Practicing Participating in an Academic Discourse: Language Socialization during ESL Teacher-Student Writing Conferences

Kyungja Ahn (Seoul National University)*
Alisha Witmer (Fauquier County Public Schools)


This case study examines how a student was socialized into participating in writing conferences as part of a basic ESL composition course at a university. Language socialization and the notion of ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978) were employed as theoretical frameworks to understand the student’s development in taking part in the routines of writing conferences. The participants were an ESL instructor and one of her students, and the data were collected during the participants’ three writing conferences held in one semester. Interactions during the openings and closings of these conferences were focused upon since the language socialization process is especially noticeable at these times. The results show that socialization occurred in several different ways. The teacher gave explicit instruction on conference procedures, including the necessity of bringing a second draft and note-taking during conferences. The student also received less explicit direction regarding participating in conference closings. In some cases, such as by bringing a second draft and initiating the closing of a conference, the student seemed to show movement from other-regulation to self-regulation. However, no such progression occurred with the student’s note-taking. This contrast shows that different skills develop at different times and rates. The findings have important implications for ESL writing conferences and composition instruction as well as for student learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

Academic writing can be challenging for both teachers and students. It is well known...
that many students, including both those who speak English as their L1 and those who have learned it as an L2, struggle with their freshman composition courses. Therefore, teachers of academic writing have tried to come up with various methods to help their students become better writers. One of the methods that they use is writing conferences.

In many writing classes, conferences are an important part of the writing process because the teacher can shape his/her comments, questions, and feedback to the students’ levels and needs. Also, it is easier for the teacher to determine student understanding from his/her responses during a conference, opposed to during a whole class setting where there might be less opportunity to monitor an individual student’s understanding. In ESL writing, students’ linguistic limitations in their second language make the writing task more difficult. Therefore, writing conferences are a valuable way to help ESL students develop their composition skills.

In this study, we analyze the interaction of an ESL teacher and her student during writing conferences. We investigate from a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) perspective (Vygotsky, 1978) how the student was socialized into taking part in a writing conference. Analysis of the interaction during conferences helps us understand how students are socialized into the culture of writing conferences and how teachers can help students meet the expectations of conferences. In particular, we focus on interaction during the openings and closings of the conferences, where the language socialization process is especially salient. We also investigate if over the course of the semester the student shifted from other-regulation to self-regulation.

There has been little research done to explore language socialization during writing conferences and even less to study this type of development through a ZPD framework. However, such research helps us understand how students are socialized into the role of a writing conference participant. Specifically, a ZPD framework is helpful for understanding how the student’s control and skills during the conferences have been developed.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ochs (1988) defines language socialization as “the process whereby children and other novices are socialized through language, part of such socialization being a socialization to use language meaningfully, appropriately, and effectively” (p. 8). Therefore, from a language socialization perspective, language is important because it is one of the tools by which children or other novices are socialized into the language patterns and other aspects of the culture of the society. In this process, novices including children are assisted by experts or those who have more experiences and capabilities in specific areas. Thus, the extensive effect of cultural norms and ideologies on a variety of types of expert-novice
interaction is emphasized in language socialization (Poole, 1992).

There are two major types of language socialization: “socialization to use language and socialization through language” (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986, p. 163). According to Poole (1992), socialization to use language is the more explicit of the two and refers to “interactional sequences in which novices are directed to use language in specific ways” (p. 595). Socialization through language, on the other hand, refers to “the use of language to encode and create cultural meaning.” In this type of socialization, “cultural knowledge is implicitly conveyed to novices through language forms and practices” (p. 595). In both types, language plays an important part in socialization, and language and culture are closely intertwined.

An example of socialization through language is found in Ochs’ (1988) study of clarification modes among white middle class American (WMCA) and Samoan caregivers. When young children make ambiguous utterances, WMCA caregivers guess or expand on the meaning. Conversely, Samoan caregivers ask children to repeat and make themselves clear. Ochs linked these different clarification styles to the ways experts assist novices and to experts’ expectations for novices in the two societies. For instance, in Samoan society, those higher in the social hierarchy expect lower hierarchy persons to make whatever accommodations are required for understanding, while in WMCA society higher status persons are also willing to make accommodations. Ochs’ study demonstrates how language is closely related to a society’s culture and beliefs and how language users are socialized into the culture of a society.

A language socialization perspective has also been used for analyzing second language classrooms (Ohta, 1999; Poole, 1992). In second language classrooms, novice (students)-expert (teacher) interactions take place, and students are socialized into the culture of the second language classroom using the language that they are learning.

The ESL writing conferences that we analyze in the following discussion are another useful way to see how language socialization in a second language learning context occurs, and therefore this study adds to the understanding of socialization in general. Through the interaction of a teacher and a student, we can see how the student is being socialized over the course of the semester.

The Vygotskian framework offers insight on the interactional characteristics of socialization (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). The basic theme of the Vygotskian perspective is that “knowledge is social in nature and is constructed through a process of collaboration, interaction and communication among learners in social settings” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 35). This perspective stresses the role of more knowledgeable members in promoting learning so that novices (learners) can develop their ability through the guidance of an expert (a teacher or a more capable peer). Over time, the learners move from guided or collaborative action by objects (e.g., textbooks) or others (e.g., teachers, peer students) to independent
action. This development, from object-, and/or other-, to self-regulation over their learning, takes place in each student’s ZPD, defined as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Therefore, the Vygotskian framework, specifically the concept of the ZPD, provides us with a helpful perspective to explain how the students develop in the socialization process of second language classrooms.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Socialization and Second Language Classrooms

Several studies on second language learning have explored language socialization in classroom interactions. Ohta (1999) examines the role of interactional routines in the socialization of expression of alignment/assessment using data from beginning adult learners of Japanese as a second language. Specifically, Ohta demonstrates the importance of students’ “limited peripheral participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991), which “concerns the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice” (p. 29). She found that with peripheral and active participation in classroom routines, students learned to use the follow-up turn of IRF (Initiation-Response-Follow-up) sequences to state assessments and other expressions to respond to their interlocutor’s comments. Ohta’s study shows how active and peripheral participation in interactional routines in the classroom plays an important role in socialization.

Another study analyzing second language classrooms from a language socialization perspective was conducted by Poole (1992). This study on teacher-student interaction in two beginning ESL classes indicates that the routine interactional sequences of the teachers and students were similar to the patterns found in Ochs and Schieffelin’s analysis of the socialization of children by WMCA caregivers. For example, the teachers in Poole’s study used expanding and guessing intended meaning as clarification strategies when students produced unclear utterances.

Specifically, Poole analyzes the opening and closing (evaluation) sequences of classroom activities from a socialization perspective. In the openings, teachers more frequently used first person plural, from which it can be inferred that their intention was that novice and expert collaborate on the task. On the other hand, in the closings, the absence of “we” was interpreted as students’ having completed the task by themselves. Poole compared this process to how WMCA children are usually given full credit for a
Furthermore, Poole demonstrates that openings and closings can be used to mask power differences between teachers and students. In the opening sequences, the representation of asymmetrical status (expert-novice) is inevitable. However, by using “we” the teacher intends to mitigate the force of directives that can cause a threat to the students’ negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Also, another strategy used to lessen the display of power difference is demonstrated through the use of stress signals (i.e. pauses, false starts, and filler words) in the openings that show the teachers’ difficulty in giving directives. In contrast, the absence of stress signals in the closing sequences indicates the ease of giving approval and praise. Poole’s study is useful because it shows how teachers play the role of expert in guiding students and because it gives an example of how ESL students are socialized into the routine of the classroom by their teachers.

2. Opening and Closing Sequences and Socialization

Other researchers have analyzed opening and closing sequences to examine socialization in children’s first language as well as in their second language. Greif and Gleason (1980) examined how children acquire three politeness routines, hi, thanks, and goodbye, by analyzing parent-child interaction. Children usually do not take part in these routines spontaneously; rather, parents’ stimulation generally produces the utterances. It was also found that mothers and fathers used different techniques to socialize their children. This study demonstrates the socialization process in expressing gratitude and greetings in first language acquisition.

As for ESL contexts, Price (1988) compares interaction related to asking for information in the opening and closing sequences in real-life conversations and textbook dialogues for ESL learners. The results show that the difference between real-life and textbook dialogues was significant, which suggests the necessity of natural interaction for socialization of openings and closings. Another example from ESL settings is Jeon’s (2003) analysis of closings in advising sessions. She demonstrates that closing conversations successfully is difficult for ESL learners, especially beginners, though as students’ proficiency levels increase, their conversational closings become less marked. This shows that although the appropriate production of openings and closings is often difficult at the beginning of language learning, these skills can develop as learners are socialized.

3. Writing Conferences

Writing conferences play an important role in the composition process from the perspective of process-based writing (Calkins, 1979; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Graves, 1981,
because during conferences, students develop their ideas and revise their compositions by negotiating meaning with their teacher and receiving his/her feedback. In contrast to the product-based perspective which stresses the final text (especially the mechanics of grammar and punctuation), process writing centers on the process students take part in to develop their writing skills which includes interaction with their peers or teacher and continuous revision. As a speech event, writing conferences represent the process model because a teacher and a student (or peer and peer) are together engaged in one-to-one discussion about a student’s written drafts (Ulichny & Watson-Gegeo, 1989).

Many studies on writing conferences suggest that student-teacher conferences play an important role in helping students become more effective writers (Freedman, 1980; Tomlinson, 1975). However, more recent research also demonstrates that interaction patterns during writing conferences are highly complex and dependent on the participants and contexts (Sperling, 1990; Ulichny & Watson-Gegeo, 1989; Young & Miller, 2004).

Research investigating the actual discourse of writing conferences has found qualitative differences in the conferences of high- and low-ability students (Freedman & Sperling, 1985; Walker & Elias, 1987). Several studies have also connected the conference discourse with revisions of the essay. These studies identified qualitative and quantitative differences between higher and lower achieving students (Jacobs & Karlner, 1977), among ESL students from various cultural backgrounds (Goldstein & Conrad, 1990), and the status of students (weaker/stronger student, native/non-native speaker) or the type of writing course (Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997). These studies suggest that context or student variables such as proficiency level, cultural background, and status influence student revision.

Several studies have discussed the discrepancy in communication during student-teacher conferences. These studies found various instances of teacher dominance (Ulichny & Watson-Gegeo, 1989), mutual misunderstandings between teacher and students (Kathryn, 1994), and students’ confusion about terminology concerning unity in writing and the negotiation of roles (Newkirk, 1995). These studies have proposed that teachers’ roles need to be shifted to relieve the conversational burden on students and to better understand students’ intended meanings.

In contrast, Sperling (1990) shows that writing conferences illustrated teacher-student collaboration in which the teacher played a leading role and that the extent of the collaboration varied both across students and within individual students at different times. Similarly, Young and Miller (2004) describe how a student and his teacher co-constructed the discursive practice of the revision talk in an ESL writing conference. Over the four weekly writing conferences, the student’s participation became more active, while the teacher took on the role of a co-learner whose participation shifted to assist the student’s learning.
Several studies present models and strategies that can be useful when conducting writing conferences and/or tutoring sessions. McAndrew and Reigstad (2001) give models for responding to a student’s composition in terms of higher order concerns (i.e. thesis/focus, development, structure/organization, voice/tone) and lower order concerns (i.e. direct statement, sentence combining, cohesion, grammar). They recommend that teachers first address higher order concerns, which are vital to the meaning of the writing as a whole, and then shift to lower order concerns. Otherwise, teachers might address many low level concerns throughout an essay and only at the end let a student know that much of the paper needs to be re-written due to lack of focus, which would an unproductive and inefficient use of conference time. Therefore, this type of model can help teachers organize their writing conferences.

Other researchers offer procedures for conducting an effective writing conference. For example, McAndrew and Reigstad (2001) suggest tutorial models for many contexts. Specifically, for cases in which the writer has a rough draft (which was required for the writing conferences in this study), they recommend the following procedure: “Sit next to the writer and read along silently as he reads the page aloud. Encourage him to tell you what he wants the two of you to look and listen for. Ask the following questions: What works best in your piece?… What parts did you have trouble writing?... Stop whenever you wish to explore alternatives with the writer. Give him every chance to solve a problem before you offer specific solutions” (p. 67). Atwell (1998) also offers a suggested structure for writing conferences: “1) The tutor invites the writer to talk, 2) The writer talks, 3) The tutor listens, 4) The tutor paraphrases, asks questions, suggests alternatives as the writer needs them, and asks about the writer’s plans” (p. 117).

Studies on how to structure writing conferences are useful because many writing teachers have studied and/or had training on how to conduct them. Therefore, it is likely that teachers’ expectations for conferences are similar to one or more of the models described.

4. The ZPD and How It Relates to Socialization

The idea that novices can develop their ability through the guidance of an expert is a fundamental theme of the Vygotskian perspective. Several studies using the concept of the ZPD have been done to examine students’ development with respect to specific grammatical items. For example, Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) conducted a study in which they analyzed the interaction of a tutor and three ESL students during writing tutorials. They examined how development could be measured by looking at the ZPD, focusing on four grammatical points in written English. In this study, the tutor was instructed to follow a certain order for giving feedback on error correction to students in order to find the
students’ level of understanding and to attempt to increase what students could do on their own by helping them through similar tasks with proper amounts of guidance.

Writing conferences are expert-novice communication by nature. In conferences, the teacher plays the expert’s role in conducting writing conferences, while students are socialized to the routines of conferences with the expert’s assistance. Also, in the process of socialization, students increase their control over writing and develop their performance (Goldstein & Conrad, 1990), which could explain the shift in regulation in the ZPD.

Several research studies link language socialization and Vygotskian theory (Kinginger, 2000; Willett, 1995). As Kinginger points out, “The emphasis in Vygotsky’s writing on the development of mental functioning within social interaction, and its genetic analysis, is mirrored in studies of first and second language socialization… The acquisition of language is fundamentally embedded in the process of socialization. Social interactions are the sociocultural contexts within which children’s participation leads to the performance of competence and cognitive skill” (p. 29). The ZPD provides a good way of looking at socialization and also offers a way of understanding the development processes that take place during social interaction.

As has been shown above, there have been numerous studies on writing conferences focusing on how and why writing conferences are effective, how teachers should conduct writing conferences, and what teachers can do to help students improve performance on specific grammar points or tasks. However, there is not much research on students’ language socialization process and development during writing conferences. Analysis of language socialization from the ZPD framework adds to our understanding of how students are socialized to the routines of writing conferences. Therefore, it is clear that this is an area worthy of study. The research questions of this study are (1) How has an ESL student been socialized into the writing conference routines? and (2) How has she developed as a writing conference participant?

IV. METHODOLOGY

The data were collected during students’ writing conferences for an ESL basic composition course taught at a North American university in spring 2003. If students did not enter the university with sufficiently strong writing skills for the ESL writing course that is the equivalent of the freshman composition course required of every student at the university, they were enrolled in this ESL basic composition course as a prerequisite. This class focused on process-based writing, and over the semester, students were expected to write three drafts each of three different papers. In this writing process, feedback from peers and teachers as well as self-revision was considered important.
In particular, teacher-student conferences played an important role in helping students to develop their ideas and revise their writing through discussions with their teacher as well as through teacher comments. Individual conferences were scheduled to last about half an hour, although they sometimes went slightly longer. Each student had three conferences, conducted once per paper, over the course of the semester. The format of the conferences varied from student to student. For example, some students came to their conference with many questions. In these cases, the teacher focused on what the student requested help with and then began to give feedback on issues the student had noticed. At other times, students did not bring questions, so the teacher read the essay silently, pausing to clarify her understanding, give feedback, and ask questions to the student.

The participants in this study were an ESL instructor and one of her students. At the time of this study, the instructor, T, was a student in the university’s Applied Linguistics Ph.D. program and had had several semesters’ experience as an ESL teacher. T is originally from Japan and came to the U.S. for her graduate education. The student, S, was enrolled in the basic ESL writing course that T was teaching. S was an undergraduate level female from China.

The researchers of this study were graduate students in the same academic department as T, and one of the researchers also taught ESL classes at the university. Before any data were collected, the teacher and the student participants signed consent forms. The participants were among students in the class who volunteered to have data collected from their conferences. The conferences took place in the teacher’s office and data from five students in T’s class were audiotaped and videotaped; however, this study focuses on only S’s conferences because she appeared to be motivated to improve her writing. Thus, by studying her, we expected to be able to see what happens when students are engaged in the socialization process.

We transcribed tapes of all of S’s conferences using a narrow transcription method that included overlaps, distinctive intonation, and pauses. We then did an in-depth analysis of the interaction during the three conferences to find evidence of the socialization process and the student’s development. Specifically, we examined the openings and closings of the conferences where socialization was especially noticeable.

V. RESULTS

Since the socialization process was most evident during conference openings and closings, examples of what happens during these routines from each of the three conferences will be presented.
1. Beginning a Conference

Among the conferences, there was a noticeable difference in the amount of talk that went on at the beginning of the conferences before T and S started talking specifically about the essay. Also, there was variation in the amount of explicit instructions given by T.

1) The First Conference

At the beginning of this conference, T begins by asking S if she has any questions. However, S seems not to understand what to do during the writing conference, so T begins to give a more detailed explanation of what is expected.

Example 1

10 T: Do you wanna say something just in general before we read out this essay
20 S: [Yeah I I will
40 T: [(xxx) [General questions
5 S: [(xxx)
6 S: Um right now I didn’t I I read I talk to you at last class
7 T: Yeah
80 S: But I will re-write the second paragraph.
9 T: Okay
10 S: So
110 T: Maybe you can tell me about how you wanna revise it when we get there
120 S: [Hm I I just ask my (mention) the last time as I talk talked to you
14 [hh
15 T: [Um hum
160 S: uh when I uh finish this uh article I found the logically it’s not uh
good
170 T: Um hum
18 S: Because the first
19 T: Right I remember that.
20 S: [Yeah

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1 In the excerpts, [ indicates overlapping speech; =, latched speech; (xxx), inaudible utterance; (h), aspiration; and (hh), longer aspiration. Additionally, (.) means short pause, and (0. (number)) means pause counted by seconds. Various contextual events are noted using (( )), usually only when they affect comprehension of the surrounding discourse.
In lines 1-2 of this example, T begins the conference by asking if S has any general questions about her essay. This is a standard way of beginning a conference used by many of T’s fellow teaching assistants. However, it is apparent the S is perhaps not aware of this expectation. In line 8, she mentions re-writing the second paragraph. T, on the other hand, only wants S to ask general questions about the essay at this point and thinks that it would be better to discuss the second paragraph when they come to it. In lines 16-17, S begins making general comments about the author’s logic in the article that she is analyzing for her paper, though she does not ask any questions about it right away. T may believe that S does not have any questions to ask and wants to move forward with the conference, so in lines 22-24 she again says that S can ask questions when they come to the relevant point in the essay. T may also realize that S might not know how a writing conference is conducted, because here for the first time she explicitly explains her expectations for the conference. She only gives S time to respond briefly before beginning to read, preventing any more “off-task” talk.

2) The Second Conference

During the second conference, T does not give as detailed instructions about what will happen during the conference. However, S has not brought her second draft and in doing so has failed to meet an important expectation for the conference. T makes an effort to ensure that S understands that bringing a second draft is necessary.

Example 2
1 T: Wow that was an intensive (week)
2 S: (xxx)
3 T: Okay oh you know uh this is your second draft right?
4 S: No this is my first.
5 T: Okay oh the first and
6 S: I didn’t write the first.
7 T: Second draft
The second conference had the longest opening out of the three. Unlike during the first conference, this time T also brings up topics not directly related to revision during the conference.

The main topic in T’s opening talk is the importance of bringing a second draft to the writing conference. S has not met a major expectation by failing to bring the correct draft. In line 3, T implies that it is necessary to bring a second draft, and in lines 9-10 she states more explicitly that this is the expectation. In line 11, S reacts with what may be surprise, which would mean that she did not know that this was expected. However, it is also possible that she is making an excuse, because she goes on to talk about how her peer review partners did not give her any helpful ideas for revision. Also, T had mentioned in the previous conference that a second draft was needed at the conference. Finally, in lines 73-74 and 80, T again emphasizes the importance of bringing a second draft to the conference. It is possible that S was previously aware that she was supposed to bring a second draft but did not know that it was a serious matter. However, T states four times in
the opening of the conference that a second draft is required, which lets S know that it is considered very important.

This time, T does not give any directions on how the conference will be run. Instead, following line 81, she begins reading with the expectation that S will be familiar with the pattern. T also does not ask S if she has any general questions. This could be because S did not ask appropriate questions during the first conference or because much time has already been spent talking about the importance of bringing a second draft.

3) The Third Conference

During the third conference, T immediately begins reading the essay out loud. She does not offer any information on how the conference will be conducted.

Example 3

1→ T: Alright (1.0) um hum should we have limits in privacy there is no
doubt in my mind privacy is something that everyone wants to have
privacy based on my understanding includes ((cough)) personal
information such as age income personal choice or personal history
etcetera that one does not want others to know however I’ve found
that it is hard to maintain absolute privacy in this world. For example,
to a personal neighbors or colleagues this person’s age
might be private information however to
9 S: The hospital
10 T: Okay to the hospital where the person was born to the schools the
person attended or to the citizen’s registration office this is not a secret
to have absolute privacy one has to live in an isolated and remote
place without interacting with other human beings okay ((cough)) in
this world the real issue of privacy comes down to who and what part
of privacies are willing to release in order to trade what we want okay

In contrast to the first two conferences, this time T begins reading right away. It is very likely that S brought her second draft, since T does not comment about the necessity of bringing it. T also does not ask S if she has any general questions, perhaps because this did not work well during the first conference. S does not bring up other topics and allows T to begin reading, showing her understanding of the procedures followed at the beginning of a conference.
2. Closing a Conference

Conferences were scheduled to take thirty minutes. T needed to end conferences on time because usually other students were waiting to meet with her. However, S may not have initially realized the importance of staying on the schedule. In the three conferences, S and T play varying parts in the closings.

1) The First Conference

At the first conference, T gives clues that it is time to end. However, talk continues for several more minutes. She also asks S to write down what they have talked about, a common practice during writing conferences.

Example 4

288 T: I wish you had the second (draft with me
289 S: [Okay (hh) (hh) ((laughter))
290 T: [Next time bring your second draft [Okay
291 S: [Okay [Okay but I didn’t uh finish it but
292 because uh this week I’m not (xxx) I have a lot of uh exam (four)
293 examinations
294 T: Okay
295 S: I work hard
296 T: Okay so for this paragraph you wanna bring your main point
297 S: Yeah
298 T: toward the beginning and then make make it show in a clear way
299 S: Yeah
300 T: So that your readers know why and how you are disagreeing with
301 S: Yeah
302 T: this statement
303 S: Yeah=
304 T: =Okay Do you wanna write it down? Oh maybe we talked so much on
305 this one Maybe you’ll remember
306 S: Okay oh would you please repeat again?
(5.0)
307 T: About [what we said?
308 S: [Yes (xxx)
309 T: Okay um it’s just (hh) ((laughter)) you’ll need to make sure your point
your main point that you have just said is clearly presented so that your readers know Um you can write down in your native language (hh) ((laughter)) if that’s helpful Um cuz if you say Okay I’m getting older and blah blah blah then it’s not really clear (3.0) what is going to be your main argument so you will bring your main argument and then show your reasons and (hh) of disagreeing with this statement and then you said you know it depends on some people’s personality some people’s cultural backgrounds. So you that’s why you are disagreeing with this statement right? That’s what you have said So you wanna s- you wanna say that point if we’re getting into (8.6) um (11.0) Okay Okay “Can you write a little bit?”

Oh we’re too

Yeah

Okay, okay so

But I [think]

[do you do you have time]

this is yeah I think we need to wrap up [in about three minutes Sorry about that.]

[Okay]

But I think this discussion will [get you to think about the general]

[Okay]

[Thank you]

revise your essay so I mean this paper is for you to show your point so you don’t have to start by saying that: okay this is the generalization from the article and I would say this this this You know Um (4.6) I mean you can say but okay I’m not clear I think I’m getting too tired ((laughter)) Ooh!

((Student corrects the teacher about the main idea in her paper and they discuss this point; teacher suggests corrections in style and organization.))

Yeah Okay I think we have to wrap up our discussion Sorry about that but um I can’t really say much here because you’ve done a lot of revisions for the second draft and we’re looking at the first

Yeah I’m maybe the first paragraph I’m gonna take that out just second draft I change because logically I’m not that so=

Yeah

So I just think about that recently really very very busy.
In lines 288 and 290, T lets S know that it would have been helpful to have a second draft and that she must bring one next time. This could mark the ending of the conference, since there is shift from talking about this essay to the next one. In lines 291-3 and 295, S offers reasons that she did not bring the draft and tries to convince T that she is a hard worker. T, however, may not sympathize much with S because she still believes that students should be responsible and bring second drafts. The new topic introduced by T in line 296 could serve two different functions: T may have truly forgotten something she wanted to say and is now bringing it up, or she may mention a new issue simply to change the topic.

In line 304-305, T presents another feature of writing conferences. Many teachers ask students to write down the changes that they are going to make so that they will not forget them. However, a student who has not previously taken part in a writing conference would not be familiar with this expectation. It is likely that S was not expecting T’s request, as evidenced by her use of “oh” in lines 306, which often indicates surprise. She also asks T to repeat what should be written down. In lines 309-320, after repeating a summary of suggested changes, T again asks S to write down the information, letting her know that this is an expected part of a writing conference.

In line 325, S takes part in ending the conference by asking T if she has enough time. T responds by saying that they need to finish in a few more minutes. It appears that S thinks that the conference is almost over, because she thanks T in line 332. T, however, continues to talk about improvements for the paper and gets into a discussion with S, who thinks that T may have misunderstood a point in her paper. Several minutes later, T again states that it is time to finish the discussion in lines 390-392, and she also again emphasizes the importance of bringing a second draft to the conference. S offers more reasons for not bring the draft in line 396, and T replies by saying thank you. This could be a way of changing the topic and also ending the conference (line 397). At this point, S picks up on the fact that the conference is ending and responds by saying thank you to T (line 398).

2) The Second Conference

S helps to initiate the closing of this conference. Unlike in the first one, here talk continues for a much shorter time after the closing has been initiated. Additionally, S uses “thank you” at an appropriate time.
Example 5
313 S: Uhum what’s time
314 T: Two and a half so uhum so we stop here maybe I will talk to you later
315 (xx)
316 S: Okay yeah we can talk later do you have a phone
317 (xxx): (xxx)
318 S: Yeah and it’s very helpful
319 T: Yeah basically I think I’m seeing that when you quote the authors you
320 sometimes just leave the quote without really expanding it
321 S: Oh yeah haha
322 T: So yeah talk about why you quoted how is this related to your own
323 argument
324 S: Okay
325 T: Yeah
326 S: So after class can I may I (xx) I want to know because last time I got a
327 lot of helpful from you so this time I also want [to hear
328 T: [Okay sure yeah yeah
329 so how about do you live here or
330 S: Yeah so (let’s do that) So ahh thank you
331 T: See you in class
332 S: See you in class

In line 313, S asks what time it is. She may know that conferences are to last 30 minutes and would be prepared to finish if it has been that long. T answers S’s question and adds that it is time to stop, although she mentions that perhaps she will talk with S later (line 314). It seems like the conference could end at this point, but in lines 319-320 T gives more suggestions to S about her essay. They speak for a few more lines about meeting again to talk about the essay; then in line 330 S says thank you. What she is referring to is ambiguous – she could be thanking T for offering to talk with her about her essay again, or she could be saying thank you for meeting with her during the conference. T responds by telling S that she will see her in class, which clearly signals that the conference is over. S responds by echoing T’s statement (line 332) and then leaving, showing that she understands its function.

3) The Third Conference

In the last conference, S uses a different method to close: instead of asking about the time, she says that she will talk with T in class. The amount of talk between initiation of
closing and the end of the conference is the shortest of the three.

Example 6

228  T:  ((Cough)) So that’s about it
229  S:  Okay I still have a lot of work to do I
230  T:  Yeah before you forget maybe you want write down (6.0)
231  S:  So how can I get a ah the source what kind of source I should use
232  T:  Ahh ((sniffle)) okay.

((T and S talk more about S’s paper))
252  S:  Okay thank you so much we can talk more in class
253  T:  Yeah in class tomorrow
254  S:  Thank you so much
255  T:  Sure so bring that draft because we’ll work on your draft tomorrow at
256  T:  twelve
257  S:  Okay I I will think about if I maybe I can if maybe I still have (xx) (if
258  I check I will ask you)
259  T:  Okay
269  S:  Thank you so much
261  T:  Thank you take care
262  S:  You too haha
263  T:  Bye okay

Before signaling the closure of this conference session, in line 230, T recommends that
S take notes on important points discussed during the meeting. However, S responds with
a question irrelevant to note-taking (in line 231). Prior to line 252, T and S had been
discussing S’s essay. Therefore, at this conference, it is S who initiates the closing. Instead
of asking about the time, S simply says thank you and that they can talk more in class. This
could mean that S has learned how long a conference should be and is taking responsibility
for ending it after that amount of time has passed. S’s “thank you” is an appropriate way of
showing closing, and she uses it again in line 260. Also, she replies to T’s “take care” with
“you too” (line 262), which would be considered a usual and appropriate response. S does
not bring up any new topics after the closing sequence has been initiated.

VI. DISCUSSION

There are several ways in which socialization takes place in the conferences. One of the
most evident relates to T’s explicit instructions for conference procedures. T likely has a
planned procedure for conferences, which seems to combine elements of the models of McAndrew and Reigstad (2001), Atwell (1998), and other researchers. It seems that she would like to begin a conference by talking about general student questions, then read the draft aloud while asking for clarification or giving feedback as appropriate, discuss overall issues, and end by having the student write down the changes that he or she will make.

However, many of T’s students may not be aware of this procedure, since for some of them it is likely their first writing conference. Also, even if the students have had conferences in the past, their teachers or tutors may have used different procedures. Therefore, T gives some explicit instruction on the procedure for her writing conferences.

In general, T focuses on higher order concerns (McAndrew & Reigstad, 2001) at the beginnings of conferences. For example, at the beginning of the first conference (example 1), T asks S if she has any general questions (lines 1 and 4). S, however, talks about the second paragraph, which T does not want to discuss until they come to it. However, in the two other conferences, T no longer asks S if she has any general questions; rather, she simply begins reading. This may be because S did not respond in an appropriate way during the first conference.

In lines 22-24 of example 1 (the first conference), T explains that during the conference she will read the essay aloud and will occasionally stop and ask questions. She does not give this type of instructions in the latter conferences. In the second conference, the participants do not begin reading immediately; rather, they enter into a discussion on peer review and the necessity of bringing second drafts. However, when T does begin reading the draft aloud following line 81, S allows her to and seems to understand what is happening. Finally, by the third conference, T immediately begins reading without any comments from S. It appears that by the final conference S has been socialized to allow T to begin the conference by reading the essay aloud and initiating the discussion of it.

Another explicit type of instruction that T gives to S is to take notes on what they have discussed during the conference. This occurs for the first time in line 304 of example 4 (the first conference) and then again in line 320. S then writes on her paper. In the second conference, note-taking is not mentioned, and there are not any pauses in the tape where it seems like S is writing. Therefore, it likely did not occur. In the third conference, T asks S to take notes in line 230 of example 6. However, in the next line S replies by asking a question about a different topic. There is no evidence that she takes any notes.

Why was S socialized to one type of conference procedure but not the other? One reason may be that allowing T to read only required a passive role while taking notes is active. When T began reading, it may have been relatively easy for S to remember what was happening and how to respond appropriately. However, remembering to take notes is more difficult. Additionally, T did not mention note-taking during the second conference, so S may not have realized that it was an important part of the writing conference.
A related issue is that of bringing a second draft to the conference. During the first conference (example 4), T states both implicitly (lines 288 and 392) and explicitly (line 290) that S needs to bring a second draft. However, S comes to her second conference with only a first draft. She knows that she needed to bring one, though she might not have realized how important it was. T, however, tells her several times (e.g. lines 3, 9-10, 73-74 of example 2). In the third conference, no mention is made of draft versions, so it seems likely that S has brought her second draft. If she has, this is another example of successful socialization.

The conference closings provide a good example of a move from other-regulation to self-regulation in S’s ZPD. In the first conference (example 4), S does help initiate closing by asking if T has time to continue (line 325). T then says that they have about three more minutes, and the two of them continue talking about the essay. Although T is giving more suggestions to S, S also brings up some points. Finally, in line 390, T again says that they need to end. S, however, talks about why she did not bring her second draft until T thanks her for coming. Even though S helped initiate, T takes most of the responsibility for closing the conference.

In the second conference (example 5), S asks what time it is, rather than if T has time to continue (line 313). T says that they will stop here but continues to give S another suggestion for her essay (line 319-320). After a few more lines, S thanks T for meeting with her (line 330). T responds by saying “see you in class”, which has a high amount of finality. S echoes her statement and leaves. During this conference, S and T shared responsibility for closing.

Meanwhile, in the third conference’s closing (example 6), S plays a much greater role. Instead of asking about the time, she initiates closing in a much more direct way by saying that they can talk in class (line 252). She gives T an opportunity to say good-bye by using “thank you” again in line 254. T continues talking about the next class’s activities, and S responds to the statement (lines 255-258). However, in the next pause, S again thanks T (line 260), and this time T takes the opportunity to end the conference. S responds appropriately to T’s comment to take care before leaving.

In a ZPD framework, it is argued that learners develop their abilities with help from other more experienced participants. In this sequence of conferences, S develops her ability to close a meeting. In the first and second conferences, S initiates closings indirectly. She also shows a lack of commitment to closing, as she brings up new topics after closing has been initiated in the first conference. T needs to regulate the closing by making comments such as that they had to wrap up soon. In the second conference, S makes fewer comments between the time she initiates closing and the time that she leaves. By doing this, she helps the conference end on time and demonstrates increasing self-regulation. Finally, in the third conference, S initiates closing in a much more direct way. She gives T several
opportunities to end their meeting. Over the course of the semester, S has been socialized to learn that finishing conferences on time is important and what types of words and phrases mark the endings of them. S’s development and move from other-regulation to self-regulation can be seen in the increasing responsibility that she takes for ending the conferences. In terms of types of language socialization proposed by Schieffelin & Ochs (1986), this is an example of socialization to use language, although the other examples generally showed socialization through language.

The other instances of socialization can also be interpreted with a ZPD framework. For example, T gave explicit instructions on conference procedures during the first meeting and she also corrected S when she did not follow them. This is other-regulation of conference procedures. However, by the last conference, S knows to let T begin. She no longer needs to be told what happens during a conference. In doing so, she has moved to self-regulation. The same seems to be true with bringing a second draft.

S’s socialization to conference closings and conference procedures can be further understood by the idea of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). S observes social interaction in the first and second writing conferences and later becomes able to take the role of a more capable participant. In the case of note-taking, S does not move to self-regulation and her legitimate peripheral participation is not activated. In the third conference, T still prompts her to take notes. This shows that different skills develop at different times and rates.

VII. CONCLUSION

In this study, we examined language socialization from a ZPD framework. Specifically, we analyzed the openings and closings of the three ESL writing conferences, the times when socialization was particularly evident.

The results show that several types of socialization occurred. The teacher gave explicit instruction on conference procedures, including the necessity of bringing a second draft and note-taking during conferences. The student also received less explicit socialization by participating in conference closings. In some cases, such as bringing a second draft and closing a conference, the student moved from other-regulation to self-regulation. However, no such progression occurred with note-taking. This may be because it was harder for the student to remember and also because the teacher did not mention it during the second conference.

This project has demonstrated that writing conferences provide a rich environment for the study of language socialization. Furthermore, it has been found that examining language socialization from a ZPD perspective is useful for analyzing students’
development in participating in the routines of writing conferences.

As a speech event, writing conferences offer opportunities for a teacher and a student to be engaged in one-on-one discussion for a student’s written drafts. While speaking in L2 about their writing, L2 learners are provided with ample communication experience in L2. Thus, writing conferences help L2 learners develop as participants in an academic discourse in their L2.

The results of this study have significant implications for ESL writing instruction and conferences as well as for student learning. First, this study is a useful reminder for writing teachers that their students may not necessarily know how to take part in a writing conference. Teachers need to remember to explain what procedures will be followed. Also, if they want students to develop a skill such as taking notes during a conference, this should be emphasized at each meeting until the student moves to self-regulation.

Even though this study was conducted in an ESL context, the findings may also be applicable to EFL contexts. Since the concepts of writing conferences and process-based writing may be rather new to EFL learners, the results of this study provide EFL teachers with important tips on how to conduct writing conferences in EFL contexts such as in Korea.

This study aimed to examine evidence for language socialization by analyzing teacher-student interactions over the three conferences. Follow-up interviews or stimulated recall sessions about the conferences with the participants may be necessary to more fully explain the student’s language socialization process. Another drawback of this study is that the data were analyzed in audio form and non-verbal information was not included in this analysis. Researching the gestures and body language of teachers and students could also prove meaningful. Furthermore, the present study was done with the one teacher and one student. If more students were studied, commonalities and/or variations between students in terms of socialization and development through writing conferences could be discovered. Also, if more teachers were observed, similarities and/or differences in the methods of socialization used by teachers and their effectiveness could be found. Therefore, future studies need to examine various writing conferences where diverse teachers and students participate. Moreover, this study primarily focused on an ESL student’s language socialization process rather than on her L2 learning and/or development of L2 composition skills through writing conferences. Thus, there is a need for further research on these multiple variables related to writing conferences and student learning.
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Lawrence Erlbaum.

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Kyungja Ahn
Department of English Education
College of Education
Seoul National University
San 56-1, Sillim-Dong, Gwanak-Gu
Seoul, 151-748, Korea
E-mail: kjahn21@gmail.com

Alisha Witmer
Fauquier County Public Schools
4529 Morrisville Rd.
Bealeton, VA 22712, U.S.A.
E-mail: alisha.witmer@gmail.com

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