feedback provider could not comment on all language errors, but a summary of the main trends or language errors might be helpful for the student.

Using both the Second Language Activity Theory and Social Presence Theory enabled me to better understand the revision decisions made by students. The Second Language Activity Theory provides the framework to understand the influence of language and context in the sense making of written feedback, how language issues influence revision decisions. Furthermore, it is the notion of psychological Transactional Distance, which also has an effect on student decisions. When geographically removed from the feedback provider, a student might experience the feedback provider as distant, biased, harsh and critical, creating a barrier for communication. Given the lack of body to body (face-to-face) interaction the remoteness might negatively influence the student to act on written feedback. These two elements of communication and perception of a distant figure might create barriers to their successfully adjusting to different academic traditions, and shifting language and academic language identity.

This study shows that NNES online doctoral students consciously decide to successfully complete their doctoral studies in English. While their respective universities determine that the students meet the criteria for adequate English language competency upon admission, in reality completing doctoral studies is more complex than simply passing a language test. Doctoral students who could not made sense of the written feedback found that it increased their level of confusion. As a result, often NNES online doctoral students consulted other people outside the normal feedback mechanisms to gain a better understanding of the implication of the feedback, but their doctoral feedback provider was not always aware of the additional support.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

During the research trustworthiness was addressed and the main actions were reported in previous chapters. A log of how the evidence was collected was kept, and it is also important to note that the participants reviewed the transcripts to ensure that they represented their views. A second coder assisted to ensure that the grouping of the experiences made sense. I might caution that my role as NNES online doctoral student did play a mediating role in this research.

Limitations of the study and recommendations for further research

The following identified limitations were not the focus of this study:

Firstly, this study was not in particular concerned with how the word-use by feedback providers impacted on the sense making process. Word-use in written feedback in English relates to multiple English terms that are used around the globe. Not only are the NNES online doctoral students the embodiment of their native language and academic cultural traditions, but the doctoral feedback provider uses a particular dialect of English, such as American or British English.

Secondly, this study did not explore the use of technology per se to develop and enhance the feedback experience as a way to overcome the online learning environment. Rather the study highlights the contexts of online learning as appose to the technological implementation of online learning.

Thirdly, this study did not explore the influence of written feedback on student motivation and persistence, but rather focussed on how the online doctoral feedback provider engaged with their students as part of the process of improving academic performance.

At this point it is important to consider that the findings reported in this study were entirely based on the perceptions and experiences of the participants, without any examination of the quality and the nature of the feedback. In this respect this research study followed Can's (2009) approach, which did not consider the written feedback as such, but focused on the students' perceptions. It was a conscious decision to steer away from a focus on the word-use by doctoral feedback providers and how the word-use impacted on the sense-making process and the actions that the students took. Furthermore, it was a broad-based study across continents and institutions, and to get permission to use the written feedback notes was not practical within the limited time frame of a study of this nature.

This study confirms that from the NNES online doctoral students' perspective, written feedback in a text based online environment is more than a vehicle for the transmission of information; it serves as a springboard for dialogue. In addition, this study confirms that NNES online doctoral students take written feedback seriously and they do consider the feedback that they receive.

The participants stress the importance that doctoral feedback providers construct feedback in such a manner that the written feedback fosters and sustains dialogue and promotes online social presence. This study was not designed to establish which phrases or words the doctoral feedback provider needs to use to address the language identity issues of the NNES online doctoral student, and as such necessitates further research. My first suggestion would be to conduct an in-depth, longitudinal study of online NNES student interactions to establish the type of feedback phrases that are deemed helpful in a text-based online environment. Although work has been done on written feedback in a text-based online situation, a specific focus on effective words and phrases will be beneficial for online doctoral feedback providers, building upon Nicols' (2006) work of feedback as dialogue. Another possible area of future research would be to investigate the helpfulness for NNES online doctoral students to receive some doctoral feedback via audio or video conversations to complement the written feedback; especially in light of an increasingly global view of online learning and the technological infrastructure necessary.

The results of this study showed a strong emphasis on the importance of social presence as an environmental factor for dialogue between NNES online doctoral students and their feedback providers. The participants in the current study provided some clues on what they found important in the way that their feedback providers engaged with them. However, this study did not specifically focus on how doctoral feedback providers create and sustain social presence when working with their NNES online doctoral students. Further research could focus on online doctoral feedback providers and how they demonstrate exemplary practice and strategies when creating and sustaining student support through social presence.

This study underlined the importance of social presence, but what is left unexplored are the ways in which social presence can be achieved and to what level it is necessary to adequately support the NNES online doctoral student, in terms of establishing and maintaining communication, when the language identity is different. This suggests that social presence could be used to support the language identity shift.

What has also not been explored is the extent to which and in what ways the NNES online doctoral students utilize the doctoral feedback to consciously change their language identity and if so, what strategies seems to be the most helpful. Another strand of enquiry from this investigation is to ask the students whether they have collegial help from doctoral feedback providers to develop their language identity. In this sense the research could focus on some emails or feedback that the NNES online doctoral student found very helpful. There might be ethical or institutional rules or issues of acquiring permission to use those private pieces of conversation.

This study explores the views and perspectives of those pursuing social studies online doctoral degrees. What was not investigated was the influence of disciplinary language on the revision decisions of NNES online doctoral students in response to written feedback. When it comes to the topic of discipline-specific language, most of us will readily agree that there are obvious differences and expectations between disciplines, for example, the discipline-specific language required of a social science doctoral student is different from that required of a science or engineering student. Thus, further consideration of not only Academic English and Academic English writing conventions needs to be reflected, but also the differences and similarities between the different disciplines and the influence of discipline-specific language to enable NNES online doctoral students to action written feedback.

In addition, the current study focuses on what NNES online doctoral students do with the written feedback that they received and does not specifically address the issue of the role of the doctoral feedback provider. For example, how much guidance should the NNES online doctoral student receive and to what extend the NNES online doctoral student may become over-dependent on the feedback provider.

Implications for Policy and Practice, including Institutional Guidelines

This study focuses on the issues faced by online doctoral students and a particular sub-group, the NNES online doctoral students. The study found that for NNES online doctoral students, written feedback was not only a set of instructions intended to highlight the need for changes, but in most cases written feedback engaged the student in a dialogue that challenged the student towards critical reflection. Further, the findings reinforce the importance of using different approaches when doctoral feedback providers give feedback to NNES online doctoral students, whose context of studying online using a different language creates additional barriers for NNES online doctoral students to effectively act upon written feedback. While this study was not originally designed to produce guidelines for doctoral feedback providers on how to write feedback to promote an academic conversation in a text-based environment, however, the participants gave some clues and indications as to what they deem are helpful practices for doctoral feedback providers to foster and sustain the dialogue with NNES online doctoral students. These indications might be useful as the basis for further practice-based research.

Implications for Policy

The findings of the study suggest that certain issues should be set across the institution to direct the decision-making and practices that impact on NNES online doctoral students with regards to the action that they take as a result of the written feedback that they receive. Firstly, given the diverse student body that represents NNES online doctoral students, it is advisable that the institution provide clear guidance on the level of English required for doctoral level studies, and that a master-degree level qualification in English may not always be a sufficient indicator of ability to ready for the rigour required in doctoral level writing. Clarity in which academic writing tradition the institution adheres to is important, for while the tradition might be implied from where the university is geographically situated, but it might not always be obvious for an NNES online doctoral student, not familiar with the different language and academic writing conventions in English.

Furthermore, prior to providing learning opportunities to NNES online doctoral students, institutions should review all policies and associated procedures. For example if the institutions policy on written feedback states that third party editing is allowed, it has to be clear in which cases the institution will view the editing as plagiarism and cheating. The policy might not allow a third party editor, make corrections to the structure of the thesis or rewrite the whole or parts of the thesis, but typing errors and grammatical mistakes would be considered acceptable. Within the scope of this policy would be the use of approved language editors, the use of writing centres for purposes of training and the anticipated costs and potential fees back for these services.

Implications for Institutional Guidance

To implement a policy or policies on written feedback to NNES online doctoral students, it might be advisable to clarify procedures that provide more detail on how to implement these policies. For example the guidance might stipulate the specific English Language Test and level achieved, and their requirement to be admitted to an online Doctoral Programme. Additionally, guidance on which courses should be available at an institution to familiarise students with AEWC and the expectations of academic writing at a doctoral level. The guidance could also be helpful to clarify the role of the feedback provider and the expectations of the student, for example the feedback provider might give feedback on the flow of argument, but not in detail on the language and grammar. The latter is the responsibility of the student. Institutional guidance could also clarify the expectations of doctoral level writing and how it is different from Master level and undergraduate work. This can form the basis of a discussion on admission or in the first module to ensure the NNES student explicitly understand the level of commitment required to complete an advance degree on doctoral level.

There should be guidance provided on doctoral feedback providers training and orientation to include dimensions of working with NNES online doctoral students who may be coming from different academic and/or language traditions. Topics might include increasing awareness of the tone of feedback and the usefulness of written feedback is as a tool to promote dialogue and connection with the NNES online doctoral student. It would be important to mention in the guidance that an ongoing dialogue needs at least two people and the student cannot hide or not participate in the online communication, but need to be present to gain full benefit from the dialogue and overcome the isolation, commonly experience in the online environment. Guidance should also include awareness that written feedback is critique of the students work and not of the person, to reduce the potential misunderstanding due to differences in language.

Implications for Practice: Students

The findings of the study confirm that for NNES online doctoral students, completing an online doctoral degree at an English language institution brings added responsibility students need to establish a relation with their feedback providers in order to have a good working relationship. Establishing and maintaining ongoing communication through the use of written feedback seems to connect the student with the institution and the community of scholars. In order for this to occur, the student has a responsibility to seek out this communication and to also be present online and respond to the feedback provider.

It is clear in the findings that the NNES online doctoral student needs a good grasp of her or his English Academic writing skills and conventions. It might be advisable at the very beginning, for NNES online doctoral students, to highlight to the feedback provider previous experiences or different academic traditions. This might alert the feedback provider to comment and issues within the students writing that might have been acceptable in the students' native academic tradition, but might be contrary to AEWC. The context of the NNES online doctoral student have to constantly shift their language identity, and it is the constant change that challenge, where campus-based NNES students are surrounded and confronted with the English language in their immediate environment.

The NNES online doctoral student language identity shift and voice in academic English is another dimension to be considered and reflected upon. In most cases, the NNES online doctoral student remains residing in his or her country of origin where English may not be the official language or is rarely spoken. It is only when NNES online doctoral students engage with their online studies that a shift in language identity occurs. In this study, most participants reported that expressing themselves in English is a struggle. The continuous shifting of language identity, experienced by the NNES online doctoral student is different from the NNES campus-based student who are surrounded and confronted with English in their immediate environment. The continuous shifting of language identity might also impact on how the NNES online doctoral students find their academic 'voice' in English and how well they fully develop a pertinent voice in their doctoral level academic writing

Participants in this research study participants reported high levels of motivation to complete their online doctoral studies in English and that they were prepared to invest time and effort to achieve this goal. Before embarking on their degree, NNES online doctoral students should consider if they are prepared to make this type of investment in time and effort and how they can sustain it over the course of a doctoral programme of several years.

Implications for Practice: Doctoral feedback providers

A good working relationship between doctoral feedback provider and NNES online doctoral student forms the basis for the students to progress to their ultimate goal. The findings suggest that where the students reported a good working relationship with feedback providers, there was an open discussion about expectations from the student and feedback providers. Expectations were clarified, and developed in an ongoing dialogue between student and feedback provider, to develop the doctoral student as a skilled scholar and researcher.

Collaborative writing opportunities with the doctoral feedback provider were one example to promote dialogue between the student and the feedback provider. Can (2009, p.146) indicated that campus-based students perceived that there were few opportunities to engage in

collaborative writing activities with faculty members. This negatively affected their motivation for academic writing to contribute to the field, improve themselves as academics, have recognition in their discipline and had a negative influence on their feedback-seeking attitudes. The online participants did comment on it, and one participant stated:

> I did not get a lot of encouragement from the lecturers...but they did give us the options of writing academic papers...so it would have been nice if they have encouraged us more...I did write one academic paper after I finished my dissertation. (*Derrick*)

What the findings suggested was that written feedback was more than an instruction to change. Written feedback challenged the students, and made them looking at opposing positions of an argument and challenged the doctoral student towards critical reflection.

Furthermore, that the participants in the study did not expect the doctoral feedback providers to correct their language and grammar, but one participant did mention that it might be helpful if the main recurring language errors are listed by the feedback provider to guide the student to do the corrections.

NNES online doctoral students need to change their language identity to successfully complete their doctoral programme in English. Doctoral feedback providers have earned the right to give feedback, by means of qualifications or experience, and are vetted by the respective universities to lecture and provide feedback. Equally important is the need for the NNES online doctoral student to understand what the doctoral feedback providers are saying and act upon it. Thus, if the NNES online doctoral student intended to complete a doctoral programme in English, it is the students' responsibility to ensure their English is on a par with the university's expectations. This description of the situation might be labelled a deficit view of the NNES online doctoral student. To rectify the situation one might argue that the NNES online doctoral student just needs remedial help to be on a par with her or his NES colleagues. Important to note is the fact that not only the NNES online doctoral student but the NES feedback provider too is situated in their native language and academic conventions, for example, British, American or Australian English language and academic conventions. Given that written feedback is the sole means of communication in an online environment, it seems reasonable to stress the importance of a discussion between the student and the feedback provider to clarify their different language paradigms and expectations. Moreover, the language differences seem to necessitate the

agreement of a realistic communication strategy between student and feedback provider, within the constraints of their own language situatedness and the expectations of their particular institution, that can promote positive learning experiences for the student and the survival of an amicable working relationship between the NNES online doctoral student and their respective doctoral feedback provider.

As pointed out in the literature review, the concept of moving from novice to the expert in learning or language acquisition, namely the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), might also be fruitfully applied to understand language identity change. It is accepted that not all NNES online doctoral students are the same, and this is also true for their identification with their language identity. The language identity shift might be from those NNES online doctoral students who are on one side of the spectrum, not aware of their language identity, or who are protective about their own native language identity and would not surrender it, to those who are on the opposite side of the spectrum and wholeheartedly embrace their adopted language identity. If the language identity shift is viewed as a spectrum it also implies that there are those students who are in between these two extreme positions. ZPD as a concept might be useful to understand that for the NNES online doctoral student, language identity change is a journey. The student is somewhere on this journey of language identity change.

The doctoral feedback provider might be the proverbial shepherd to care that the NNES online doctoral student not only gains knowledge, skills and understanding of their respective subject or discipline, but survives the shift in one of the fundamental tools in higher level

thinking, namely language. Given the personal nature of identity and in this case identity change, the shift raises questions not only about the individual as student, but who she or he is as a person. Given that in a solely online environment this identity change is mediated by written feedback, in a different language than that with which the student identifies the potential for misunderstanding between the NNES online doctoral student and the feedback provider increases. In this respect social presence of the doctoral feedback provider and the type of communication provided can support the NNES online doctoral students who are in the process of changing their language identity. Programme providers and institutions would benefit from focussing not only on the Academic English ability of NNES online doctoral students, but also on the impact of a language identity shift on students' response to written feedback.

In most cases, the doctoral feedback provider is respected, and the student will follow the guidance. Some of the practical aspects that the feedback provider might consider are, firstly, their receivers' language abilities. Feedback providers' assumptions about the NNES students' academic writing ability in an online class might not be the reality for that particular student. For example, one student objected and mentioned that to assume an equal playing field might not be true and it is not "fair to assume that everybody with a master's degree has a certain level of academic writing" (*Charles*). "Cut and paste" written feedback to more than one student might not suffice and Non-Native English Speakers need clear guidance written in Standard English in complete sentences. Assumptions of students' English proficiency should be ascertained on a case by case basis. NNES online doctoral students' level of training in English is varied as the level of training impacts on their ability to use Academic English proficiently. It is also not clear how well the NNES online doctoral students are adequately prepared to identify the subtle nuances used in Academic English writing. Previous Academic English writing experiences do not guarantee students are on a par with the expectations in a doctoral programme and certain practice-orientated Masters Programs might not have been as rigorous as expected in a doctoral programme.

Secondly, timely feedback without delays will communicate to the student that the intention of the feedback provider is serious and demonstrates respect for student. One respondent commented that to facilitate communication an acknowledgement of receipt would put the student at ease. Following on from this one could speculate that if written feedback is the

only medium of communication, the feedback also communicates something about the quality of the student-feedback provider relationship.

Thirdly, expectations from the institution and the personal preferences of the feedback provider need to be explicitly communicated from the start. One respondent who did follow a doctoral programme at an American university made a comment about the university he attended and a committee member's expectation about American English language and grammar conventions. The participant was a NNES, who learned and completed his under- and post-graduate studies in a British and Australian English context before he switched to the American system. The particular committee member was his tutor during the modular phase, as well as part of the committee which reviewed his research proposal. These issues were never an issue before the dissertation phase of the study. The participant commented on the doctoral feedback providers' additional requirements in the final stages before he had to submit his dissertation:

> the committee member that I mentioned was actually an English teacher...and she felt that there were certain stylistic issues ...from an American perspective...but I feel that those stylistic issues did not involve...grammar, even according to American rules...so it was a personal style that she preferred... (*Derrick*)

Fourthly, expectations from the institution and the personal preferences of the NNES online doctoral student need to be explicitly communicated from the start. Given the diversity of languages and students' backgrounds, I found that where the students reported a good working relationship with feedback providers, there was an open discussion about expectations between the student and feedback providers. Expectations could be clarified to facilitate an ongoing dialogue with the aim of guiding the doctoral student to take up her or his place in the academic community as a skilled scholar and researcher.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: E-mail to the Department Heads and/or Faculty

Dear .....;

I am an Ed.D. student completing my studies at the University of Liverpool. Currently I am conducting a research study in fulfillment of my Thesis. For this study, I am planning on conducting interviews with Non-Native English speaking online doctoral students in social science departments who are:

- at their later stages of their program (preferably after proposal defense)
- actively engaged in academic writing activities, (preferably) has at least one publication.

I am writing to ask if you might provide me the names of students that meet these criteria, so that I may invite them to participate in the research study. For your information, I have provided a short summary of my proposed research study.

I look forward hearing from you.

Best Regards

Guillaume Olivier

Skype: guillaume.o2

Mobile: UK 07776231419

Email: guillaume.olivier@my.ohecampus.com

Postal address:

196 High Road. Wood Green London N22 8HH

Appendix B: E-mail to the Doctoral Students

Dear .....;

I am an Ed.D. student in the department of Higher Educational Studies at the University of Liverpool. Currently I am collecting data for my dissertation. I am doing interviews with Non-Native English speaking online doctoral students who are at their later stages of their program and who are actively involved in academic writing activities.

Dr. ...... suggested that your participation would be useful to my research. I would appreciate if you could spare about 1 hour for an interview with me. I copied the consent letter below.

If you would like to participate, could you please let me know which day and what time is best for you?

If you agree to participate, I usually do the interviews on Skype.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best Regards

Guillaume Olivier

Skype: guillaume.o2

Mobile: UK 07776231419

Email: guillaume.olivier@my.ohecampus.com

Postal address:

196 High Road. Wood Green London N22 8HH

Appendix C: Confirmation of Interview date and time

Dear

RE: Interview participants for the Written Feedback Study

Many thanks for your willingness to participate in a research interview.

The interview will take approximately 1 hour to complete, which will be recorded. A copy of the transcript of the recording will be sent to you, to validate that the transcript is an accurate reflection of the interview.

Supporting documents
The following documents are attached to the email for your perusal, namely
The participant information sheet
The consent form
Draft interview questions

Appointment Date and Time

Sunday to Thursday, from 2 pm till midnight (UK Time);
Friday or Saturday (any time)

Dates available: Friday, 6th June 2014 till Sunday 22nd June 2014.

Please let me know which date and time will suit you best.

Many thanks in advance for your offer to help out and best of luck with your own studies.

Guillaume

Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet

1. **Title of Study**

ONLINE DOCTORAL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD
WRITTEN FEEDBACK FOR ACADEMIC WRITING

2. **Version Number and Date**

    Version1/08122013

3. **Invitation Paragraph**

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate,
it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.
Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask us if you would
like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. Please also feel free to
discuss this with your friends, relatives and colleagues if you wish. We would like to stress that
you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

    Thank you for reading this.

3. **What is the purpose of the study?**

This study is being used to fulfill one of the requirements for the EdD degree at the University of
Liverpool. The study involves a research study, intended to help researchers learn to apply
research approaches to understand Higher Educational practices or the practices of their
organisations and to enact positive change.

    Professor Kathleen Kelm, Doctoral Tutor, University of Liverpool and Doctoral
Candidate Guillaume Olivier are conducting a research study to find out more about perceptions
and attitudes of Non-Native English speaking online doctoral students in social science

departments toward different sources and characteristics of written feedback for their academic papers and the relationship of these perceptions and attitudes to their revision decisions

To achieve this goal, researchers will engage in various data collection methods including quantitative and qualitative primary data and secondary data. Some potential sources of primary data include interviews, surveys or observations. To support their research plans, researchers may also collect and analyse documents of organisational policies, practices, and programmes (such as mission statements, policy statements, strategic plans, and meeting minutes) within their organisation to determine how information revealed within these artefacts can support their approach to action research.

4. Why have I been chosen to take part?

Any current or recently graduated Non-Native English Speaking online doctoral students (PhD, EdDs, etc.) in social science departments are invited to participate in this research study. There will be approximately 200 total participants in this research.

5. Do I have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at anytime without explanation and without incurring a disadvantage.

6. What will happen if I take part?

If you agree to participate in this research study you will be asked to complete an anonymous online questionnaire which may take about 30 minutes. You may exit the questionnaire at any time and your data will not be saved. You may also skip any questions that you do not want to answer. However, answering each question completely will provide important information for the study.

In addition to those who complete the survey, they will be asked if they would be willing to be interviewed. The interview will take approximately 1 hour to complete, which will be recorded. A copy of the transcript of the recording will be sent

to each interviewee, to validate that the transcript is an accurate reflection of the interview.

All data will be kept on a password protected computer. All recordings and transcripts will be kept as password protected documents . Only my committee members will access the transcriptions. The Skype addresses will be deleted after the interview.

7. Expenses and / or payments

As a token of appreciation you will receive a $50 gift card for participating in an interview.

8. Are there any risks in taking part?

Participation in this research study is considered minimal risk.

9. Are there any benefits in taking part?

There may not be any direct benefit to you from the results of this study. However, the information you provide may inform the design of effective written feedback for online Non-native English speaking doctoral students.

10. What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

The University has a complaints procedure that is open to you should you be unhappy about any element of the Study. Should this be the case, please contact the Research participant advocate liverpoolethics@ohecampus.com When contacting them please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

11. Will my participation be kept confidential?

Your responses will be anonymous. Furthermore, the online survey is being hosted on a private account by a professional company and maintains high standards of confidentiality and data security. The questionnaire data will be stored for 5 years in a secure location on a computer, accessible only to the researchers.

The digital recording will be stored in the same manner, but identified by interview number, your identity will be removed from the transcript, and the table giving the link between your identity and the data file will be stored in a secure area. A thematic analysis will be performed on the anonymised transcript

Contact Details

- **My contact details are:**

  Mr. Guillaume Olivier

  196 High Street Wood Green London UK

  Email: guillaume.olivier@my.ohecampus.com

  Mobile: UK 07776231419

- **The contact details of the Research Participant Advocate at the University of Liverpool are**:

  001-612-312-1210 (USA number)

  Email address liverpoolethics@ohecampus.com

Please keep/print a copy of the Participant Information Sheet for your reference. Please contact me and/or the Research Participant Advocate at the University of Liverpool with any question or concerns you may have.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

UNIVERSITY OF
LIVERPOOL

CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: ONLINE DOCTORAL STUDENTS'
PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD
WRITTEN FEEDBACK FOR ACADEMIC
WRITING

Researcher(s): G. Olivier

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated 12 th December 2013 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected.

3. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.

4. I agree to take part in the above study.

_____   _____   _____

Participant Name   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Name of Person taking consent   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Researcher   Date   Signature

The contact details of lead Researcher (Principal Investigator) are:

Skype: guillaume.o2

Mobile: UK 07776231419

Email: guillaume.olivier@my.ohecampus.com

Postal address:

196 High Road. Wood Green London N22 8HH

Appendix F: Survey

INTRODUCTION AND DIRECTIONS
Please read the following directions before starting the questionnaire.
A. Questions
The questions are grouped under the following headings:
a) General Information
b) Academic Writing
c) Program
d) Requesting Written Feedback
e) Written Feedback Preferences
f) Critical/Negative Written Feedback
g) Feedback Providers
h) Revision Decisions
i) Feedback Process in General

B. Use of Terms
In the context of this questionnaire the following terms are used:
• **Written Feedback:** One or a group(s) of comments, edits, marks, etc. written (handwritten or electronic) by someone who reviewed your particular academic paper.
• **Feedback Provider:** The person who gives you written feedback.
• **Critical/Negative Written Feedback:** Written feedback which points out problems in your paper. They may or may not include suggestions for improvement.
• **Positive Written Feedback:** Written feedback which points out good things about your paper. They may or may not include suggestions for improvement.
C. For first year doctoral students
When answering the questions you could also refer to your masters' experiences if you haven't had much academic writing experience at the doctoral level yet.
D. Completing this questionnaire will take about **30 minutes.**
E. If you need any **explanations** about the questions, please feel free to contact the researcher at anytime
TEL NO: XXX EMAIL XXX
F. Please answer **all** the questions
<p align="center">**Thank you for participating!**</p>

[NAME OF THE RESEARCHER]

A. GENERAL INFORMATION [Items 1-17]

1) How old are you?		
2) What is your gender?	Male	Female
3) Do you consider English your native language?	Yes	No
4a) Which university did you complete your first degree?		
4 b) What was the language of instruction?		
5) What is your academic major?		
6) How long have you been in the doctoral program?	Less than a year 1 year 2 years 3 years 4 years 5 or more years Graduated	

7) How do you rate your overall academic writing ability?	Very poor Poor Average Good Very good

8) Please indicate how many of the following you have written or participated in writing.
* Include the ones that you are currently writing.
* You may type 0 or leave it as blank for the items that you haven't written.

	How many?
Journal Article	
Conference Proposal, Poster, Proceeding	
Book Chapter or Book	
Grant Proposal	
Masters Thesis	
Doctoral Comprehensive Exam	
Dissertation Proposal	
Dissertation	

9) Are you currently employed?
Yes (continue answering the questions)
No (please do not answer 9a, continue with the next page)
9a) Does your job require you to engage in academic writing?
Yes
No

10% Completed

[Page Break]

B. ACADEMIC WRITING [Items 18-28]

1) Please rate the following statements according to the extent to which you agree or disagree.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I enjoy writing academic papers				
I enjoy writing academic papers with others				
I have confidence in writing academic papers				
I need someone to push me to write academic papers				

Please rate the following statements according to the extent to which you agree or disagree.

2) My motivation for academic writing is:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
To meet graduation or occupation requirements and expectations				
To build up my vita				
To gain a promotion or get into a good job in the future				
To gain experiences, skills, and knowledge as an academician				
To have recognition in the field				
To share my ideas or findings with others				
To contribute knowledge to the field				

18% Completed
[Page Break]

C. PROGRAM [Items 29-36]
Please rate the following statements according to the extent to which you agree or disagree.
1) In my program

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel like I am treated as a peer and a colleague here by the faculty members				
The faculty members push doctoral students to write and publish a lot				
The faculty members are very productive in terms of the quantity of publications				
The faculty members' academic writing standards are very high				
The faculty members often write academic papers with their students				
The faculty members invite me to write academic papers together with them				
I ask faculty members to write academic papers together with me				
There are a lot of opportunities to write academic papers with faculty members				

23% Completed
[Page Break]

D. REQUESTING WRITTEN FEEDBACK [Items 37-71]
1) Please rate the following statements according to the extent to which you agree or disagree.

I ask others for written feedback on my academic papers	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I look for several people to give me written feedback for my papers				
I look for several written feedback occasions at different stages of my papers				
I ask for written feedback only when I come to a point where I can't improve my paper any further				
I don't ask for written feedback if I am confident with my paper's quality				
I don't want to expose myself to others by asking them to give me written feedback if I am not confident in my paper's quality				
My pride has a lot to do with my decisions to not ask for written feedback				
I feel comfortable asking for written feedback from professors on my committee				
I feel comfortable asking for written feedback from professors outside of my committee				
I feel comfortable asking for written feedback from other doctoral students				
When asking for written feedback from others, I tell				

them what aspects of the paper I want them to look at			

2) How important are the following characteristics of a person to you when deciding whether or not to ask for their written feedback?

	Unimportant	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
Whether the person is younger or older than I am				
Whether the person lives/works/studies close to me in terms of location				
His/her being in the same discipline or not				
His/her knowledge level in the content area that my paper is about				
His/her interest level in the content area that my paper is about				
Whether he/she thinks my paper is important				
Whether he/she has a decisive role in my degree completion or publication				
His/her publication experience				
His/her writing skills				
His/her writing style				
His/her thinking, organizing, and analyzing skills				

Whether I like his/her personality				
Whether he/she is a responsible person				
Whether I trust him/her as a person				
Whether we have a good social relationship				
Whether I have a mutual feedback relationship with him/her				
Whether I feel that he/she will be willing to help				
Whether I feel that I won't be a burden to him/her				
Whether I think they have time to give me feedback				
His/her reasons/incentives for giving me feedback				
His/her expectations of the quality of my paper				
My previous experiences with his/her feedback				
Others' previous experiences with his/her feedback				
Whether I think he/she will give feedback quickly				

46% Completed

[Page Break]

E. WRITTEN FEEDBACK PREFERENCES [Items 72- 116]

1) Please choose one of the following:
I prefer sending my paper electronically, such as through email
I prefer handing in my paper personally, face-to-face
I have no preference

2) Please choose one of the following.
I prefer receiving written feedback electronically, such as track-changes in Word, comments, edits
on the computer
I prefer receiving handwritten feedback, such as comments handwritten on my paper
I have no preference

3) When writing academic papers, how frequently do you feel that you need written feedback for the following aspects of your papers?

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often
Introduction, purpose and significance of the paper				
Conclusion				
Transition and flow between sentences, paragraphs, or sections				
Logical order and organization of information and ideas				
Consistency in the overall paper				
Inclusion or exclusion of information				
Clarity and understandability of the statements				
Arguments and justifications in my paper				
Grammar and sentence structure				
Formatting (tables, figures, page design, fitting APA style, giving citations, etc)				
References and literature decisions				

4) Please rate the following statements according to the extent to which you agree or disagree.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I appreciate critical/negative written feedback more than positive written feedback				
I appreciate written feedback in which negative things are said in a more positive way				
I appreciate balanced positive and critical/negative written feedback				
I appreciate straightforward written feedback				
I don't appreciate written feedback that tries to change the direction of my paper				
I don't appreciate written feedback that tries change my writing style				
I appreciate written feedback that gives me clear instructions for how to revise my paper				
I appreciate written feedback that revises or edits my paper for me				
I appreciate written feedback that directs me to other related resources				
I don't appreciate suggestions in written feedback that are hard for me to use while revising my paper				
I appreciate written feedback about grammar				
I don't appreciate marks without text in feedback (such				

as underlined sentences, circle around a word, question mark, etc)				
I appreciate detailed/specific comments more than overall/general comments				
I don't appreciate receiving contradictory feedback from different people				
I appreciate written feedback which is given based on only what is on the paper, not based on my previous papers				
I don't appreciate written feedback that is given because of a personal preference				

Please rate the following statements according to the extent to which you agree or disagree.

5) I appreciate written feedback comments similar to this:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Explain why you're focusing on these dimensions. Not clear to the reader.				
Break this into smaller, more focused paragraphs.				
I have a hard time following this section.				
I think this sentence should be said much earlier.				
It is important.				
This section is a bit dense, with lots of details.				
Are they all necessary?				
I don't agree with this				

paragraph. I think, ...				
This argument is unsupported. You need to cite more references.				
You're on the right track, this is a well organized paper.				
This section is really strong.				
Have you thought about adding one more section to your paper about X literature?				
Here is an article that supports what you're saying here.				
Maybe you need a table here, listing X with each column showing Y. Just an idea.				
Check the APA manual for this citation.				
I'd like you to go in a little different direction, like this....				
It is not clear how this paragraph addresses your research question. You need to show links to the research question.				
A bit of wavering focus from this paragraph to this paragraph. Check for consistency throughout.				

75% Completed
[Page Break]

F. CRITICAL/NEGATIVE WRITTEN FEEDBACK [Items 117- 124]
1) Please rate the following statements according to the extent to which you agree or disagree.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Critical/negative written feedback affects me emotionally				
I am scared to get critical/negative written feedback				
Having critical/negative written feedback makes me feel embarrassed				
I lose self-confidence when I receive critical/negative written feedback				
I lose my motivation to work on my paper further when I receive critical/negative written feedback				
I feel that it is a personal attack when I receive critical/negative written feedback without suggestions				
I give up on my paper if I receive very critical/negative written feedback from someone with more knowledge and experience than I have				
I re-write my paper if I receive very critical/negative written feedback from someone with more knowledge and experience than I have				

80% Completed
[Page Break]

G. FEEDBACK PROVIDERS [Items 125-129]

1) Please rate the following statements according to the extent to which you agree or disagree.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I think that written feedback is influenced by the personality of the feedback provider				
I think that people I have a close relationship with (e.g family, good friends) avoid giving me critical/negative written feedback				
I think that feedback providers have high expectations of me when they give me critical/negative written feedback				
When feedback providers give me written feedback mostly about grammar, sentence structure, format, etc. I think that they are not interested in my paper				
When feedback providers give me written feedback mostly about grammar, sentence structure, format, etc. I think that they are not knowledgeable about the content topic of my paper				

83% Completed
[Page Break]

H. REVISION DECISIONS [Items 130- 147]
1) Please check one of the following.

I revise my paper to some degree after receiving written feedback

I don't revise my paper after receiving written feedback

[Questionnaire skips to Section I: "Feedback process in General" when the second option is selected]

[Page Break]

Please rate the following statements according to the degree of frequency.

2) If I don't agree with a written feedback comment, before deciding to ignore or use that comment for my revisions I ask myself:

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often
Am I confident in what I wrote?				
Is there any justification for that feedback?				
Is there really a need to make the change?				
Will there be some kind of punishment for not revising this way?				
Will there be some kind of reward for revising this way?				
How much will this revision affect my paper's direction?				
Is it hard or easy for me to make the revision?				
Will I lose my voice and writing style if I accept this change?				
What is the knowledge and experience level of the person who gave me this feedback?				
What kind of authority-power relationship do I have with the person who gave me this feedback?				
What kind of motivation or agenda might this person have for giving me this feedback?				
Did the person really understand what I wrote?				

Should I ask that person about the feedback?				

3) Please rate the following statements according to the extent to which you agree or disagree.

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often
If feedback providers start their written feedback with critical/negative comments, I feel less open to the rest of the comments				
If I sense an authoritative tone in the written feedback, I feel resistant to use that feedback in my revisions				
If I catch a big mistake among the written feedback, I tend to disregard the other feedback comments that person gives				
If I dislike the personality of a feedback provider, I tend to disregard his/her written feedback				

95% Completed
[Page Break]

I) FEEDBACK PROCESS IN GENERAL [Items 148- 155]

1) Please rate the following statements according to the extent to which you agree or disagree.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The feedback process affects me emotionally				
The feedback process keeps me from progressing				
The feedback process is a good learning experience				
It is hard for me to get others' written feedback				
I get upset if I wait for written feedback for more than two weeks				
I get upset when I am not given another opportunity to submit my paper after receiving written feedback				
I rarely get surprised with the written feedback on my papers				
I feel that feedback providers' opinions of me will be affected based on whether I make the revisions they suggest or not				

THIS IS THE END OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

THANK YOU
XXXX
Comments (Optional)

WRITTEN FEEDBACK- RESEARCH STUDY*

Can (2009) survey are employed in this study as it was develop to investigate Doctoral Students attitudes and perceptions toward written feedback on their academic work. It is the only such survey to date that look at both attitudes and perceptions in depth. It is relevant to use this survey instrument that was develop with on-land doctoral students, to understand the similarities and differences of those with online doctoral students.

Reference:

Can, G. (2009). *A model for doctoral students' perceptions and attitudes toward written feedback for academic writing.* (Ph.D., Utah State University). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses,* (305012078).

Appendix G: Audit Trail

What was done	With whom	When	Where	How much data produced	How connects with the research question	How was the data analysed	Any particular problems or issues that arose
1. Dr. Can gave permission the written feedback survey that she developed in her dissertation might be used for this study	-	5/2/2014	Online- email	-	It is a useful tool to understand the students' perceptions around written feedback	-	Prepared the Survey of dr. Can (2009) and upload it on SurveyMonkey and there were no technical problems and SurveyMonkey TM were used on different platforms
2. Invitations to doctoral tutors EdD university of Liverpool (see example of the invitation to dr. tutors to link me with their students)	Doctoral Tutors Forwarded Some name To me	6/2/2014	Send Emails	Send to 10 Online doctoral tutors	To obtain references of bone fide doctoral students	-	7 tutors responded with some names. Tutors could verify that the students were online doctoral students
3. Send the invites to the students. It was mentioned that their doctoral tutor gave me their name	-	16/02/2014 17/02/2014 18/02/2014	Send emails	Send to 41 invitations to doctoral students	To ask the students to complete an online survey	-	6 email addresses bounced back and the error message reported that the email address had a permanent error
4. 18 students completed the survey and results were analysed	-	16/02/2014- 5/3/2015	Survey-Monkey TM	18 surveys	To explore online doctoral students' attitudes and experiences of online learning	PSPP was used to do Descriptive Statistical analysis	Not all students indicated their native language; as this was not a compulsory question

What was done	With whom	When	Where	How much data produced	How connects with the research question	How was the data analysed	Any particular problems or issues that arose
5. From the 18 pilot surveys received 9 students were contacted those who were willing to took part in the interviews (NNES and NES); send invitations; emailed them the questions in advance	-	03/2014	Online	6 students Were available to do the interviews (4 NNES and 2 NES) - the researcher decided to interview the two NES students To explore any potential Problems with the interview protocol	It was piloting the research questions; to obtain rich data about the online doctoral students experiences	Thematic analysis	There were some technical problems with the telephone/Skype connections; but all participants were patient and continued till the interviews were done. No changes were made to the questions and the body of the survey instrument; although some demographical information questions were added. No major changes were made to the semi-structured interview protocols, but suggestions were incorporated in the email invitations, and the interview protocols

What was done	With whom	When	Where	How much data produced	How connects with the research question	How was the data analysed	Any particular problems or issues that arose
6. Contacted the 58 deans and faculties who are responsible for online doctoral programmes; as per information provided on the universities public web pages		12/02/2014 - 14/02/2014	Online	24 participants completed the survey; As some deans send it on, and others requested, further clarification others did not respond.	This approach was followed to established that the students are bone fide online doctoral students	PSPP was used to do Descriptive Statistical analysis	It did not yield enough respondents that completed the survey from the 14/4/2014 – 30/4/2014 only 24 participants completed the survey; then trawled the internet to find universities with online doctoral programmes and with the doctoral students names and emails available online
7. Other websites like the Sloan consortium were review	-	29/4/2014	online	7. Other websites like the Sloan consortium were review	-	-	No further links for Deans were gained
8. Reminder were send to the deans	-	3/5/2014	online	Reminder was send to the Deans in the initial list	It was done to try and recruit more participants	-	No response were received from the Deans

What was done	With whom	When	Where	How much data produced	How connects with the research question	How was the data analysed	Any particular problems or issues that arose
9. 3813 emails were send to bone fide PhD or doctoral students as identified on the Official University web pages were used; if they supplied the list of names of their doctoral students, to confirm that they are bona fida online doctoral students.	-	1/5/2014	Online	61 (1.6%) students responded to these personalized emails	To gain insight in what NNES online doctoral students do with the written feedback that they received	PSPP was used to do Descriptive Statistical analysis	It was a very low response rate to gain participants. They had to complete the survey voluntary and no gift was given.
10. Some minor changes were introduced, but none that changed the content of the survey itself. The semi-structure interview protocol were updated	-	1/ 6/2014 5.06 pm (UK time) The survey was closed	Semi-structured interview protocol reviewed	--	-	-	As this is a sequential mixed method study; the survey had to be completed before the interviews could be conducted.
11. 11 participants indicated that they are willing to take part in the interviews. The researcher then contacted those that self-reported that they are NNES to arrange for an interview	-	2/6/2014	Online				Only 6 participants at the end were willing to be included in the interviews.

What was done	With whom	When	Where	How much data produced	How connects with the research question	How was the data analysed	Any particular problems or issues that arose
12. 6 more interviews were conducted.	-	6/6/2014 – 13/6/2014	Skype or telephone	90 pages of transcripts	It directly ask questions about what students do and how they reflect upon the written feedback	It was transcribed	No the participants were very at ease using telephone or Skype
13. The interviews were anonymized and transcribed	-	June 2014	On the researchers' computer		To understand the most prominent themes	It was transcribed	None
14. The transcripts were verified by the participants and some minor changes were made	-	13/6/2014 – 27/6/2014	-		Coding could then started after permission were given and some minor textual errors were rectified		
15. The transcripts were coded and central themes were identified from the transcripts	-	July; August; September 2014	-	-416 pages Of text and code			28/6/2014 structural coding 5/7/2014: In Vivo coding 22/7/2014 pattern coding 28/8/2014 NVivo word frequency analysis of transcripts without the interviewers comments or

What was done	With whom	When	Where	How much data produced	How connects with the research question	How was the data analysed	Any particular problems or issues that arose
							questions
16. The coded transcripts and the key for the codes were send to the second coder for review and comment	-	19/10/2014					
17. Second coder send email with comments back	Second Coder	30/10/2014	Email	-	-	-	He confirmed my analysis.

Appendix H: Ethical approval

Dear Guillaume

I am pleased to inform you that the EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below.

Sub-Committee:	EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC)
Review type:	Expedited
PI:	
School:	Lifelong Learning
Title:	
First Reviewer:	Prof. Morag A. Gray
Second Reviewer:	Dr. Lee Graham
Other members of the Committee	Dr. Ewan Dow; Kathleen Kelm; Dr. Ian Willis
Date of Approval:	14.01.14

The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:

Conditions

1	Mandatory	M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdD Thesis Primary Supervisor.

This approval applies for the duration of the research. If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Sub-Committee should be notified. If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Sub-Committee by following the Notice

of Amendment procedure outlined at
http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/researchethics/notice%20of%20amendment.doc.

Where your research includes elements that are not conducted in the UK, approval to proceed is further conditional upon a thorough risk assessment of the site and local permission to carry out the research, including, where such a body exists, local research ethics committee approval. No documentation of local permission is required (a) if the researcher will simply be asking organizations to distribute research invitations on the researcher's behalf, or (b) if the researcher is using only public means to identify/contact participants. When medical, educational, or business records are analysed or used to identify potential research participants, the site needs to explicitly approve access to data for research purposes (even if the researcher normally has access to that data to perform his or her job).

Please note that the approval to proceed depends also on research proposal approval.

Kind regards,

Morag Gray

Chair, EdD. VPREC

APPENDIX I: Dr. Can's permission to use the survey

Subject :	**Re: PERMISSION REQUEST TO USE THE WRITTEN FEEDBACK SURVEY (Can, 2009)**
Date :	Wed, Feb 05, 2014 08:43 AM CET
From :	**Gulfidan Can <gcan@metu.edu.tr>**
To :	guillaume olivier <guillaume.olivier@my.ohecampus.com>

Dear Guillaume Olivier;

You are welcome to use or adapt the survey. Your study sounds very

interesting! I am also interested in ESL students' online

communication and written feedback experiences with their supervisors

from a different theoretical framework. In my case the supervisors are

also ESL. Please let me know when you publish your research, I will be

very happy to read.

As the reference for the survey, please use this reference:

Can, G. & Walker, A. (2011). A model for doctoral students'

perceptions and attitudes toward written feedback for academic

writing. Research in Higher Education, 52(5), 508-536.

Best

Gulfidan

Dear Dr. Can

PERMISSION REQUEST TO USE THE WRITTEN FEEDBACK SURVEY (Can, 2009)

My name is Guillaume Olivier and I am a doctoral student (EdD: Higher Education) at the University of Liverpool, UK. My research interest is on written feedback received by Non-native English Speaking Students from Native English Speaking doctoral research supervisors in an online context.

Here is a provisional abstract:

The purpose of this sequential (QUAN – QAUL) case study is to explore the attitudes and perceptions of Non-Native English Speaking (NNES) Online Doctoral students toward the written feedback that they receive from their Native English Speaking (NES) doctoral research supervisors. Written feedback by NES doctoral research supervisors to this population is under researched. NNES students' attitudes and perceptions regarding written feedback and the feedback providers, including influences on the revision decisions, will be the focus of the research. The Social Realist and Second Language Activity theories will frame the interpretation of the findings.   The results of the research will be examined for practical use by NES online doctoral research supervisors.

 In the first phase of my research, I have proposed to use the Written Feedback Survey (Can, 2009) that you have developed in your dissertation. My research committee agreed for me to the use of it, given that you gave the necessary permission. I would be ever so thankful if you would let me know your view on it, and if you have any other concern/advise it will be welcomed.

Kindest regards
Guillaume

--
Asst Prof Dr. Gulfidan Can

Middle East Technical University
Department of Computer Education
and Instructional Technology

Universiteler Mah. Dumlupinar Blv.
No:1, 06800 Cankaya Ankara/TURKEY

E-mail: gcan@metu.edu.tr
Phone: 0312 210 7521
Room: C115

 guldifan can 2009 permission to use the survey.docx (29.141 KB)

Appendix J: Interview protocol

Cans' Interview protocol	Olivier's' adaption of Cans' semi-structured interview protocol.
	General information:
	1. Is English your native language, if not, which language is?
	2. What do you do when you receive written feedback?
	3. Potential question:
	"The feedback process is a good learning experience" In what sense would you say it is a good learning experience?
	2. Your perceptions and attitudes towards academic writing and written feedback in particular:
1. My first question is, how would you define academic writing in your own words?	1. My first question is, how would you define academic writing in your own words?
AQ: What kind of writing can be considered as academic writing?	AQ: What kind of writing can be considered as academic writing?
AQ: What are the differences between academic writing and non-academic writing?	AQ: What are the differences between academic writing and non-academic writing?
SQ: Can you give me some examples of types of academic writing?	SQ: Can you give me some examples of types of academic writing?
	1.1 Potential question: Do you need someone to push (encourage) you to write academic papers? 1.2 Potential question: If your motivation for academic writing is to contribute to knowledge in your field, how do you understand that contribution, something totally new or expanding on others work?
2. In your discipline, what do you think is the purpose of academic writing?	2. In your discipline, what do you think is **the purpose** of academic writing?
3. Do you think there is a clear list of criteria for good academic writing in your discipline?	3. Do you think there is a clear list of criteria for **good academic writing in your discipline**?
AQ: Do you think the criteria change according to	AQ: Do you think the criteria change

different people?	according to different people?
4. During your doctoral program, what kind of academic writing activities did you engage with?	4. During your doctoral program, **what kind of academic writing activities did you engage with?**
SQ: Could you tell me whether you chose to write these or someone asked you to write them?	SQ: Could you tell me whether you chose to write these or someone asked you to write them?
AQ: Which one of these writing activities were required from you, and which ones were not required from you?	AQ: Which one of these writing activities were required from you, and which ones were not required from you?
5. Do you usually get written or oral feedback for your writings?	5. Do you usually get written or oral feedback for your writings?
SQ: Can you tell me which one do you find most useful?	SQ: Can you tell me which one do you find most useful?
SQ: Why?	SQ: Why?
//If the participant usually receives written feedback and like written feedback//	
The following questions will be about written feedback only.	
//If the participant receives and likes both written and oral feedback//	
The following questions will be about written feedback, but you can also consider oral feedback in your answers if you like.	The following questions will be about written feedback, but you can also consider oral feedback in your answers if you like.
6. You mentioned that you wrote <types of writing>. Can you tell me, what were your motivations and incentives for writing them? (For each paper)	
7. Whom do you mostly get feedback from?	6. Whom do you mostly get feedback from?
SQ: Is he/she in the same discipline as you?	SQ: Is he/she in the same discipline as you?
SQ: (credibility): Do you find this person very knowledgeable in the area that you are studying?	**SQ: (credibility): Do you find this person very knowledgeable in the area that you are studying?**
SQ: (role): Is your relationship like an instructor-student relationship, or more like a colleague to colleague relationship?	SQ: (role): Is your relationship like an instructor-student relationship, or more like a colleague to colleague relationship: are you treated like a peer?
SQ: (social relationship): How is your social relationship with him/her?	SQ: (social relationship): How is your social relationship with him/her?
SQ: (language): Is she/he a Native English Speaker or Non-Native English speaker?	**SQ: (language): Is she/he a Native English Speaker or Non-Native English speaker?**
8. What kinds of feedback do you like or find most	7. What kinds of feedback do you like or

useful and valuable?	find most useful and valuable?
SQ: Can you give me some specific examples?	SQ: Can you give me some specific examples?
9. What kinds of feedback do you not like, or find not useful?	8. What kinds of feedback do you not like, or find not useful?
SQ: Can you give me some specific examples?	SQ: Can you give me some specific examples?
10. From whom do you not request feedback intentionally?	9. From whom do **you not request feedback intentionally**?
FI: You can tell me the characteristics of the people that you do not request feedback intentionally.	FI: You can tell me the characteristics of the people that you do not request feedback intentionally.
SQ: Why?	SQ: Why?
SQ: Does this persons native language influence your decision?	**SQ: Does this persons native language influence your decision?**
11. After you receive feedback, do you usually revise your paper?	10. After you receive feedback, do you usually revise your paper?
12. What affects your decision to accept or reject certain feedback?	11. What affects your decision to accept or reject certain feedback?
AQ: Is your social relationship with him/her, or that person's power over you, or credibility affect your revision?	AQ: Is your social relationship with him/her, or that person's power over you, or credibility affect your revision?
SQ: Does the their native language influences your decision to accept or reject the feedback?	SQ: Does the their native language influences your decision to accept or reject the feedback?
13. Do you give feedback to others?	12. Do you give feedback to others?
SQ: Can you tell me what kind of feedback do you give to them?	SQ: Can you tell me what kind of feedback do you give to them?
SQ: The kind of feedback you give to others, is it similar to the type of feedback that you want to receive from others?	SQ: The kind of feedback you give to others, is it similar to the type of feedback that you want to receive from others?
The following questions will be about <source 1>.	
	13. What criteria do you think he/she (supervisor or tutor) considers the most when reviewing your paper?
14. Do you request feedback from him/her or they just give it to you anyway?	14. Do you request feedback from him/her or they just give it to you anyway?
SQ: (If yes). What are the important characteristics of this person that lead you to ask for feedback?	SQ: (If yes). What are the important characteristics of this person that lead you to ask for feedback?
SQ: This is a similar kind of question. What do you like about that person that led you to ask for feedback?	SQ: This is a similar kind of question. What do you like about that person that lead you to ask for feedback?
SQ: Does their native language plays a role in you requesting feedback?	

AQ: (If no). Is there a specific reason for not asking for feedback?	AQ: (If no). Is there a specific reason for not asking for feedback?
15. What do you think are his/her motivations or reasons to give you feedback?	15. What do you think are his/her motivations or reasons to give you feedback?
SQ: Do you give feedback to this person too?	SQ: Do you give feedback to this person too?
16. What kind of feedback do they give to you? Can you give me some specific examples?	16. What kind of feedback do they give to you? Can you give me some specific examples?
FI: Suggestions, feedback for motivation, criticisms, the amount and content of feedback?	FI: Suggestions, feedback for motivation, criticisms, the amount and content of feedback?
SQ: Do you find this kind of feedback useful?	SQ: Do you find this kind of feedback useful?
SQ: Among his/her feedback, is there a kind of feedback that you don't like or find not useful?	SQ: Among his/her feedback, is there a kind of feedback that you don't like or find not useful?
	16.2 Potential question What type of electronic feedback to you prefer, for example written comments on a different page, comment bubbles; edits on the text etc.?
17. What criteria do you think he/she considers the most when reviewing your paper?	17. What criteria do you think he/she considers the most when reviewing your paper?
18. Do you request feedback from him/her or they just give it to you anyway?	
SQ: (If yes). What are the important characteristics of this person that lead you to ask for feedback?	
SQ: This is a similar kind of question. What do you like about that person that lead you to ask for feedback?	
AQ: (If no). Is there a specific reason for not asking for feedback?	18. Can you compare the feedback from a Native English speaking doctoral tutor and an Non-Native English speaking doctoral tutor and tell me whose feedback was more useful to you?
19. What do you think are his/her motivations or reasons to give you feedback?	18.2 For feedback on arguments and justifications in your academic writing, do you prefer written or verbal feedback? And if it is written feedback, what would you expect to see?
SQ: Do you give feedback to this person too?	18.3 Potential questions?
20. What kind of feedback do they give to you?	If you have to decide whether there is a

Can you give me some specific examples?	need to change or not. What type of questions would you ask yourself?
FI: Suggestions, feedback for motivation, criticisms, the amount and content of feedback?	
SQ: Do you find this kind of feedback useful?	
SQ: Among his/her feedback, is there a kind of feedback that you don't like or find not useful?	
21. What criteria do you think he/she considers the most when reviewing your paper?	
22. Can you compare the feedback from a Native English speaking doctoral tutor and an Non-Native English speaking doctoral tutor and tell me whose feedback was more useful to you?	
Now, these last four questions will be about your specific feedback experiences.	Now, the following four questions will be about your specific feedback experiences.
23. Do you remember a specific feedback experience that affected you some way? That you remember the most?	19. Do you remember a specific feedback experience that affected you some way? That you remember the most?
SQ: (If yes). Could you share it with me?	SQ: (If yes). Could you share it with me?
24. Have you ever had an experience where you received feedback from different people and their feedback contradicted each other?	20. Have you ever had an experience where you received feedback from different people and their feedback contradicted each other?
SQ: (If yes): Can you tell me about it?	SQ: (If yes): Can you tell me about it?
SQ: What did you think or how did you feel?	SQ: What did you think or how did you feel?
SQ: If you revised your paper, how did you do it?	SQ: If you revised your paper, how did you do it?
AQ: How did this affect your revision?	AQ: How did this affect your revision?
25. Have you ever had an experience where you did not understand the feedback?	21. Have you ever had an experience where you did not understand the feedback?
SQ: (If yes): Can you tell me about it?	SQ: (If yes): Can you tell me about it?
SQ: What did you think and how did you feel?	SQ: What did you think and how did you feel?
SQ: If you revised your paper, how did you do it?	SQ: If you revised your paper, how did you do it?
AQ: How did this affect your revision?	AQ: How did this affect your revision?
26. Have you ever had an experience where you received negative feedback while you were confident and expecting positive feedback?	22. Have you ever had an experience where you received negative feedback while you were confident and expecting positive feedback?
SQ: (If yes). Can you tell me about it?	SQ: (If yes). Can you tell me about it?
SQ: What did you think and how did you feel?	SQ: What did you think and how did you feel?
SQ: If you revised your paper, how did you do it?	SQ: If you revised your paper, how did

	you do it?
AQ: How did this affect your revision?	AQ: How did this affect your revision?
27. Similarly, have you ever had an experience where you were not so confident and you received negative feedback?	23. Similarly, have you ever had an experience where you were not so confident and you received negative feedback?
SQ: (If yes). Can you tell me about it?	SQ: (If yes). Can you tell me about it?
SQ: What did you think and how did you feel?	SQ: What did you think and how did you feel?
SQ: If you revised your paper, how did you do it?	SQ: If you revised your paper, how did you do it?
AQ: How did this affect your revision?	AQ: How did this affect your revision?
28. Is there any other thing related to your feedback experiences that you want to tell me? Anything that could be useful to my research?	24. Is there any other thing related to your feedback experiences that you want to tell me? Anything that could be useful to my research?
SQ: How does the fact that the feedback provider is a Native English Speaker influence your revision decisions?	SQ: How does the fact that the feedback provider is a Native English Speaker influence your revision decisions?
SQ: Do you distinguish between the native language of a feedback provider or not; and if so in what respect?	SQ: Do you distinguish between the native language of a feedback provider or not; and if so in what respect?
	24.2 "I appreciate straightforward written feedback" Do you? and if so what do you understand with straightforward feedback?
	24.3 *Potential question:* Some students might appreciate it if their tutor or supervisor provides them with an article to support what they have written. What is your view on it?
	3. Inner conversations
	3.1. So what is your first reaction when you get written feedback that seems to be negative?
	AQ: Do you just blot difficulties out of your mind, rather than trying to think them through ?
	3.2 How decisive are you when you have to decide to act upon written feedback?
	3.3. What do you consider ideal academic writing, and will you try to live up to that ideal, even if it costs you a lot to do so?
	3.4 When you consider critical written feedback, does that effect you emotionally?
	AQ: Does critical written feedback make

	you cross, or do you just feel overwhelmed by it?
	3.5, <u>Do you think you can make a difference to how things turn out, when you consider written feedback?</u>
	<u>3.6. Are you satisfied with your academic writing, or do you think things can be better, and why?</u>
	3.7. Do you feel helpless and powerless to deal with the written feedback that you receive, however hard you try to sort them out; and why?
	3.8 *Do you agree with the statement that you might think that* feedback providers have high expectations of me when they give me critical/negative written feedback and why?
	<u>4. In conclusion, is there anything that you would like to add that doctoral supervisors can consider if they give feedback to Non Native English speaking doctoral students in an online environment?</u>

Appendix K: Response from the second coder

On Thursday, October 30, 2014 12:11 PM, Marinus <drvr@telkomsa.net> wrote:

To Whom It May Concern

I did a blind control on the interviews that Mr. Olivier conducted with 10 other non-native speaking English doctoral candidates. He had to do a theoretical analysis regarding two main theories of each of the interviews. I agreed with the majority of his coding and think that he was fairly objective.

Yours sincerely

Dr Marinus van Rooyen

Psychology PhD