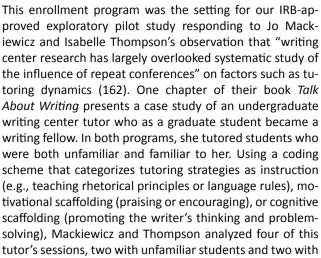# Comparing Tutoring Strategies in Recent Tutorials

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In addition to an appointment-based program typical of most writing centers, our Writing Center features a non-credit enrollment program in which students meet with the same tutor once or twice a week all semester. Tutors and students report that these regular meetings generate rapport and foster productive working relationships. Recurrent tutorials allow the tutor to become familiar with the student's writing strengths and struggles, and the student gets to know the tutor as a person and a writer. In between course assignments, students sometimes write on topics of their own choosing and discuss that writing with their tutor, which often strengthens their bonds with each other.

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This enrollment program was the setting for our IRB-approved exploratory pilot study responding to Jo Mackiewicz and Isabelle Thompson's observation that "writing center research has largely overlooked systematic study of the influence of repeat conferences" on factors such as tutoring dynamics (162). One chapter of their book *Talk About Writing* presents a case study of an undergraduate writing center tutor who as a graduate student became a writing fellow. In both programs, she tutored students who were both unfamiliar and familiar to her. Using a coding scheme that categorizes tutoring strategies as instruction (e.g., teaching rhetorical principles or language rules), motivational scaffolding (praising or encouraging), or cognitive scaffolding (promoting the writer's thinking and problem-solving), Mackiewicz and Thompson analyzed four of this tutor's sessions, two with unfamiliar students and two with

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more familiar ones. The authors found that familiarity had a small influence on the tutor's strategies. In the first sessions, when the student and tutor were not as familiar with each other, the tutor showed concern more frequently, a strategy the authors categorized as motivational scaffolding. In the second sessions, when the

student and tutor knew each other better, the tutor more frequently used the cognitive scaffolding strategy of reading aloud. They noted, however, that the stage of the writing process was a complicating factor; the tutor was also more likely to read aloud when they were revising a draft rather than, say, brainstorming.

Our study analyzes two tutorials between an experienced graduate student tutor and an undergraduate student, both non-native speakers of English. Both tutorials occur at the same stage of the writing process; both involve reading drafts aloud for revision purposes. However, the second tutorial occurred later in the semester when tutor and student knew one another better, and on a draft written not for a course, but for the tutor herself. Our goal was to discover whether a greater degree of personal and topic familiarity, as well as the nature of the writing's audience, influence the tutorial strategies and dynamics of the sessions.

Other researchers have found Mackiewicz and Thompson's coding scheme useful, so we were excited to try it. Mike Mattison and Kaitlyn Zebell used it to show how two undergraduate tutors over two years developed confidence in their instructional abilities. Kathy Rose and Jillian Grauman used it to analyze the effects of tutors' motivational strategies on transfer of learning. Most recently, Julia Bleakney and Sarah Peterson Pittock used it to examine tutor influence on student revisions. In our study, the earlier tutorial, which took place in the fourth week of an eight-week summer session, focused on a topic unfamiliar to both tutor and student. The second tutorial occurred in the seventh week on a draft written expressly for the tutor on a topic familiar to both parties. First, we wanted to compare the content of the earlier and later tutorial, which we defined in terms of the sessions' focus, audience, structure, and topic episodes (exchanges on particular writing issues). Then, we wanted to compare the tutoring strategies of the two tutorials—that is, the distribution of instruction and cognitive and motivational scaffolding. The following research questions guided our analysis of the data:

1. What are possible effects of the degree of personal and topic familiarity on the content of the earlier and later tutorial? That is, what are the focus, audience, structure, and topic episodes of each session?

2. What are possible effects of the degree of personal and topic familiarity on the distribution of tutoring strategies in the earlier and later tutorial? That is, to what extent does the tutor use instructional, cognitive scaffold-

ing, and motivational scaffolding strategies in each session?

METHODS

The participants in this exploratory case study were international student second-language writers. Carmen, the tutor, is a Latin American graduate student in Education. Like the tutors in *Talk About Writing*, she is experienced; at the time of the study, she had been tutoring for five years in the Writing Center, including its satellite Spanish Writing Center. Her English proficiency is near native. The student, Se-hun, is a Computer Science major from Korea. A sophomore enrolled in Rhetoric, he is of intermediate English proficiency. Both names are pseudonyms.

The data collected for the study consist of two 24-minute recorded tutorials, transcribed and then analyzed in terms of focus, audience, structure, topic episodes, and tutorial strategies. These tutorials were chosen because one occurred in the middle of the summer term (week 4) when Carmen and Se-hun had already met six times, and the other occurred toward the end (week 7) when they were more familiar with one another. Between the two recorded sessions, Carmen and Se-hun met four times.

As in *Talk about Writing*, the transcripts were coded by identifying the tutoring strategies used. It made sense to first analyze the content of the tutorials to set the stage and then examine the distribution of tutoring strategies. We further categorized topic episodes into rhetorical and linguistic exchanges because we plan to apply Mackiewicz and Thompson's coding scheme to analyze more conferences with second language writers, which often include more attention to language.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Content of the Earlier Tutorial

Focus and Audience. Carmen helped Se-hun with a rhetorical analysis of materials (brochures, programs, and posters in the university library's archives) used to promote the Chautauqua circuit, an early 20th century program of entertainment and education that traveled to rural American towns. For this rhetoric assignment, the classroom instructor was the primary audience; students had to make a claim about Chautauqua rhetoric and support it with rhetorical analyses of the materials. The setting—the rural American Midwest 100 years ago—and the nature of the movement were unfamiliar to both Carmen and Se-hun. In fact, at first Carmen thought a Chautauqua was a circus. The assignment was even chal-

lenging for American writing center tutors and students who grew up and were educated in the United States.

Structure: What happens in this tutorial? Carmen reads aloud and comments as Se-hun types, making the changes she recommends. He is receptive to her recommendations, but wants to make sure he understands them, so he asks clarification questions. In terms of volubility (number of words), Carmen uses at least twenty times as many words as Se-hun; she drives the conference by reading aloud and making comments. Se-hun's contributions are limited. Only once, when Carmen is articulating her understanding of the Chautauqua movement's educational mission, does he reword what she says by suggesting the word "motivate." "Yes, yes, yes!" she praises. It is the climax of the tutorial and the single instance of collaborative knowledge-building. In an interview at the end of the term, Carmen indicated she did not intend to conduct the early session this directively but did so because Se-hun seemed unfamiliar with the conventions of academic writing.

Rhetorical and Linguistic Episodes
Carmen initiates all the topic episodes. Three of these are rhetorical episodes, two related to argument development and one related to cohesion. She points out that Se-hun has not provided support for one of his thesis points about the Chautauqua's educational mission, the topic episode on which they spend the most time. She also points out his need to add another 200 words to meet the assignment requirements. In terms of cohesion, she advises him to replace his sub-headings, not necessary in a short paper, with transitional sentences. In between commenting on these larger issues, Carmen identifies nine language issues.

Tutoring Strategies in the Earlier Tutorial
As can be seen in Table 1, *instruction* clearly dominates this tutorial, encompassing 56% of the total strategies, with *telling and explaining*, both more direct and less mitigated than *suggesting* and not involving reasons, rules, or principles, constituting half of the instruction. As in the Mackiewicz and Thompson study of the tutor-turned-fellow, Se-hun's added unfamiliarity with the genre of academic writing, particularly its need for evidence, and with rhetorical analysis in particular, may explain Carmen's reliance on instruction, particularly *telling*. Cognitive scaffolding strategies account for only 24% of the total strategies and are led by the reading aloud cognitive strategy. Motivational scaffolding strategies constitute 20% of the total.

Tutorial	Instruction		Cognitive Scheduling		Motivational Scaffolding	
	Earlier	Later	Earlier	Later	Earlier	Later
Telling	25 (50%)	14 (35%)				
Suggesting	10 (20%)	21 (40%)				
Explaining	15 (30%)	17 (25%)				
Reading Aloud			10 (48%)	18 (35%)		
Responding / Reader			0 (0%)	25 (49%)		
Hinting			2 (10%)	3 (6%)		
Prompting			6 (28%)	0 (0%)		
Pumping			3 (14%)	3 (6%)		
Forcing a Choice			0 (0%)	2 (4%)		
Showing Concern					10 (55%)	2 (5%)
Praising					5 (28%)	38 (93%)
Encouraging Ownership					2 (11%)	0 (0%)
Using Humor					1 (6%)	1 (2%)
Total	50 (56%)	52 (36%)	21 (24%)	60 (35%)	18 (20%)	41 (29%)

Table 1: Strategies of Instruction, Cognitive Scaffolding, and Motivational Scaffolding in the Earlier and Later Tutorial

Content of the Later Tutorial

Focus and Audience: Carmen and Se-hun discussed a draft of Se-hun's review of the movie *Twilight*, which he wrote not as an assignment for a required course, but for Carmen, to convince her to watch it.

Structure: What happens in this tutorial? Again, Carmen reads aloud, but this time asking Se-hun questions, expressing delight and interest, modifying vocabulary and grammar, and suggesting ways to make the review more persuasive. Se-hun answers her questions, participating more than in the earlier tutorial, and again types on his laptop to make the changes she suggests.

Topic Episodes

The rhetorical episodes again concern development, but also organization, now in service of persuading Carmen as the reader. Ten linguistic episodes are woven into the discussion of rhetorical episodes, but more tightly than in the earlier tutorial. In terms of development, the description of the movie's magical fairytale *setting*, a word Carmen recommends, needs more details. She also suggests that he give equal weight to each of his three points. In particular, she asks him to explain why 1) vampires are appealing; 2) vampires and werewolves are rivals; and 3) forbidden love between vampires and humans is compelling to the audience. Concerning organization, she suggests a full paragraph for each point. Two of the language episodes involve idioms and expressions.

Tutoring Strategies in the Later Tutorial

Table 1 shows that the proportions and types of instructional and cognitive scaffolding strategies in the later tutorial differ dramatically from those of earlier one, reflecting both topic familiarity and the more familiar tutor-student relationship with Carmen as audience three weeks later. Not only does Carmen provide less instruction–which is reduced from 56% to 36% of the total strategies–but the nature of her instruction differs. Perhaps due the greater topic familiarity of a draft that will not be handed in or graded, a low-stakes rhetorical situation, her *telling* has decreased from 50% to 35% and is replaced in part by the more mitigated *suggesting*, which now constitutes 40% of the instructional strategies. In addition, not only have Carmen's cognitive scaffolding strategies increased from 22% to 35%, but the cognitive scaffolding strategy of *responding like a reader/listener*, not employed at all on the Chautauqua draft, is now the most common cognitive scaffolding strategy at 49% even though she is still reading aloud. The types and proportions of motivational scaffolding strategies have also changed, not only with an increase in praise, but with frequent use of, in Mackiewicz and Thompson's terms, a non-formulaic type of praise--showing interest in the topic and therefore in the student, as the following excerpt illustrates.

> Carmen: Okay, [Reading Aloud] *cold-blooded, drinking blood, an invisible being—there are lots of words to describe vampires*... [Praise: Showing Interest] Good, yes, it's weird, they're cold-blooded but they drink warm blood
>
> Se-hun: Hm-hm
>
> Carmen: [Reading Aloud] *Conventionally, they are treated as evil creatures of horror* hm, *however when I watch the movie Twilight, I couldn't help but be captivated by their incredible power and beauty and distinctive love*. [Praise: Showing Interest] Good. I really like this part because you start by changing something that is negative and evil...
>
> Se-hun: *into*, yes
>
> Carmen: *into* something that is interesting and appealing to watch

Note how Se-hun anticipates what Carmen will say and prompts her to finish her sentence with *into,* which she picks up.

Greater Personal and Topic Familiarity, Greater Collaboration

Looking closely at the interactional dynamics of the later tutorial,

we can also see a greater degree of collaboration than in the earlier one, partly due to the participants' mutual fascination with the topic, as shown in the following exchange in which their contributions overlap and complete one another's:

> Carmen: Imagine someone like me, who has not watched the movie, how would you describe, it's a magnificent forest with very tall trees (Se-hun typing) and when it snows, you said *image of snow*, when it snows it's magical. So it adds, okay, sorry, so I think what you mean is like the *setting* of the movie…

> Se-hun: Um-hum, yeah, *setting*…

> Carmen: …adds to the fairytale and the enchantment of the…

> Se-hun: Yeah, of the *story*. It's hard to see, I mean, uh, in Iowa or some urban areas, so

> Carmen: Um-hum, yeah. I know what you mean….

In the first exchange, he echoes *setting*. In the second, he finishes Carmen's sentence with story and adds a thought about how it contrasts with the more familiar urban settings viewers like them are accustomed to, which Carmen immediately affirms. In addition, Se-hun's contributions are more personal. He admits he is "sick of" the Chautauqua assignment, which he may not have done in a single appointment with an unfamiliar tutor. In response, Carmen reminds him that work on Chautauqua is almost over and tries to cheer him up by praising his *Twilight* draft. The fact that Se-hun feels comfortable enough to ask Carmen if she will watch *Twilight* with her husband shows their rapport, typical of relationships that develop between tutors and students in our enrollment program.

CONCLUSION

This pilot study of two tutorials shows how the degree of familiarity of the participants and the topic, as well as the draft's audience—either the classroom teacher as assigner/grader or the tutor as enlightened reader—can affect the tutor's strategies and the nature of their interaction. Although the study is exploratory and involves only two sessions of only one tutoring pair, with the second session only three weeks later than the first, it suggests that recurring appointments, especially when the paper topic is of interest to both, can increase student engagement and help tutors and writers work more collaboratively with each other.

More important are the results of testing the coding scheme. We found that employing Mackiewicz's and Thompson's tutoring strategies revealed compelling interactional contrasts between the two tutorials, especially the greater proportions of "suggesting," "responding like a reader," and co-constructing ideas and sentences in the later tutorial. These proportional differences in strategies show how a low-stakes piece of writing on a topic of high mutual interest to tutor and student when they know one another better can change tutoring dynamics. Our research team has since audio-taped more sessions between another tutoring pair that includes an international second language writer, and we are eager to apply the coding scheme to a new set of tutorials.

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