

# Peer Feedback in Disciplinary Writing for Publication in English: The Case of 'Rolli', a German-L1 Novice Scholar

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## Abstract

Achieving publication in Anglophone science journals is a goal of many multilingual scholars, and failure can have huge implications for individuals' future careers and for the global dissemination of scientific knowledge. Despite the importance of the topic, there is still a lack of bottom-up research, which investigates the experience of writing for publication in English from the perspective of the novice scholar. This article presents the case of 'Rolli', a German-L1 novice scholar facing the challenge of writing his first article for publication as the lead author and writing it moreover in English. The study uses text history, interviews, and feedback comments to portray the socially-situated story of a novice multilingual writer on a trajectory to successful publication. The case shows how peer feedback was pivotal in achieving publication. Rolli's ability to respond to this feedback was a key success factor in the writing for publication process. The case sheds light on the importance of peer feedback in disciplinary writing.

## Introduction

The global dominance of English as 'the language of science' (Kaplan 1993 and Ammon 2001) has resulted in an increasing pressure on novice multilingual scholars to publish in English. Academic writing for publication in English currently involves more than 5.5 million scholars and 2,000 publishers across the globe (Lillis and Curry 2010: 1). Failure to publish has implications for individual scholars' future careers and for the global dissemination of scientific knowledge. Statistically, multilingual scholars have greater problems publishing in the mainstream Anglophone journals than their Native English-Speaking (NES) counterparts (Marušić and Marušić 2001), and many multilingual scholars certainly feel that they are disadvantaged compared to NES scholars (Marušić *et al.* 2002).

Several studies have claimed that successful publication in Anglophone journals depends on knowledge of specific rhetorical conventions and stylistic practices operating within the dominant Anglophone discourse community (Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995, Drury and Webb 1991 and Freedman 1987). Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995: 13), for example, refer to a 'cognitive apprenticeship' by which novice scholars learn the linguistic norms and stylistic practices of their discipline. Swales (1990) also argues that to acquire membership of a discourse community, an individual has to undergo some form of apprenticeship. Gee (1990: 147) similarly asserts that discourses are not mastered by overt instruction, but by enculturation ('apprenticeship') into social practices through scaffolded interaction with people who have already mastered the discourse. In the same vein, Hyland (2009: 88) notes that

research articles are 'sites of disciplinary engagement' and suggests that 'the final product is seen as a social act that can only occur within a particular community and audience'.

In the last 20 years some L2 academic writing researchers, attempting to describe this process in more detail, have drawn on Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of 'community of practice' (COP). In their studies of situated learning, Lave and Wenger (1991: 33-37) showed how newcomers in a range of different fields use 'legitimate peripheral participation' (LPP) to move along a centripetal pathway in their COP, eventually taking on the roles of more experienced members. The basic idea of LPP is that newcomers first participate in low-risk peripheral tasks that are nevertheless legitimate and productive for the goals of the community. In a disciplinary writing context this might mean that a novice scholar first contributes to a literature review or prepares slides for their supervisor before beginning to write up their own research. Through these peripheral tasks novice scholars learn more about the inner workings of the community and eventually become more centrally located within its social practices.

Several previous studies of scientific writing have used this COP framework to depict the centripetal movement of novice multilingual scholars. Flowerdew (2000) and Li (2006) for example focused on Chinese novice scientific researchers writing for publication in English. Flowerdew's (2000) case study of 'Oliver' showed how successful publication was dependent on Oliver's developing knowledge of the publishing 'game' and in particular his decision to resubmit his article to a second and third journal. Similarly Li's (2006) case study of 'Chen' showed how Chen's two supervisors helped him to achieve publication by making several contributions to the positioning of his draft paper.

L2 academic writing researchers have become increasingly interested in the role of different forms of feedback in helping novice scholars develop their academic literacy. Feedback on writing can be used to achieve different purposes: broadly speaking, feedback serves an informational and an interpersonal role (Hyland and Hyland 2006). Informational feedback consists of teachers' or supervisors' responses or reactions to the text, which are used by learners to facilitate improvements and consolidate their learning. Such responses may make learners change performance in a particular direction, or prevent learners from repeating prior behaviour (Nelson and Schunn 2007).

However, Hyland and Hyland (2006: 206) point out that although the informational content of feedback is extremely important for novice academic writers, feedback should also engage with writers on an interpersonal level, giving the impression that it is 'a response to a person rather than to a script'. Hyland and Hyland argue that the interpersonal feedback strategy chosen by teachers or supervisors, e.g. using praise, making suggestions, or giving criticism, can have a significant impact on novice writers' motivation and subsequent writing development. Appropriate interpersonal feedback thus empowers novice writers to produce texts that address the expectations needed to succeed in a particular discourse community (Hyland and Hyland 2006).

Although Lave and Wenger (1991: 56-57) specifically describe 'the importance of near peers in the circulation of knowledgeable skill' and the significance of 'triadic sets of relations' featuring 'apprentices,' 'young masters,' and 'old timers' as a frequent feature of a COP, there is still a lack of L2 writing-for-publication research focusing on the role played by close colleagues, co-workers and peers who provide feedback on texts. Despite not being officially in a supervisory role, it is my contention that these co-workers or 'near peers' play a significant role in socialising and enculturating novice scholars into the discipline. To explore the role of different 'actors' on the text, those individuals who correct, comment on, or discuss the text with the author during the writing process, and the impact of different sources and styles of feedback in this socialisation process, I decided to conduct a case study of a novice scholar writing an article for publication in English as first author for the first time.

## Methods

Case studies are a particularly appropriate tool for exploring social relationships as they focus on in-depth analysis and detailed description of individuals in a social setting (Duff 2008: 43). In an L2 academic writing context, Casanave (2002: 33) argues that the advantage of this kind of approach is that it allows researchers to 'interact with, analyse, and depict real people' in a recognisable situation.

### **Data Collection**

The case study drew on Lillis and Curry's (2006, 2010) concept of text history (TH) as a main method of data collection. The TH in this case comprised all available drafts of the text, written feedback comments on these drafts, and email exchanges between the novice scholar and different actors on the text.

In addition, three interviews were conducted with the novice scholar: 1) at the beginning of the article writing process, 2) following initial submission, and 3) following feedback from journal reviewers. The interviews were used to construct a picture of the novice scholar's changing perceptions of the writing process and the role of different sources of feedback on the development of the texts. All the interviews were conducted in English.

In the interviews, the novice scholar was asked how feedback comments were incorporated in the subsequent redrafting of the texts. To obtain a better idea of how the novice saw his relationship with other actors on the text, he was asked to sketch a diagram showing these relationships.

### **Data Analysis**

In order to analyse the impact of various actors on various drafts of the text, changes were tracked using a heuristic adapted from Lillis and Curry (2010: 89).

All the written feedback comments were analysed by first classifying them into two broad categories: 'content comments' and 'language comments' (see Appendix, Table 5). Drawing on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday 1994), content comments were defined as those comments which addressed the 'ideational aspects of the text' – remarks about the scientific reasoning and the technical details presented in the text as well as the citations of previous work. Language comments were defined as those comments which addressed 'textual aspects of the text' – remarks about the text's internal organisation, communicative nature, grammatical complexity, lexical density, cohesion, coherence and clarity. The interpersonal nature of the feedback comments was analysed and comments were classified based on different interpersonal functions such as 'praising' or 'criticising', 'making suggestions' or 'directing the writer to make changes' (see Appendix Table 6). In addition the usage of *Du* or the more formal *Sie* form of address was noted as an indication of the proximity or distance of the actor to the writer.

## Case Study: Rolli

Born and raised in northern Austria, 'Rolli' was 27 years old when the case study began. He held an MSc in Information Technology and was employed as a Research Assistant in a Computer Science department of a large German-speaking university. In addition to studying for his PhD, Rolli's duties included teaching courses in software engineering.

### **Rolli's Previous Writing Experience**

In Interview 1 Rolli stated that his experience of writing scientific texts in English first began four years earlier when he took part in an Erasmus exchange seminar in Finland. In Finland, Rolli began to use his 'school English' in everyday life for the first time. Prior to writing the

article that became the basis for this case study, Rolli had contributed ‘some small sections to six papers’ in English in collaboration with his supervisor, Professor DR.

Rolli said he felt ‘some disadvantages’ compared to NES scholars because of ‘weaknesses’ in his English writing skills. He defined his main problems with scientific writing in English as ‘structuring an argument’ and ‘using specific vocabulary’. Despite these problems, Rolli felt that he had made progress in the last four years: ‘If I take a look now at some text I wrote back in Finland, it’s horrible.’

### Text History

The Text History (TH) in this case was based on analysis of changes made to 17 drafts of Rolli’s text and feedback comments from nine actors who wrote comments on the text (total circa 150,000 words).

Table 1 shows the different actors in the TH, their position in Rolli’s Community of Practice (COP) and their role in the writing process according to Rolli. All five of the main actors (AR, BR, CR, DR, ER) spoke German as an L1. Rolli’s supervisor, Professor DR, was very experienced with a long publication record in the Information Technology field.

**Table 1. Principal actors in the text history**

Actor	L1	Position in COP	Role in writing process, according to Rolli
AR	German	MSc student, supervised by Rolli and ER	Did the work upon which the article was based
BR = Rolli	German	Research Assistant and PhD student	1 <sup>st</sup> Author
CR	German	Research Assistant and PhD student	Gave input about content
DR	German	Professor, Head of Department, Rolli’s PhD supervisor	2 <sup>nd</sup> Author Feedback on Title and Abstract. Proofread final text
ER	German	Research Associate, Rolli’s colleague	Made large-scale revisions to abstract introduction and conclusion
FR	English	Research Associate, Rolli’s colleague	Proofread final version of article prior to submission
GR	Not known	Journal 1 <sup>st</sup> reviewer	Reviewed and rejected article
HR	Not known	Journal 2 <sup>nd</sup> reviewer	Reviewed and rejected article
IR	Not known	Journal 3 <sup>rd</sup> reviewer	Reviewed and rejected article
JR	Not known	Journal editor	Rejected article
KR	Not known	Head of conference editorial board	Accepted poster
LR	Not known	Editor of proceedings paper	Accepted proceedings article

Figure 1 represents the trajectory of the text and the main interactions between the different actors. The size of each circle in Figure 1 represents the approximate amount of influence of each actor on the text, based on analysis of the TH and subsequent discussions with Rolli. Lines dividing circles into two halves show how one actor was involved at two different stages in the TH.

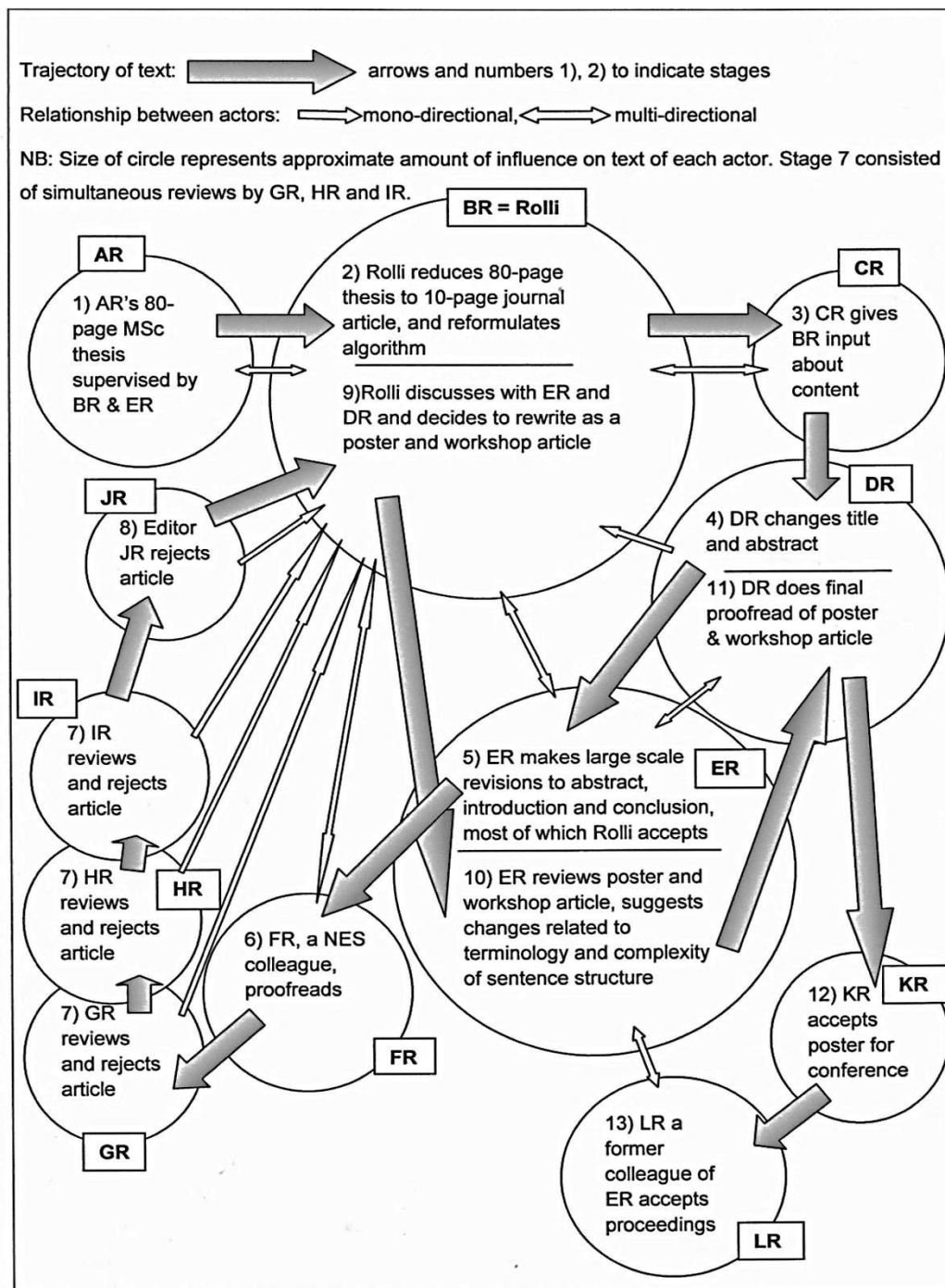


Figure 1. Trajectory of text and interactions between actors

### Early drafts

Rolli began preparing a 10-page journal article on 22 January 2010. The first draft of the text was itself based on an 80-page MSc thesis that Rolli and his colleague ER, a Research Associate, had supervised together. The author of this MSc thesis was AR, an MSc student. Rolli confirmed in Interview 1 that he *'took many of the contents directly from AR'*.

By 4 February 2010 Rolli had a *'rough outline of the text'* (Draft 1) and decided to discuss it with another colleague, CR. Peer CR recommended that Rolli continue writing but advised that *'the scope of the findings should be narrowed down'*. Rolli worked on the manuscript for the next four days until 8 February to place greater emphasis on the novelty of the described

system. As a result of further talks with CR, Rolli decided *'to make the purpose more explicit'* and foregrounded a statement of purpose in the revised version of the text (Draft 2).

### *Supervisor feedback*

On 9 February, Rolli showed a complete draft of the 10-page article to his supervisor, Professor DR. DR read the whole text but only gave feedback on Rolli's title and abstract. Table 2 (Appendix) presents a detailed analysis of DR's feedback and shows how DR focused primarily on sentence level language features such as syntax, terminology, grammar, and punctuation.

Table 2 shows that DR adopted a rather minimalistic approach to feedback. DR's only feedback on the content of the article was one comment at the end of the abstract and the use of wavy lines and question marks to suggest the doubtful nature of some of the claims made in Rolli's text. In addition, DR cut the length of Rolli's abstract from 250 to 225 words. The punctuation was improved and the average sentence length was slightly reduced.

In Interview 2, Rolli summarised DR's feedback as: *'mostly cosmetic changes and not really fundamental things.'* Rolli interpreted the minimal changes to his abstract from Professor DR as an indication that everything was fine with the text: *'I interpret that it's okay and if I take those language changes it's better.'*

Rolli was initially surprised that DR's changes were *'mostly from a language point of view – not really contents'*. Although he found DR's comments *'helpful'* he was *'a little disappointed'* that DR did not say more about the content and had not reviewed the whole article. Rolli was, however, not keen to criticise his supervisor, explaining that DR was *'very busy and probably did not have time to comment in detail on the whole text.'* According to Rolli, this was fairly normal procedure: *'only if an article was accepted'* would Professor DR spend more time reviewing. Rolli was confident that he would receive more feedback from his supervisor at a later stage.

### *Peer feedback*

Following Professor DR's feedback, Rolli continued to work on the manuscript and on 10 February showed another draft to his co-worker ER. Crucially, ER had more experience of publishing than Rolli but was *'more approachable than Professor DR'*. From 10 to 12 February the text underwent several large-scale revisions as a result of detailed feedback from ER. In total ER made changes affecting more than 150 lines of Rolli's 10-page article and wrote 32 feedback comments about the text using a mixture of Word 'balloons' and PDF 'sticky notes'.

In editing the text, ER focused on restructuring Rolli's abstract, and shortening the introduction and conclusion sections. Table 3 (see Appendix) summarises the main changes made by ER to Rolli's text and shows how ER worked simultaneously at different levels on both content and language issues. At the section level, ER reorganised, reformulated and restructured the argument to emphasise the relevance of the new software development tool to the intended audience of the article, changes which could be classified as *'rhetorical machining'* (Gosden 1995). At the paragraph and sentence level, ER deleted personal pronouns to make the text more impersonal. In addition, more complex sentence structure and the frequency of linking words such as *'thus'* and *'hence'* was substantially reduced. At the sub-sentence level, ER improved the text by correcting small errors in grammar, vocabulary and punctuation, changes defined by Gosden (1995) as *'polishing'*.

Interestingly, in most cases where ER introduced large-scale changes to the text, he also added comments to explain what he was doing. Table 4 (Appendix) shows how ER employed a wide variety of interpersonal aspects in his response to Rolli's text. On 10 occasions ER inserted questions in the text for Rolli to consider and on a further five occasions ER made suggestions for possible changes. In subsequent interviews Rolli confirmed that ER's feedback was particularly useful in getting him *'to think more carefully'* about what he had written.

On four further occasions ER used directive feedback to give explicit instructions about what should be changed, such as: *'You should talk about benefits here at the end of the abstract'*. On two further occasions ER provided models to help Rolli learn a structure or guidelines that could be used for future papers. Interestingly, within one review of the text ER wrote some comments in German and others in English, indicating his high level of language proficiency and flexibility as a writer. In total 15 comments were made in English and 17 in German.

Comparing the feedback that Rolli received from Professor DR and Peer ER it appears the two actors had very distinctive feedback styles. ER seems to have better understood the interpersonal nature of feedback and the importance of responding to a person, whereas DR focused on correcting a text. It is significant that on four occasions ER used Rolli's name to personalise the comments that he was making, and on another six occasions addressed Rolli as 'Du' or 'you.' On eight occasions ER used 'we/wir' or 'our/uns' suggesting that he positioned himself as a knowledgeable friendly colleague engaged in a collaborative endeavour rather than a superior expert making corrections to a text.

Figure 2 exemplifies how ER focused equally on language and content issues and provided a running commentary and suggestions for alternative paragraphs for Rolli to consider. Figure 2 also shows how Rolli responded to ER's feedback by making pencil notes in the margin of ER's alternative paragraph (*context, problem, introduction, benefits*). The final draft of the abstract was basically a collaborative work combining elements of Rolli's original abstract with ER's alternative suggestion. When interviewed later Rolli referred to the *'helpful comments'* he had received from ER which *'motivated'* him to attempt another draft.

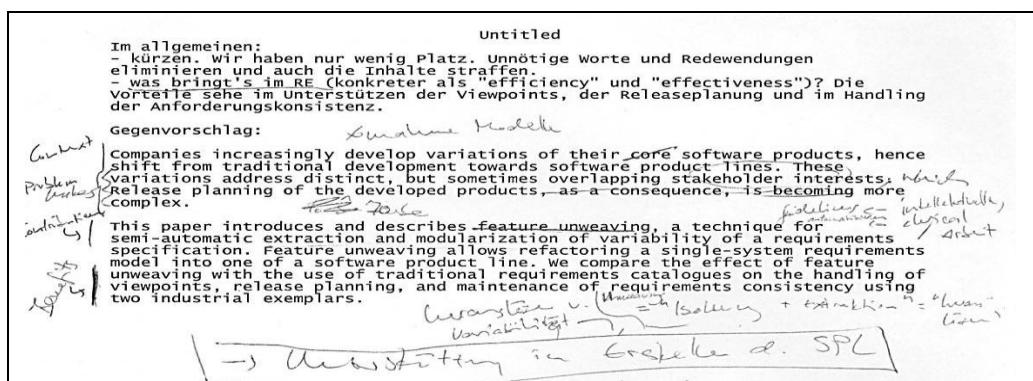
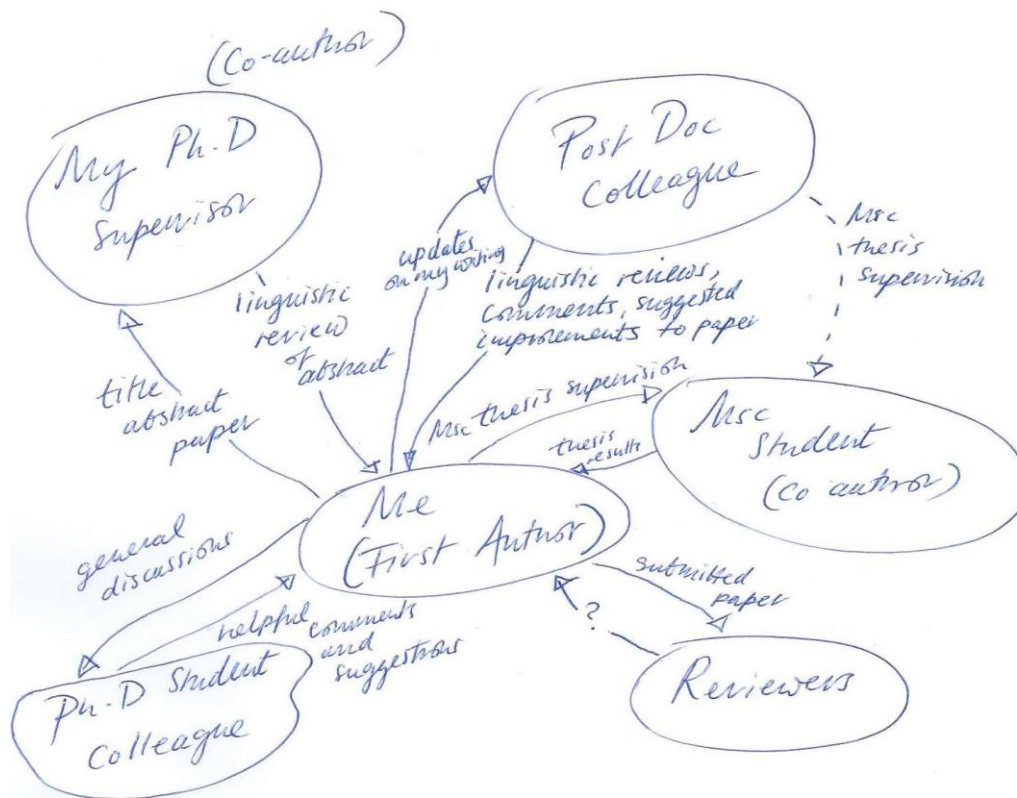


Figure 2. ER's multilingual feedback and Rolli's notes, which formed the basis of a new version of the text.

As the deadline for submission approached, the text was given to an NES colleague, FR, for proof-reading. FR introduced 12 sentence-level changes to correct errors of punctuation and article usage, and to turn contracted forms into full forms. According to Rolli in Interview 3, FR's changes were mainly *'small-scale'* in comparison to the amount done previously by ER. A final version of the complete text was submitted to the journal on 20 February 2010.

### Reflection on process up to submission

Reflecting on the process up to submission of the article in Interview 2, Rolli drew a sketch of how he saw his writing network up to that point. Figure 3 shows the sketch Rolli produced at the interview.



The most helpful input came from (so far):

1. Msc Student (he worked out the method the paper is about; this was the basis)
2. Post Doc Colleague (very helpful with structuring and writing, he helped me a lot)
3. PhD student/colleague (many general discussions)
4. Supervisor (so far only limited input; but will be very helpful once the paper is accepted)

Figure 3. Rolli's sketch of his writing network

In the sketch Rolli is surrounded by his supervisor Professor DR, the post doc Peer ER, the MSc student AR, unnamed reviewers and a fellow PhD student Peer CR. Beneath the sketch Rolli ranked each actor in terms of 'the most helpful input... (so far)'. Interestingly, at this point Rolli placed AR at the top of the list because he felt that AR 'worked out the method the paper is about; this was the basis.' Peer ER was ranked in second place and Peer CR in third place. Rolli's supervisor, Professor DR, was ranked last. Describing the help so far received from Professor DR, Rolli wrote 'so far only limited input; but will be very helpful once the paper is accepted.' In his sketch the arrows connecting Rolli to his supervisor show that Rolli had provided Professor DR with the 'title, abstract, paper' but had received only a 'linguistic review' and 'comments' on the abstract in return. By comparison, Rolli had given Peer ER some 'updates on (his) writing' and had received 'linguistic reviews, comments and improvements' and an entire section of the paper in return. Figure 3 exemplifies how Rolli greatly valued the input from his other colleague, Peer CR, with whom he had had 'general discussions' and had received 'helpful comments and suggestions.' Peer CR's feedback was ranked higher than that received from his supervisor.



### *Reviewer feedback*

Around three months later, on 29 April, Rolli heard from the editor of the journal, JR, that the paper had been rejected. All three reviewers (GR, HR and IR) mentioned problems establishing the novel contribution of the work and the need to compare existing approaches and literature. Reviewer GR commented that *'clarifications are needed to improve the understanding of the paper'*. The second reviewer, HR, complained that not enough detail had been given in order for the reader to be able to understand and evaluate the claims that it made.

Reflecting on the rejection of the article, Rolli said he had been convinced that the article stood a good chance of being published because the new tool it described was *'very novel.'* Rolli felt it was ironic that this very novelty made it difficult to relate to previous literature. The reason that only limited discussion was given to related work was that the existing approaches were not really related to the new method: *'...really there exists nothing which does the same thing so far, there is no previous work'*.

### *Decision to rewrite as a poster*

On 29 May, one month after receiving the rejection, Rolli discussed with Professor DR and Peer ER what to do with the article. During the subsequent discussion Professor DR suggested that one option would be to rewrite the text as a poster for a forthcoming international conference. ER was also involved in the decision and emphasised that he knew LR, one of the people running one of the workshops who could help *'get the poster accepted'*.

Initially Rolli felt the decision to go for a poster would be *'too difficult'* because it would involve reducing the text from 10 pages to just two. However, the advantages would be that there would be less of a delay than in resubmitting to a journal and having to wait another three or four months for reviews.

From May to June the paper underwent a substantial editing process as eight pages were cut from the text. This time Rolli mainly worked alone on the text but was helped by *'several informal discussions'* with co-workers ER and CR. Rolli explained how much of the editing work consisted of paring down the article to its basic meaning and making the text more *'reader-friendly'*. As a result of this process the average sentence length of the text was reduced from 37 to 28 words. In addition, only two figures were used to illustrate the procedure, as opposed to 11 figures and six tables in the original paper. The conclusion was reduced from 18 to just 6 lines.

By 25 June Rolli's poster (Draft 12) was finished and was subsequently reviewed by DR and ER. Once again Peer ER provided more extensive feedback than Professor DR, who confined himself to surface level changes. ER suggested replacing some of the more complex sentences in the poster with shorter alternatives.

On 30 June Rolli responded to ER's questions by email and explained how he had addressed most of these issues in his revised version of the poster. Interestingly, this time Rolli did not feel compelled to take on board all of ER's suggested changes: *'I have decided to keep this the same'*. This episode is significant as it clearly demonstrates Rolli's growing confidence as an academic writer. Previously Rolli had accepted all the changes suggested by DR and ER and had not questioned any of the feedback he had received. However, from this point onwards Rolli seemed to have reached a level of confidence where he felt able to resist some of the changes suggested to him and had developed a clear rationale for maintaining certain terms in the text. This suggests a growing sense of autonomy and improved awareness about what constituted appropriate use of language for the intended audience of the text.

Following ER's review and Rolli's subsequent revision, another version of the text (Draft 14) was reviewed by Professor DR on 1 July, the first time Rolli's supervisor had commented on the whole text. Surprisingly, however, Professor DR again confined himself to sentence level language changes and made no comment on the contents.

In this review, Professor DR adopted a somewhat unusual feedback strategy of deleting whole sentences and then replacing them with his own versions, which differed only moderately from the original. For example the phrase: *'The here presented work'* was deleted and replaced by *'The work presented here'*. Similarly in the Conclusion, the sentence *'Future work should address graphical layout options'* was deleted and replaced with *'Future work will address graphical layout options'*. Unlike ER, DR gave no written explanation of the rationale for these changes, some of which were again not obvious to Rolli. Interestingly, although Rolli was not always completely clear on why DR had made the changes to the text, all of DR's changes were subsequently accepted by Rolli in the final version of the poster. Following its submission on 3 July, the poster was accepted and presented at a large international conference in Sydney, Australia. A 4-page version of the poster was subsequently published in the international conference's proceedings a month later.

### *Rolli's reflections on the writing process*

In Interview 3 Rolli was asked which of the actors had provided the most useful feedback or helpful comments on the text. Rolli responded:

*'...I think ER first, he was pushing me to think more carefully...and then other colleagues in our group with informal discussions about the field... and also about writing issues, for example CR was quickly scanning and suggesting some things. And from DR (the supervisor) I got feedback after it was accepted to improve the version that was published...'*

Rolli also explicitly mentioned that Peer ER had been able to work on both content and language at the same time: *'ER was pointing out all those language things - how to write much more shorter (sic) and concisely - but also to focus on the message for this audience'*. Ultimately Rolli felt ER had helped him *'much more than DR.'* Compared to ER, DR's changes were *'quite minor...I think the feedback from DR was mostly after it was accepted and at this point you should not change too much anyway.'*

In addition, Rolli emphasised that Peer ER helped broker the final publication of the text in the conference proceedings. ER had *'good connections to LR'*, the person in charge of editing the proceedings publication. According to Rolli this connection was useful to ensure the paper was included in the proceedings publication, as not all workshop presentations or posters would be included.

Interestingly, by the end of the case study, Rolli's assessment about which of the actors was most helpful had changed from when he had drawn the sketch in Interview 2. At that time Rolli ranked AR as the most important actor because AR had done the initial work as part of his MSc project, which had been supervised by Rolli and ER. However, AR was not mentioned as such a significant contributor to the writing process by Rolli in Interview 3. This was because AR's subsequent role in the final version of the article was confined to *'some input about illustrations'*. Another change was that at the time of drawing the sketch in Interview 2 Rolli was hopeful he would get more help from Professor DR at a later stage in the process. As it turned out, however, the subsequent feedback received from DR left Rolli feeling *'disappointed to some extent'*.

In Interview 3 Rolli also spoke about how he had gained confidence from the writing process: *'I have seen that I can already write something down and get it accepted somewhere for the next time, so it's not so hard anymore...'* These comments together with Rolli's increasing readiness to resist changes made to his text support the view that the writing process had helped him to gain in confidence and autonomy.

By the end of the case Rolli no longer felt disadvantaged when compared to NES writers of English. In Interview 3 he commented: *'I don't think that's a disadvantage now... I feel I have got a lot of training in writing research texts now in English'*. These comments suggest the writing and publication process had led to a shift in how Rolli perceived himself in relation to the wider discourse community.

## Discussion

The current case study strongly supports the idea of a novice scholar moving from a peripheral to a more centrally-located position within a disciplinary COP (Lave and Wenger 1991 and Flowerdew 2000). Rolli's centripetal movement from the periphery to a more centrally located position in the COP was largely dependent on the extensive peer feedback and support he received from his co-worker, ER, who seems to have played a pivotal role in enculturating Rolli into the disciplinary practice. Rolli's success in finally achieving publication was helped by ER's shaping, polishing and brokering of the text. In this process ER adopted a style of feedback characterised by frequent interpersonal comments, question raising, use of alternative suggestions, and a sense of collaborative endeavour. As a result of this feedback Rolli seems to have been tacitly enculturated into aspects of the discourse and was motivated to work on later versions of the text in an increasingly autonomous way. In addition to extensive shaping of Rolli's text prior to its initial submission, ER also helped to polish the poster submission and brokered the publication of the final version of the text.

Peer ER's approachability, accessibility and proximity to Rolli, and his willingness to give extensive dialogic feedback seem to have also been significant factors in helping Rolli to become a more confident and autonomous writer. By the end of the case history, Rolli felt confident enough to undertake the major task of reducing the text from a 10-page article to a two-page poster on his own. The support obtained from Peer ER seems to have enabled Rolli to gain greater confidence and autonomy in his writing.

The significance of peer feedback for novice scholars has been identified in some previous studies of writing for scientific publication, for example Li and Flowerdew (2007: 108) mention the 'high value' that novice scientific writers attach to the role of the peer corrector, while Mehlenbacher *et al.* (2001: 17) emphasise the role of peer feedback as a 'best practice strategy' in the teaching of academic writing. The findings from the current case study confirm the notion that feedback from proximal but slightly more experienced peers can be an extremely useful and motivating form of support in the writing-for-publication process. This fact stands in contrast to some previous studies of peer feedback in academic writing, which have tended to downplay the affective role of peer feedback (Leki 1991, Saito 1994 and Zhang 1995).

While previous case studies of novice scholars writing for publication (e.g. Belcher 1994, Dong 1996, Blakeslee 1997 and Flowerdew 2000) have focused almost exclusively on the dyadic supervisor-supervisee relationships in a COP, the current case study shows the significant role which can be played by near peers in this process. This finding is supported by Lave and Wenger's (1991: 57) emphasis on 'the importance of near-peers in the circulation of knowledgeable skill' in a COP and triadic sets of relations rather than purely dyadic ones. This case suggests that a 'near peer' or slightly more-experienced co-worker like ER is well placed to help enculturate a novice into the social practices of the COP.

The case suggests that the type of feedback strategy adopted by different actors can play a crucial role in the progress that a novice scholar makes. Peer ER's feedback (raising questions, explaining the rationale for changes, providing models and alternative paragraphs for Rolli to consider) and his awareness of the importance of interpersonal strategies seem to have provided better opportunities for learning and centripetal development than feedback from the supervisor DR, who seems to have focused almost exclusively on correcting a text. Professor DR's initial feedback comments on, and changes to, Rolli's drafts do not seem to have been so effective because the rationale for changes made was not explicit and feedback comments tended to be overly directive, leaving Rolli feeling '*disappointed to some extent*'.

The case illustrates the complexity of doctoral supervision and suggests that a successful supervisor may need to move between different roles as a mentor, guide and collaborator rather than just as a text corrector, as some previous research has claimed (e.g. Hockey 1997). In this respect Peer ER, who had the ability to shift between shaping, polishing, and brokering the text, as well as to respond to both language and content issues, can be seen as

something of a model of collaborative supervision. ER's successful contributions were in part related to his ability to shift between different roles in this way.

At the same time, the case suggests that slightly more-experienced colleagues and peers such as ER are well placed to provide feedback which fits better with a partnership model of supervision. As Dysthe (2002) has pointed out, supervisors who adopt a more symmetrical relationship and characterise writing a text or thesis as a collaborative endeavour are likely to use dialogic feedback, which in turn fosters independent thinking and reflection. In this regard, several previous researchers in the field of L2 writing instruction (e.g Belcher 2007: 20) have argued that writing teachers should raise novice academic writers' awareness of 'the relationship between authorship and authority' and should help them to recognise that some requests for changes from supervisors may be negotiable (Burrough-Boenisch 2003 and Swales and Feak 2000).

In conclusion the case shows that 'the location and distribution of authority' in expert/novice interactions (Blakeslee 1997: 125) can result in less effective feedback and may restrict novice scholars' opportunities for negotiating about, responding to and learning from the feedback they receive. This suggests that in order for novice scholars to gain adequate experience, overly directive or authoritative supervisors should be prepared to relinquish some of their authority and adopt more of a partnership model of supervision.

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**Appendix**

Table 2. DR's feedback on Rolli's abstract

<b>Type of feedback comment or orthographic mark</b>	<b>Focus of feedback: Language / Content</b>
3 circles	<b>Language: punctuation</b> Indicating need for commas
2 circles 2 question marks	<b>Language: terminology</b> Suggesting uncertainty about the terms 'unweaving' and 'basic'
35 words deleted in pencil	<b>Language: length</b> Shortening Abstract
Minor reformulations to 2 sentences	<b>Language: readability</b> <i>'This enables a refactoring...'</i>  <b>Changed to:</b> <i>'and thus helps refactor...'</i>
1 wavy line 1 question mark	<b>Content: strength of claim</b> Suggesting doubtful nature of claim: <i>'We show that our approach can successfully support refactoring'</i>
1 comment at end of abstract	<b>Content:</b> <i>'Say more precisely that it is model-based; say more precisely that it's about requirements models with implicit variability'</i>

Table 3. Changes made by ER to Rolli's text

Section and type of change	Effect	Example	Number of changes
<b>Abstract</b>			
<b>Change to argument: 'rhetorical machining' (Gosden, 1995)</b>	Relevance to community emphasised	<i>'Companies are increasingly developing variations of their core software products thus unintentionally shifting from traditional development towards software product line development'</i> <b>Changed to:</b> <i>'To address the needs of different market and user segments companies develop variations of their software products...'</i>	<b>6</b>
<b>Sentence level changes</b>	Grammar corrected	<i>'Software requirements models <u>having</u> implicit variability ...'</i> <b>Changed to:</b> <i>'Software requirements models <u>with</u> implicit variability...'</i>	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction</b>			
<b>Sentence reformulation</b>	Shorter sentence length	<i>'However building a dedicated variability modelling approach and establishing all necessary mappings is a considerable effort and hence often inhibits the explicit introduction of a software product line approach'</i> <b>Changed to:</b> <i>'It is evident that such an approach is a considerable effort and often inhibits the explicit introduction of a software product line approach'</i>	<b>15</b>
<b>Change to register</b>	Less formal style	<i>'Since'</i> <b>Changed to:</b> <i>'because'</i>	<b>7</b>
<b>Sentence deletions</b>	Length reduced from 88 to 56 lines	<i>'Products are getting more complex and need to satisfy more requirements than ever'</i> <b>Deleted</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>			
<b>Sentence deletions</b>	Length reduced from 29 to 18 lines	<i>'This approach is called feature unweaving and can successfully be used for refactoring reference requirements models into software product line models with aspect oriented modelling'</i> <b>Deleted</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Sentence level changes</b>	More impersonal style	<i>'We have ...'</i> <b>Changed to:</b> <i>'The paper has ...'</i>	<b>3</b>
<b>Sentence level changes</b>	Grammar corrected, claim strengthened	<i>'The approach could improve...'</i> <b>Changed to:</b> <i>'The approach improves...'</i>	<b>2</b>



Table 4. Interpersonal aspects of ER's feedback on Rolli's text

Interpersonal aspect	Example	Number of comments
Raising questions	'Are you ready to demonstrate that?'	10
Making suggestions	'Evtl. noch angeben was die added Value sein würde im Vergleich' (Probably still add what the added value would be in comparison)	5
Instructing or directing writer to make changes	'Stattdessen: Anpassung an Markt und Nutzersegmente' (Instead of this: focus on the market and user segment)	4
Addressing writer directly by name	'Rolli dies sind doch selbst gemachte Probleme' (Rolli, but these problems are self-created)	4
Praising	'Deine Fussnote mit Link ist Gut' (Your footnote with the link is good)	2
Explaining rationale for changes made to text	'Dies hilft uns die Relevanz zu erklären' (This helps us to explain the relevance)	2
Providing alternative paragraph	'Gegenvorschlag... ' (Alternative suggestion)	2
Providing models	'Structure of this second paragraph: 1) contribution = feature unweaving (this is ok) 2) what is feature unweaving? 3) what are the benefits of feature unweaving in terms of the outlined problem? 4) how was the approach validated? What has been learned?'	2
Criticising	'Ich verstehe diese Satz nicht' (I don't understand this sentence)	2

Table 5. Classification of written feedback comments

<p><b>A. Focus of Feedback Comment</b></p> <p><b>1. Focus on content or 'ideational features' of text</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Scientific reasoning, errors of own data</li><li>b. Define terms</li><li>c. Incomplete literature</li><li>d. Procedural infelicities or lack of rigour</li><li>e. Statistical irregularities</li><li>f. Incorrect scientific interpretation of other authors</li><li>g. Lack of association between claim and prior research</li><li>h. Lack of association between claim and data</li><li>i. Explain why data are unusual</li><li>j. Accuracy or details of tables/figures</li><li>k. Fuller explanation of table/figures</li><li>l. Other technical detail</li></ul> <p><b>2. Focus on language or 'textual features' of text</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Problems with whole text organisation</li><li>b. Problems with paragraph organisation</li><li>c. Problems with information flow</li><li>d. Wrong section (e.g. move to discussion)</li><li>e. Incoherent or lack of clarity</li><li>f. Problems with readability</li><li>g. Problems with verbosity</li><li>h. Use particular specialist terminology</li><li>i. Repetitions</li><li>j. Typos, spellings</li><li>k. Up-tone or give more salience to novelty feature (Strengthen claim)</li><li>l. Down tone or hedge (Reduce strength of claim)</li></ul> <p><b>B. Language of Comment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. English</li><li>2. German</li></ul> <p><b>C. Response of Author</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Accepted</li><li>2. Rejected</li></ul>
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Table 6. Categories used to analyse interpersonal aspects of written feedback

<p><b>Interpersonal aspects of feedback</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Praising</li><li>b. Making suggestions</li><li>c. Criticising</li><li>d. Raising questions</li><li>e. Explaining reason for changes made to text</li><li>f. Instructing or directing writer to make changes</li><li>g. Providing models to help writer</li><li>h. Addressing writer directly with 'Du' / 'Sie' / 'you'</li><li>i. Addressing writer directly by name</li></ul>
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