

Developing All Skills: Vocabulary and Grammar in Writing Instruction

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Why focus on vocabulary and grammar during writing instruction?

- Increases rhetorical effectiveness (Muncie, 2002)
- Improves reading comprehension (Laufer, 2003)
- Supports overall L2 development (Nagy, & Townsend, 2012)
- To meet expectations of academic and professional audiences (Lucas, T., & Grinberg, J., 2008; Beason, L., 2001).

How are grammar and vocabulary learned?

Incidental learning

Natural exposure to language

Reading, media, social interaction (Van Zeeland & Schmitt, 2013; Krashen, 1989)

Explicit instruction

Focus on formS

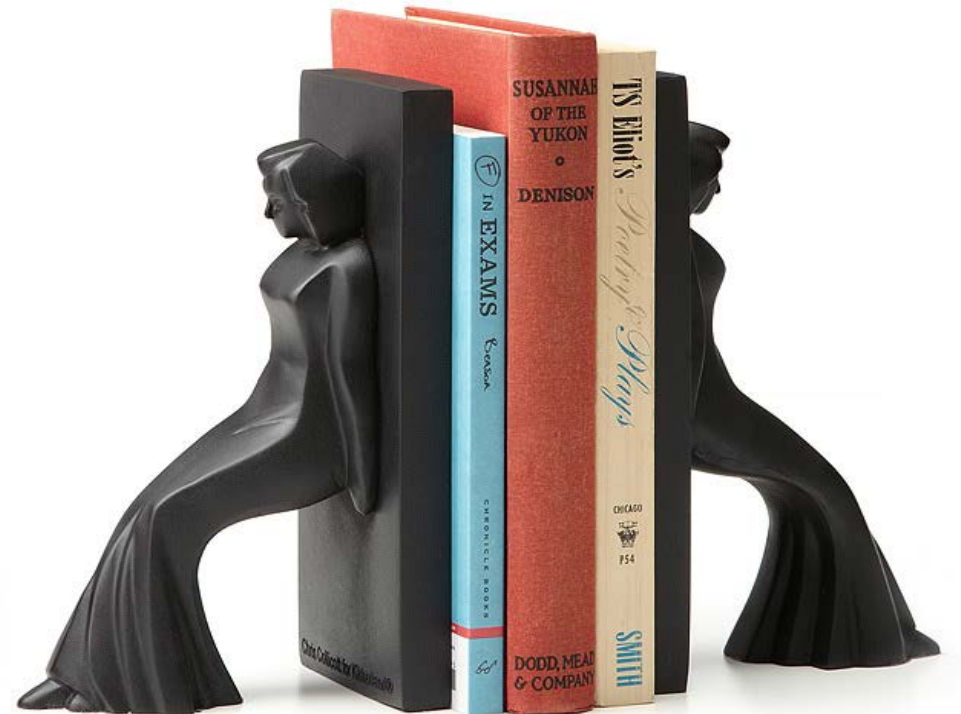
Focus on form: Noticing, just-in-time learning (Alcón, 2007)

What are the options for grammar and vocabulary in writing instruction?

Upfront: Pre-teach grammar and vocabulary, practice in controlled tasks, apply in open-ended tasks.

Just-in-Time: During the writing process, as need arises

Reactively: After working with students and seeing patterns in difficulties and needs



How do we incorporate grammar and vocabulary into writing instruction?

Upfront: Pre-teach grammar and vocabulary, practice in controlled tasks, apply in open-ended tasks.

Just-in-Time: During the writing process, as need arises

Reactively: After working with students and seeing patterns in difficulties and needs

Select vocabulary from readings; study topoi and genre features (Wolfe, Olson, and Wilder, 2014).

Strategically, during peer or teacher conferencing

Lessons with students texts to address class patterns (Harris, Miles, and Paine, Eds., 2010)

Clarity.

Where is the communication breakdown?

It is difficult to reach an assertion of Achilles' personalities without taking into fully account the history and social norm during that certain time. However, through the cause and affect of Achilles' anger we could call him a hero who regards the prize he earns from fighting the symbol of honor thus considers it imprescriptible. The paradoxical feature within Achilles is revealed when his continuous pursue of honor contradicted with his doubts toward the heroic ideology of dying in glory. Propensity for anger, doubt and self-contradiction all together portraits Achilles as an archetype of a thinking human.

(Data source: Fernández, Campbell and Koo's
Multilingual Writers Longitudinal Study;
Chinese L1 writer, first-year composition)

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Reading generously, what essential errors would you point out to the student?

Most of these groups are young who came to the U.S to join with their families, as well as for a better life, including the rest of us who came for the love of our goals, and also those who want to secure a successful future completing their higher education. ...I, myself would like to be an author for the rest of my life, sharing stories with children at school and people who've retired who enjoy to spend their time relaxing on reading. I believe the saying "to be happy keep busy". As we learn from the famous immigrant, we have to live for others to our duty must be to eradicate poverty, war, sickness and crime. We have to focus on the field of education inventing useful things for human being and animals keep clean respect the environment, in order to get a walkers' paradise atmosphere. War crime and disease can't pay anything, absolutely nothing.

(Data Source: Fernández, 2011,
Newspaper Project Adult ESL course;
Level 5, Amharic L1 Writer, Adult ESL)

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Common Impediments to Clarity

(Unpublished data from Fernández, Campbell and Koo's
Multilingual Writers Longitudinal Study, Davidson College)

Word choice

Derivational morphology (word form)
Idiomatic language
“the thesaurus effect”

Syntax

Misplaced modifiers
Placement of clauses and phrases

Discourse markers

Subordination/coordination
Transition words

Verb tense

Pronouns

Unclear reference

Punctuation

Commas
Fragments

How to Handle Clarity Issues

TREATABLE ERRORS

- Rule-governed grammatical structures
- Verb tense and form, S-V agreement, plural/possessive endings, fragments/run-ons, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, some word choice, some article use

NON-TREATABLE ERRORS

- Requires acquired language knowledge/socialization
- Most word choice errors, some pronouns and prepositions, word order and missing/unnecessary words.*

Error Types and How to Handle Them

(Ferris, 2011)

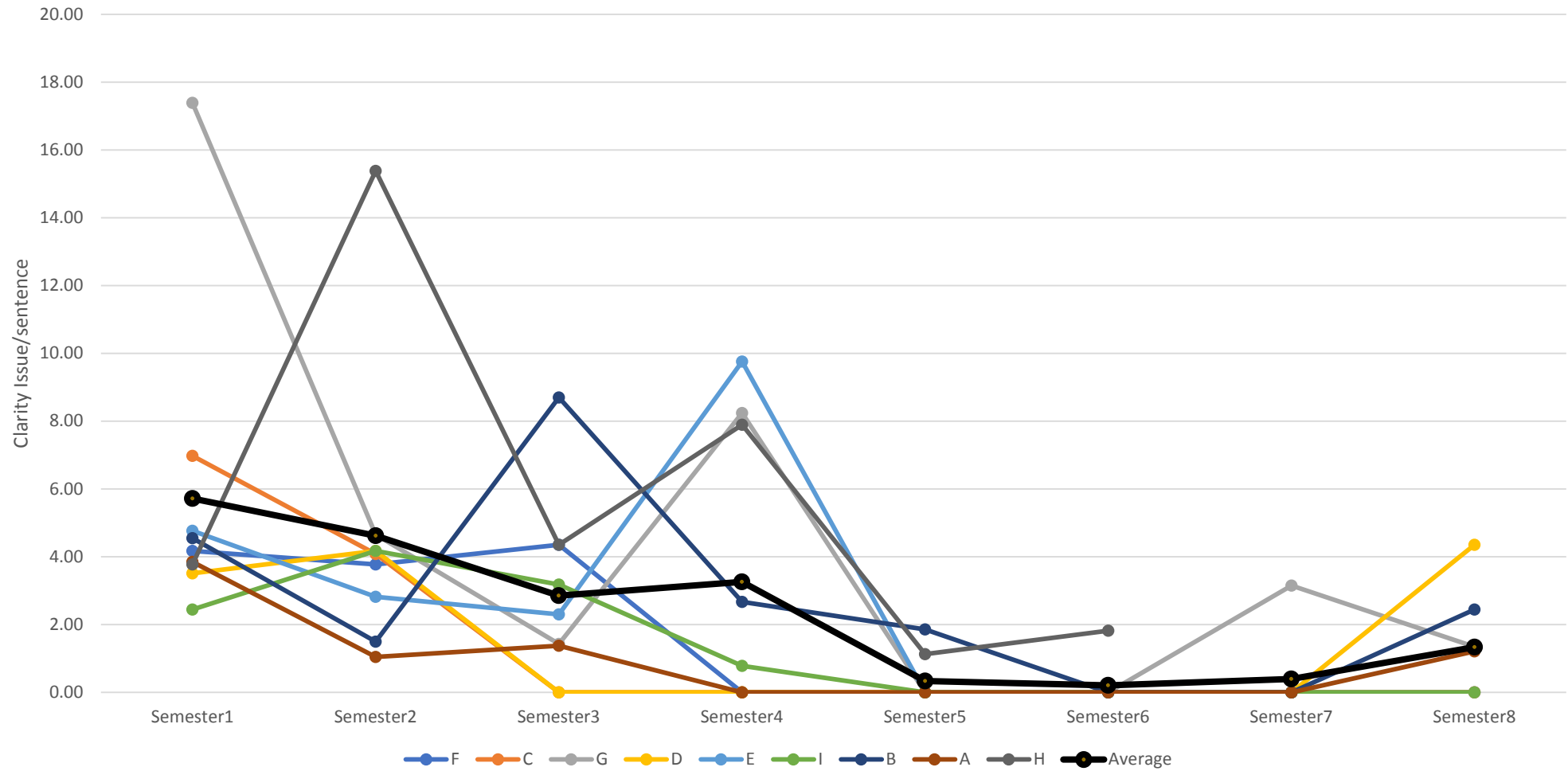
Indirect Feedback	Direct Feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do nothing; comment on thesis, structure, ideas, etc.• Point out specific errors and leave writers to revise on their own.• Make a checkmark or some other marking on the margin without pointing to specific error	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Comment and provide close guidance in some aspects of revision• Supply some corrections, depending on the type (e.g., non-treatable).• Model or reformulate* select sentences.

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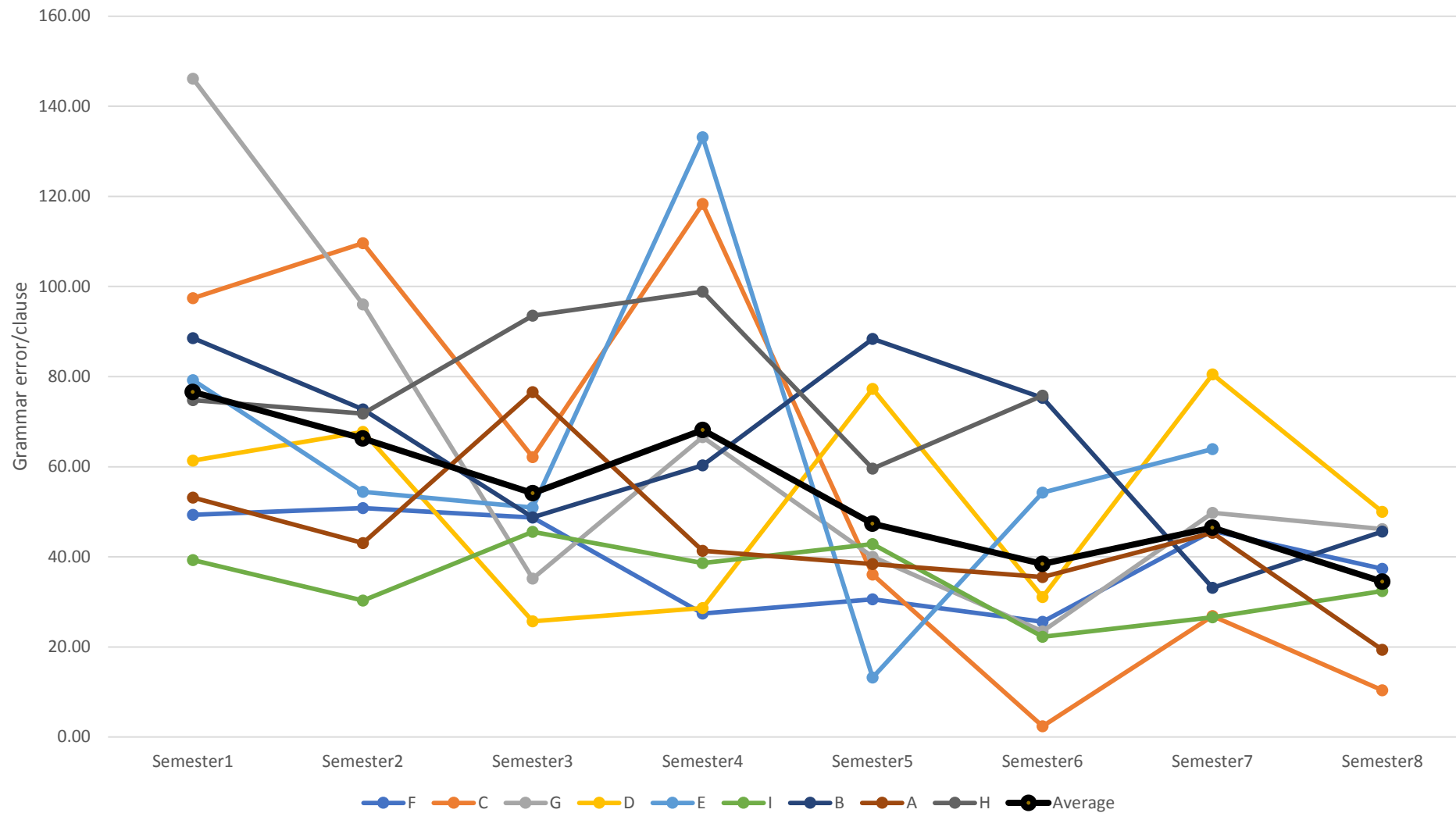
TREATABLE ERRORS	NON-TREATABLE ERRORS
<p data-bbox="428 504 894 554">Indirect Feedback</p> <p data-bbox="186 575 1136 682"><i>(Circle/outline words, tick margin, or ignore; students work out on their own)</i></p>	<p data-bbox="1625 504 2051 554">Direct Feedback</p> <p data-bbox="1358 575 2313 682"><i>(Help students with corrections, supply some corrections, reformulation)</i></p>
<ul data-bbox="122 725 1136 1232" style="list-style-type: none">•Rule-governed grammatical structures•Verb tense and form, S-V agreement, plural/possessive endings, fragments/run-ons, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, some word choice, some article use	<ul data-bbox="1230 725 2428 1160" style="list-style-type: none">•Requires acquired language knowledge/socialization•Most word choice errors, some pronouns and prepositions, word order and missing/unnecessary words.*

Individual growth in clarity over 4 semesters



Multilingual Writers Study, 2017,
Unpublished Data. Davidson College

Individual growth in accuracy over 4 semesters



Multilingual Writers Study, 2017,
Unpublished Data. Davidson College

Putting It All Together

- In class, while some students write, conference with others.
- Focus mostly on clarity; don't obsess over grammar otherwise.
- Teach students to give each other feedback in the same way; they can identify what is unclear to them, even if they don't always notice grammar mistakes.
- Address vocabulary and grammar through direct feedback: help students self-correct; it's okay to offer a new word or reformulate at times (Yu, L. , 2014).

In a sudty ceetlpmod by Cmarbigde Uinevrtisy, lteetr in wdros can apaper in any oedrr with the eticexpon of the fsirt and lsat lteer (they msut aaeppr in teihr cerocrt pitsonois), and senomoe can siltl raed what is wetitrn. They elipaxn that the hmaun mind deos not look at each lteetr iladdunliivy, but ineatsd lokos at the word as a ctmoplee uint. Pterty dran azimang, huh?

Non-native English writing can be read in the same way. Papers full of language errors are usually, at the very least, readable...until they are not. At that point, a vocabulary and/or grammar intervention is in order.