

# The proofreading of student writing: differing perspectives, consensual policies

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Deconstruction**

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# Structure of talk

- ▶ **PhD pilot and main study research (Richards, 2022)**
  1. Research design: title, questions, mixed-methods, participants
  2. Example interventions of proofreader changes
  3. Findings - Quantitative and qualitative
  4. Stakeholder tool for academics when permitting the proofreading of student work for assessment

# Research Title & Questions

- ▶ **Title:** An investigation into proofreading practices at a UK university: the perspectives of an L2 student, proofreader, and lecturers
- ▶ **Overarching research question:**
  - How do students, proofreaders, and lecturers perceive a range of proofreader interventions in terms of ethical appropriacy?

# Research Method Approach

## ► Used mixed methods:

- Quantitative - analysed proofreading interventions made to student participants' work i.e., what changes the proofreader made and how many changes through a taxonomy based on Harwood (2018) and Kruger and Bevan-Dye's (2010) frameworks
- Qualitative - discussed at interview changes that were and were not made to the student texts to investigate views on lighter and heavier touch interventions

# Participants

- ▶ *All participants were based at the same UK university*
- ▶ **Pilot study:**
  - An L1 Chinese-speaking student studying toward an MA in Applied Linguistics and TESOL
  - An L1 Spanish-speaking lecturer and an L1 English-speaker lecturer working in the Department of English Language and Linguistics

# Participants

## ► Main study:

- An L1 Spanish-speaking student studying toward a Doctorate in Education
- An L1 English-speaking professional proofreader who proofread the student's work without payment as they are friends.
- Two L1 English-speaking senior lecturers from:
  - 1) Department of English Language and Linguistics; and
  - 2) Department of Urban Studies and Planning - retired and proofread student work for assessment

# Quantitative Analysis - Example Interventions

- ▶ **Intervention categories included:**
  - Adding or deleting words
  - Substitution
  - Reordering words, phrases, or sentences
  - Rewriting
  - Recombining
  - Mechanical alteration
  - Structural editing
  - Meaning and content

# Quantitative Findings (1)

## ► Overall number of interventions

- Pilot MA text - 219 to 2,657 words (8.24 interventions/100 words)
- Main study EdD chapters/thesis - 5,577 to 124,341 words (4.48 interventions/100 words)

## ► In-text and comment interventions

- Pilot MA text - 215 in-text changes and 4 comments
- Main study EdD chapters/thesis - 4,574 (3.67/100 words) in-text changes, and 1003 (0.80/100 words) comments



## Quantitative Findings (2)

- ▶ **Most interventions were lighter-touch**
  - Pilot MA text
    - **Substitution** (82, 3.08/100 words)
    - **Addition and mechanical alteration** (47, 1.76/100 words)
  - Main Study EdD chapters/thesis
    - **Mechanical alteration** (2931, 2.35/100 words)
    - **Reference list** (1133, 0.91/100 words)
    - **Substitution** (842, 0.67/100 words)

# Quantitative Findings (3)

## ► Minimal/no intervention

- **Recombining** - Pilot (7)/Main study (1)
- **Reordering** - Pilot (3)/Main study (41)
- **Rewriting** - Pilot (1)/Main study (13)
- **Meaning and Content** - Pilot (no changes)/Main study (1)

# Qualitative Findings Consensus(1)

## ► Acceptable interventions

### ➤ Pilot MA Text

1. Addition and deletion
2. Mechanical alteration
3. Reordering
4. Recombining

### ➤ Main Study EdD chapters/thesis

1. Minor addition
2. Mechanical alteration
3. Reordering words within a sentence
4. Substitution

## Qualitative Findings Consensus (2)

### ► Questionable/unacceptable interventions

#### ➤ Pilot MA text

1. Adding a year to a citation
2. Rewriting

#### ➤ Main Study EdD Chapters/Thesis

1. Deletion
2. Meaning
3. Structure

### ► Comments preferred over in-text changes for both studies

- #### ➤ Comments preferred over in-text changes (cf. Harwood, 2019; Kruger and Bevan-Dye, 2010) to ensure proofreading is educative (cf. Harwood, 2022)

# Qualitative Findings Disagreements

## ► Pilot Study

- Student had a more permissive view of proofreading than lecturers but opinions diverged between the latter regarding number of overall changes (cf. Harwood, 2023)

## ► Main Study

- Student was more discerning than the pilot and general consensus as to un/ethical proofreading but some disagreements e.g., rewriting, and meaning and content

# Stakeholder tool

- ▶ Findings led to development of a stakeholder tool (Richards, in preparation)
- ▶ Limits placed on proofreaders by academics are formative
- ▶ Stakeholder tool shows three categories of potentially acceptable, questionable, and unacceptable forms of proofreading intervention

# Example Intervention - Minor Addition

- ▶ Minor addition involves the proofreader adding one to five words to a student's text.
  - 1) Adding the words 'flexible environment' in the first example is acceptable as it had already been referred to earlier by the student.
  - 2) Adding 'providing/strengthening' in the second is even more appropriate as it is a suggestion rather than a direct change by the proofreader.

The student's original text	The proofreader's intervention
1. Thus, while the first FL principle may be closely linked to social constructivism, the second FL principle could be connected with a broader understanding of constructivism.	1. Thus, while the first FL principle, <b>flexible environment</b> , may be closely linked to social constructivism, the second FL principle could be connected with a broader understanding of constructivism. (in-text)
2. Ridley (2012) further explains how this also influences the formulation of RQ as well as the justification for researching this topic.	2. The proofreader suggested 'as well as <b>providing/strengthening</b> the justification for researching a chosen topic'?' (comment)

Does the supervisor approve of the proofreader making minor addition interventions?

Yes

No

Reason: \_\_\_\_\_

# Stakeholder Agreement Permitting Proofreading

- ▶ Stakeholder tool feeds into a ‘Stakeholder Agreement Permitting Proofreading’ document
- ▶ Document is based on that of the Society of English-language Professionals in the Netherlands (SENSE) (SENSE, 2016)



# Implementation of Stakeholder Tool

- Needs much organisation (Salter-Dvorak, 2019) and difficult to establish (Harwood, 2023)
- Stakeholder tool is designed to advise academics as to un/ethical forms of proofreading, allowing them to make informed decisions concerning suitable forms of third-party intervention
- Important to educate staff and students (Bretag and Mahmud (2016, pp. 468-469)
- Core of stakeholder tool is ethically appropriate forms of proofreading and communication amongst stakeholders (see Alhojailan, 2019; Harwood 2018, 2019; Harwood et al. 2009, 2010, 2012; Kim, 2019; Kim and LaBianca, 2018; McNally and Kooyman, 2017)

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Thank you!