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What do proofreaders of student writing do to a master's essay? Differing interventions, worrying findings

Abstract

There has been much interest recently in researching the changes editors, supervisors, and other language brokers make to the writing of L2 researchers who are attempting to publish in English. However, studies focused on the pre-submission proofreading of *students' university essays* are rarer. In this study of student proofreading, 14 UK university proofreaders all proofread the same authentic, low quality master's essay written by an L2 speaker of English to enable a comparison of interventions. Proofreaders explained their interventions by means of a talk aloud while proofreading and at a post-proofreading interview. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data reveals evidence of widely differing practices and beliefs, with the number of interventions ranging from 113 to 472. Some proofreaders intervened at the level of content, making lengthy suggestions to improve the writer's essay structure and argumentation, while others were reluctant to do more than focus on the language. Disturbingly, some proofreaders introduced errors into the text while leaving the writer's errors uncorrected. I conclude that the results are cause for deep concern for universities striving to formulate ethical proofreading policies.

Keywords:

Academic writing; language support; editing; error correction; feedback; tutoring; English for academic purposes

1. Introduction: Why researching proofreading of student writing matters

Before submitting writing for assessment, university students in the UK may approach a ‘proofreader’ to improve their work. Indeed, proofreading adverts can be found around many campuses, but it is not always clear what types of interventions will be provided. The current study begins to fill this knowledge gap, investigating the quantity and type of interventions by 14 proofreaders who proofread the same master’s essay by an L2 speaker of English.

Articles and opinion pieces about proofreading of student writing appear frequently in publications such as *Times Higher Education* and are often shot through with a discourse of moral panic traditionally reserved for plagiarism and cheating (e.g., Scurr (2006), titled “It is not enough to read an essay and mark it; one must also guess if a student has purchased professional help”; and Baty (2006), titled “Fluency can be yours...for a small fee”). The concern is that students, especially L2 students with inadequate English, are buying their way to success by paying a proofreader to write their essays for them—or at least to rewrite their work to a standard they would never achieve working alone. Hence Scurr (2006) argues that proofreading services enable students to pass themselves off as having acquired academic literacy when doing so legitimately would require much time and effort.

Another alarming story is Shaw’s (2014) post in *The Guardian* higher education blog, which claims “Proofreading agencies boast of being able to improve grades”. The Cambridge Proofreading LCC website (proofreading.org) promises clients: “If you do not get a significantly improved grade from our proofreading and editing work, we will give you a full refund”. Shaw argues that proving students have solicited the help

of unscrupulous companies is “difficult...and there is uncertainty about whether universities are willing to act”. There follows two anecdotes from academics suggesting that universities turn a blind eye, and that the UK lags behind the US and Australia in formulating clear proofreading policies.¹ The blog post ends by pointing out that “international students bring in money, and lots of it, and there’s no cap on the number of international students that UK universities can recruit”. Hence the question is:

...how universities are going to ensure that they maintain professional integrity and standards, while providing academically sound degrees to the foreign students they recruit.

Some readers identified weak L2 students and over-lenient university admissions policies as the problem: one poster spoke of overseas students as “cash cows” with “appalling English language skills”. However, others defended the practice of proofreading:

Who in their right mind would submit an essay/assignment etc, without having it proofread in some capacity? I have an accomplished scholar (my partner) available to proofread my writing when needed and I’m an experienced lecturer.... International students, who arguably need proofreading the most, are least likely to have access to a native speaker within their own ‘community of practice’ and are therefore at a significant disadvantage. That is why they turn to professional proofreaders as any sensible person would.

Another response comes from a proofreader who differentiates between different forms of interventions, some more ethical than others:

I don’t alter the integrity of [L2 students’] work: that is copy-editing and is a far more invasive form of amending written material. Proofreading covers the

scrutiny of spelling, use of grammar and punctuation, typographical errors and consistency of layout and format. That's it. [...] To those of you who wish to construe that as 'cheating' in some way, I hope this alters your thinking. If not, try imagining writing a thesis in Korean, if it's not your mother-tongue.

Proofreading, then, is a topic which results in debate about incapable L2 student writers and negligent universities/language support services. And such debates can also be found in the scholarly literature around the ethics of language support, as in Starfield's (2016) account of how an L2 doctoral student at an Australian university was told by her supervisor he was not prepared to read her draft chapters until they had been proofread. Starfield explains how the student's academic skills support centre provides a range of programmes, but does not offer a proofreading service. The only help the centre could offer was to provide the student with a list of freelance proofreaders she could approach; but the centre was unable to advise her as to the quality or the extent of these proofreaders' work. Indeed, Starfield makes clear that the support centre has "no idea of what the proofreaders do in practice...proofreading in the contemporary university covers a wide range of activities" (p.58). Starfield highlights here how the precise roles and boundaries of proofreading student writing are contested, and there are likely different ideas within and between the various parties—lecturers, universities, and students—as to the ethically acceptable roles proofreaders can perform. Indeed, as Burrough-Boenisch (2013) and Harwood et al. (2009) claim, even the appropriate terminology is disputed ("proofreader", "copy editor", "error corrector", "language corrector", etc.). Here I prefer the term *proofreader* as this is the one most commonly used in the UK university context, however problematic and unstable its meaning. I follow Harwood et al. (2009) in

adopting an intentionally broad definition of proofreading—“third-party interventions (entailing written alteration) on assessed work in progress” (p.166)—rather than a more traditional, narrower definition of proofreading (e.g., by the Society for Editors and Proofreaders (2005:4): “a process of identifying typographical, linguistic...or positional errors or omissions”), since Harwood et al.’s studies show that some proofreaders of student writing exceed the narrower remit (e.g., by commenting on argumentation). The decisions proofreaders must make about these and other potential areas of intervention are not helped by the lack of proofreading guidelines at many universities—or, where guidelines do exist, their vagueness or inconsistency as to what is permitted (Baxter 2010; Burrough-Boenisch 2014; Harwood et al. 2009; Kruger & Bevan-Dye 2010).

While there has been much interest recently in researching proofreading in the context of English for publication (e.g. Burrough-Boenisch 2005; Flowerdew & Wang 2016; Li 2012; Lillis & Curry 2010; Luo & Hyland 2016, 2017; Martinez & Graf 2016; Willey & Tanimoto 2012, 2013, 2015), studies focusing on the proofreading of *student essay writing* are thinner on the ground. To set the scene for my study, I thus review four studies on the proofreading of student writing.

2. Studies of proofreaders and proofreading of student writing

A study by Lines (2016) is especially interesting given Lines’ status as a former proofreader who ran her own editing company for six years and mostly worked with Australian postgraduate theses. She describes how she was frequently asked to perform inappropriate proofreading. For instance, “on many occasions” a student

produced a compendium of work copied and pasted from the Internet and “ask[ed] [Lines] to link it all together and rewrite it to ‘make it sound like my own words.’” (p.376). Lines also claims that the majority of Australian proofreaders are not up to the job: she would regularly seek to hire new proofreaders for her business, and although “the vast majority of applicants lacked the requisite qualifications or skills..., many were already working in the industry.” She estimates that 80% of these proofreaders “are unqualified or unsuitable for the task” (p.375).

Lines contacted 50 proofreading services she identified via an Internet search, posing as a Saudi PhD student seeking inappropriate proofreading for his text (“for the content, will you...help me to improve if my ideas, argument, or information are wrong?,” p.373). 44 of the 50 proofreading services were prepared to meet this request, and worrying assurances were provided by some companies, including that the text would “read like native English regardless of the initial standard,” would “be passed or accepted,” or would “receive an improved grade” (p.373). Lines also explains that some of the websites featured student testimonials where the interventions described clearly went far beyond acceptable proofreading practices, for instance “thanking the editor for her assistance with...developing conceptual models and assisting with theoretical aspects of the thesis” (p.374). Lines’ conclusion is bleak:

If rates of [inappropriate] editing continue to rise, the number of graduating students who have dishonestly received their degrees will increase also. A degree from an English-speaking university implies a certain standard of English-language proficiency and is valued highly by both degree holders and potential employers. If students with poor language skills based on dishonestly

attained degrees continue to graduate, the value of Australian education as an export product will decrease.... (p.380)ⁱⁱ

As in the journalistic pieces discussed above, here we have something of a discourse of moral panic.

An interview-based study of proofreaders' profiles, beliefs, and practices at a UK university by Harwood et al. (2009, 2010, 2012) suggested that practices varied, with some interviewees happier than others to intervene not just at the level of grammar and syntax, but to make more substantial changes involving organization, argumentation and problematic content, highlighting what they felt to be questionable facts or claims. However, since it was wholly interview-based, the study can be criticised for only investigating *reported* rather than *actual* proofreader behaviour in the same way as Lines' study; Harwood et al. did not collect and analyse samples of proofreaders' interventions from writers' texts.

Kruger & Bevan-Dye's (2010) questionnaire-based study investigated the beliefs and practices of proofreaders of student writing working in South Africa. Drawing on handbooks delimiting the potential roles of proofreaders, Kruger and Bevan-Dye's instrument described different interventions under four headings (copyediting, stylistic editing, structural editing, and content editing). In general, the majority of the copyediting and stylistic editing tasks were felt to be acceptable when proofreading student writing, whereas the majority of structural and content editing tasks were not. However, there were disagreements: in the copyediting category, for instance, although most informants agreed they could check in-text citations and reference lists for style, there was less consensus regarding "correcting bibliographical information

for accuracy and...correcting to ensure that all references in the text appear in the bibliography” (p.161). The greatest divergence of opinion with regard to the stylistic editing tasks was with reference to “rewriting sections of the text to improve the style” (p.161). More disagreements occurred in responses to the structural editing tasks; specifically, regarding “reordering sentences...and reordering paragraphs to ensure a logically structured argument” (p.161). Finally, disagreements related to content editing came in response to “checking for plagiarism..., deleting irrelevant or unnecessary content...and correcting to ensure the consistency of content” (p.161). One limitation of Kruger and Bevan-Dye’s study is that they targeted elite informants—members of the South African Translators Institute and the Professional Editors’ Group. While the responses of this group of informants are of course interesting, Harwood et al.’s (2009) research suggests much proofreading is done by volunteers and friends/family—a very different constituency who may proofread quite differently. In any event, although the study shows many areas of agreement, it also points to major differences of opinion in some aspects.

None of the above studies investigated what proofreaders of student writing *actually do* as evidenced by their textual interventions, in contrast to Rebeck (2014). His 11 proofreaders included L1 and L2 speakers of English with varying experience of academic writing, and one of the proofreaders was Rebeck himself. They proofread the same 300-word excerpts from 15 MA dissertations. The proofreading was mixed in quality: there were places where proofreaders misunderstood disciplinary terminology and made inadvisable amendments which changed the writer’s meaning (e.g., “wage costs” → “wages”). Disturbingly, Rebeck found that some of the proofreaders introduced errors into the text; for instance, one proofreader changed

possessive *its* to *it's* (**with it's higher technology*, p.12). There were also marked quantitative differences between the proofreaders' interventions. In his own proofreading, Rebeck made around 60 interventions; but another proofreader made just four—and all four of these interventions were wrong. When Rebeck tried to discover whether this proofreader felt her interventions were satisfactory at interview, she was “generally positive” (p.14) about her work, suggesting she had a misplaced sense of confidence in her ability. Rebeck's study is small-scale and the analysis of the proofreaders' feedback is rather impressionistic. However, it provides a good basis on which to build, and a more methodologically robust study would utilize a systematic revision taxonomy to enable a richer inter-proofreader comparison.

In sum, the body of literature reviewed above gives cause for concern, suggesting proofreaders may interpret their role differently and their ability to proofread may vary. All of this has implications for the assessment of students' true abilities, given that students could have their work proofread to different standards and degrees, conceivably affecting their final marks when assessed. Proofreaders' interventions therefore merit further investigation and to accomplish this my research design and methods are described below.

3. Method

Data was gathered via (i) a questionnaire about proofreaders' profiles; (ii) analysis of the interventions informants made while completing a proofreading task; (iii) talk

aloud during proofreading; and (iv) a post-proofreading interview. Each stage of the research is described below.

3.1 *Questionnaire*

After agreeing to participate in the research, informants were emailed a profile questionnaire (Appendix 1) which adapted some of Harwood et al.'s (2009) interview questions to enquire about their current/previous employment, academic qualifications, training, and number of years' experience proofreading. It included a question about the level of English in the texts they proofread—particularly relevant given the problematic nature of the text they would be proofreading, as discussed below. The last section of the questionnaire focused on working practices: did proofreaders maintain contact during and after proofreading? These questions were included given claims in the literature that dialogue with authors is an important part of ensuring texts are fit for purpose (Burrough-Boenisch & Matarese 2013) and earlier studies showing that proofreaders will often communicate with writers to resolve difficulties (Flowerdew & Wang 2016; Harwood et al. 2012; Luo & Hyland 2016; Willey & Tanimoto 2013). Questionnaire responses were explored further at interview.

3.2 *Proofreading task*

There were four important features of the proofreading task assigned: (i) it was *authentic*—an invented text may not have simulated the kind of task student proofreaders customarily face; (ii) it was *relatively lengthy*, since using a shorter text (e.g., an abstract) may not have provided an accurate picture of what proofreaders of student writing regularly do when they read essays or dissertations; (iii) the *subject*

matter was highly familiar to me, to ensure I understood the source material and could grasp the writer's intended message as far as possible, in order to assess whether the proofreaders' interventions were accurate and appropriate (e.g., how far their rewritten text faithfully represented the writer's message/sources); and (iv) there was only one text, so informants would *all proofread the same piece of writing*, enabling a fair inter-proofreader comparison of their interventions.

An authentic TESOL master's essay of 2,511 words was chosen for the task. The essay focused on the error correction debate in second language writing, in particular on Truscott's criticisms of error correction. It was written by a Chinese student who gave her permission for the essay to be used for this research, and had been awarded a bare pass mark of 50 by the module lecturer. The essay is in Appendix 2, with line numbers added for ease of reference, and it suffers from various flaws in relation to language and content. A range of language errors are present (e.g., problems with articles, agreement, connectors, and verb forms. See lines 65-7, errors bolded: ***the Truscott's experiment only focus on one type of feedback. At last, Truscott draw a conclusion that there are no evidence to show...***). And there are frequently places where the writer's message is obscure (e.g., line 3: *the effort of error correction*, where "effort" should read *effect*; and lines 88-91, in the writer's review of Lalande's research: *A large number of short articles had been read by students in control group and teacher of control group give comprehensive corrections on students' article and demanded for 'incorporating' by same aspects*).

In a further attempt to make the task maximally authentic and because Harwood et al. (2009) described how some of their proofreaders made use of them, I provided

proofreaders with a number of resources they could take advantage of if they so wished:

(i) the lecturer's essay brief, including the five essay titles from which writers could chooseⁱⁱⁱ;

(ii) a departmental handbook, which included details of the department's referencing style;

(iii) a copy of Truscott's 1996 review article, "The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes," providing an overview of Truscott's position on error correction which the writer engages with in her essay; and

(iv) a laptop computer with Internet connection, so that proofreaders could consult online resources (dictionaries, etc.) or perform searches to learn more about the error correction debate. A hard copy of the writer's essay was provided as well as one on screen, so informants were free to work on paper or laptop, since Harwood et al. (2009) found some proofreaders prefer to work on hard copy—which indeed my preliminary questionnaire confirmed.

In the accompanying task instructions, informants were asked to "do whatever you do normally when you proofread".

The task was piloted and only one change made for the main study. Although I wanted a lengthy, authentic text for reasons of validity, the full text took a long time for the pilotee to proofread: around 100 minutes. Given that informants would also be taking part in a lengthy semi-structured interview afterwards, in the final task there is

a part of the essay coloured red (676 words, lines 132-202) which informants were told they did not need to proofread. This enabled me to retain the authentic essay and a fairly lengthy text, but made the task less onerous.

3.3 Textual analysis

Proofreaders' interventions were analysed using a modified form of Willey & Tanimoto's (2012) framework, discussed below.

3.4 Talk aloud

The proofreaders explained what they were thinking and doing and why as they worked through the text, similar to a metacognitive think aloud, as proofreaders supplied justifications and explanations for what they decided or declined to do (see Bowles 2010 on metacognitive/non-metacognitive think aloud). This method can be questioned on the grounds of reactivity, that is, the danger "that the act of talking while performing a given task might alter the process from the way it would naturally occur" (Smagorinsky 1989: 465; see also Yang et al. 2014). Could requiring proofreaders to explain what they were doing as they were doing it have changed their proofreading process? Perhaps it made proofreaders more reflective, as verbalization would result in a slower proofread than normal? And proofreading in laboratory conditions may also have had a reactive effect: informants were outside their familiar working environment where they could take breaks and proofread at their preferred time of day. However, allowing proofreaders to work in their own homes/workplaces would not necessarily have prevented reactivity, given informants were aware they were proofreading for a researcher rather than a client; and the interview in which they explained why they had made their interventions would likely have been

delayed, jeopardizing recall. In contrast, I was able to interview subjects about their proofreading immediately after the proofreading/talk aloud, while the text and their decisions were relatively fresh in their minds. Furthermore, examining proofreaders' interventions and explanations seemed preferable to merely harvesting *accounts* of what proofreaders do, as in Harwood et al. (2009). Talk aloud has been used in studies examining lecturers' feedback (Bloxham et al. 2011), professional editing (Bisaillon 2007), and proofreading for publication (Willey & Tanimoto 2015), but I am not aware of the method featuring in work on proofreaders of student writing.

Given the difficulty of becoming comfortable with talk aloud (see Bowles 2010), a warm-up task consisted of the opening two paragraphs plus the reference list of another master's essay on the same topic, second language writing correction. During this practice task, when informants fell silent, I asked them to keep talking. Once they had become accustomed to the nature of talk aloud and had asked me any questions about the process, we turned to the main task, which was audiorecorded.

3.5 Post-proofreading interview

The post-proofreading interview delved deeper into proofreaders' profiles, practices, beliefs, uncertainties, and motivations for their behaviours. The first section asked follow-up questions about proofreaders' profiles, based on their questionnaire responses (e.g., *In your questionnaire, you talk about having 6 months' editorial experience. Can you tell me more about that?*).

The second section asked about the proofreading task: How typical was it of the kind of proofreading jobs they normally take on? How typical was the way they proofread

the task compared to their normal practice? Did they find anything particularly problematic about proofreading the text? In addition, there were individually-tailored questions for each informant based on their talk aloud, during which I took notes, listening and observing. For instance, some informants used the online resources provided as they were proofreading, googling some of the writer's word choices, apparently unsure of their appropriacy, and so I asked about this. I also asked questions when proofreaders appeared to experience difficulties regarding decision making; I noted how Sheila^{iv} said in her talk aloud "*I can't rewrite whole sentences*", and how she then highlighted the relevant part of the text in yellow. Sheila explained at interview her highlighting signifies she is unsure of the intended meaning of the text and that consequently any changes she makes to these passages are more tentative than usual.

Harwood et al. (2012) report that various metaphors were used by their proofreaders to describe appropriate/inappropriate proofreading roles, despite the fact no metaphors had been provided for interviewees to speak to. It seemed metaphors could prove useful to question my proofreaders about their role, and I therefore drew on the metaphors Harwood et al. identified for the third part of the interview: the *cleaner/tidier*, *helper/mentor*, *leveller*, *mediator*, and *teacher*. I asked what informants understood by each metaphor in the context of proofreading and the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the appropriacy of each.

The final question enabled informants to add anything else they wished to say about proofreading. Interviews lasted around an hour on average, and were audiorecorded, transcribed, and coded using NVivo.

Institutional ethical approval for the project had been secured, and written consent was obtained. Informants were paid £40 plus travel expenses, funded by an in-house university research grant.

3.6 Data analysis

3.6.1 Analysis of textual data

To the best of my knowledge, there are no taxonomies designed to analyse student proofreaders' interventions (as opposed to other types of proofreading and editing, as discussed below).^v Therefore Willey & Tanimoto's (2012) revision taxonomy, designed to analyse proofreading of L2 manuscripts for publication, was trialled, as was Luo & Hyland's (2016), a modified version of Willey & Tanimoto. Willey & Tanimoto's taxonomy was found to be operationalizable for my purposes, albeit with modifications. The final version of the taxonomy is in Appendix 3.

One modification was the addition of more detailed definitions for some of the categories to enhance analytical consistency/reliability (e.g., for the Mechanical Alteration category). Luo & Hyland's grouping of proofreading alterations into minor changes (proofreaders changing five words or fewer), meso changes (six-ten words), and major changes (more than 10 words) was also adopted for a finer level of precision.

During trialling, the distinction between Willey and Tanimoto's Substitution and Rewriting categories proved somewhat problematic. Willey and Tanimoto differentiate by reserving the Substitution category for "words or phrases (not whole

sentences)” and the Rewriting category for “Transformation of sentences at lexical and grammatical level” (p.259). However, the distinction could be fuzzy when it came to more substantial revisions, and so a more consistent approach was to take Luo & Hyland’s Minor/Meso/Major division and apply it to the Substitution and Rewriting categories as follows: revisions greater than five words were classed as Rewriting and subclassified as Meso Rewriting (6-9 words) or Major Rewriting (10+ words). Revisions of five words or fewer were classed as Substitutions. The Minor/Meso/Major distinction was also used to subclassify revisions identified as Addition and Deletion. A final modification involved what Willey & Tanimoto (2012) call *Consultation Points*, places in the text where proofreaders noted the need to question the writer regarding issues like technical terms or the writer’s intended meaning. All of my proofreaders except one also asked questions and wrote comments to the writer, and I relabelled Willey and Tanimoto’s category *Consultation/Teaching Point*. There were times my informants needed to consult writers to seek clarification (“*What is it you are trying to say?*”), as in Willey and Tanimoto. However, there were also comments which were pedagogic; where proofreaders were attempting to transmit a formative message to the writer which would enhance the text and also perhaps subsequent work (“*Put this into a bulleted list to make it clearer*”). Other comments educated the writer about referencing and other academic conventions (“*Since this is a quote, please give the page number*”); or advised the writer to develop her arguments further, enhance her conclusions, etc. Thus I felt the additional reference to *teaching* necessary.

Occasionally proofreaders’ interventions were double-coded. These double-codings always involved a Consultation/Teaching Point. Most Consultation/Teaching Points

were single-coded, since they simply expressed puzzlement and no rewrites were offered (e.g., “What do you mean???”); however, at times a rewrite was also offered:

Writer’s text:

...demanded for “incorporating” by same aspects.

Proofreader’s Consultation/Teaching Point:

This section is confusing; it is not clear what you are trying to say. I would suggest ‘instructed the students to incorporate the same aspects.’

This intervention was double-coded Consultation/Teaching Point, Rewriting (Meso).

Once the taxonomy was finalized, intra-rater reliability testing was conducted with a script one month after the original coding. The agreement rate at 92% was high, and no further changes were deemed necessary.

3.6.2 Analysis of interview data

Following detailed summaries of several interview transcripts, a draft codebook was constructed, trialled, and modified until it captured the essence of the data. The final codebook is in Appendix 4, and featured 22 codes, including codes relating to proofreaders’ profiles, their roles, their evaluation of the proofreading task/text, their difficulties, and ethical issues associated with proofreading. An intra-rater comparison of an interview transcript a fortnight after the first coding resulted in an agreement rate of 75%.

4. Proofreaders' profiles

Informants were recruited by contacting proofreaders known to me or to my colleagues; and by contacting proofreaders who advertised their services around the university research site. An overview of proofreader profiles is presented in Tables 1 and 2 and the first column of Table 1 shows that informants were a mixture of L1/L2 speakers of English. Details are included about the volume of proofreading undertaken by each informant and I classify proofreaders into three groups, borrowing from Harwood et al.'s (2009) distinction between *Professionals*, *Part-time/Temporary Freelancers*, and *Volunteers*. *Professionals* proofread regularly, as “a business rather than a hobby,” and as “(one of) their main job(s)” (p.172). Bernard's case is distinctive, in that he is classified as a professional given that proofreading constitutes a large part of his job, but unlike the professionals in Harwood et al.'s dataset, he doesn't charge—as an English Language Coordinator, he holds an average of 20 one-to-one proofreading tutorials each month, which can increase to 15 hours a week around essay submission deadlines. In all, Bernard estimated that proofreading tutorials accounted for a third of his time, the remainder dedicated to pre-/in-session English classes. *Freelancers'* proofreading is “sporadic or likely to be short-term” (p.172), and this group mainly comprises PhD students who proofread to help fund their studies. Other proofreaders in this group were Fiona, a retired lecturer, proofreading part-time to “make a bit of pocket money,” and Eleanor, a writer of fiction who proofread fellow writers' work for free and proofread students' writing for additional income. Finally, *Volunteers* proofread free of charge for altruistic reasons, wishing to help student writers “in the way they have been helped by others earlier in their academic careers” (p.172)—or, in the case of my PhD volunteers, because they wished to help their friends whose English language proficiency may

have been less strong than their own. Hence, for instance, Sally proofread for her fellow students as a favour; Andy established a network of students who proofread each others' work and found the experience enjoyable and beneficial, as it helped him "learn from other people how to write a good essay"; while Norman, a lecturer, volunteered to proofread the work of students he was not teaching. Harwood et al.'s classification helped to capture my informants' profiles, but the categories are not mutually exclusive: a number of proofreaders proofread for money as well as working for free as a favour to friends, and so could be seen to straddle the Freelance and Volunteer groups. However, where it was clear that one category predominated (e.g., the informant proofread more often for a fee), this category was adopted.

Clearly, this is a diverse set of informants in terms of their profiles, proofreading experience, proofreading workloads, disciplinary backgrounds, and L1/L2 status. But then as Harwood et al. demonstrated, this variation is typical of the range of proofreaders operating in UK universities. I wasn't trying to focus on only a subset of UK proofreaders of student writing; I was rather trying to recruit proofreaders of all kinds and to investigate how they understood their role via analyzing their interventions and their reasoning behind making these interventions.

Table 1
Proofreaders' profiles: Part A

Proofreader/ L1 or L2 speaker of English	P/R status and current position	Academic background/ qualifications	Previous work experience	Proofreading training?	Number of years proofreading	Number of texts proofread per month/ year	Disciplines of texts proofread
Jackie L1	Part-time/ temporary freelancer Student support officer Administrator	BA (History) MA (History)	Outreach officer Administrator Human resources officer	☐	7 years	4 per month, but variable	Any discipline: History Sociology Financial Management Business Linguistics TEFL Politics Health English Literature Law Psychology
Fiona L1	Part-time/ temporary freelancer Retired	2 x BA (English, Law) PGCE Advanced Diploma (Education)	University lecturer School teacher	☐	3-4 years	4 per month; over 50 per year	Various disciplines, but mainly Law, Business Studies, and Sociology
Sheila L2	Part-time/ temporary freelancer PhD student Research assistant	BA (Psychology) MSc (Environment & Society)	Writer Typist Receptionist	☐	3.5 years	6 per year	Any discipline, except texts which feature equations and statistics

Eleanor L1	Part-time/ temporary freelancer Music teacher Fiction writer	BA (Philosophy & Politics) MA (Philosophy)	Secretary/PA Company director Radio producer Graduate teaching assistant Critical thinking facilitator	□	15 years	8 per month, 'plus my own work [fiction writing] every day'	Philosophy Creative writing
Sally L1	Volunteer PhD student Research assistant	BA (Ancient History) CELTA 2 x MA (Linguistics) Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education	TEFL teacher Staff trainer (writing skills) Graduate teaching assistant	□	6 years 'on and off'	4 per year	Linguistics
Norman L1	Volunteer Lecturer	BA [Health-related] MA [Health-related] Registered Nurse Dip Nursing PGCE	Nurse Teacher	□	3 years	6-7 per year	Health Biological Sciences Psychology
Linda L1	Part-time/ temporary freelancer Research fellow	BA (Psychology) MA (Psychology) PhD (Sociology) CELTA PGCert TESOL	English teacher	□	2 years	150 per year	'Every discipline except science': Business Linguistics TESOL Psychology Accounting Philosophy Theatre Literature
Andy L2	Volunteer Intern, rewriting press releases	BA (Philosophy, Politics, Economics)	N/A	□	2 years	2 per year	Law Philosophy Politics

Ana L2	Volunteer PhD student	2 x BA degrees (English Language & Literature, German Language & Literature) MA (English Language Teaching)	English and German teacher	□	2 years	5-8 per year	Computer science, Psychology, Biology, Economics
Helena L2	Part-time/ temporary freelancer and Volunteer PhD student TEFL teacher	MA (ELT) CELTA Diploma in TEFL	TEFL teacher	□	2 years	10 per year	Various disciplines: Health, Philosophy, Applied Linguistics, Medicine
Martha L1	Part-time/ temporary freelancer PhD student	BA (Sociology) MA (Sociology)	Graduate teaching assistant	□	4 years	10 per year	Sociology Law Economics Linguistics Politics
Adrian L2	Part-time/ temporary freelancer PhD student	BA (English) 2 x MA (Applied Linguistics, English & French)	University teacher Freelance translator and interpreter EFL teacher	□	2 years	10 per year	Biological sciences, Linguistics, Management, Economics, Psychology, essays on more general academic topics (e.g., media, culture, religion)
Bernard L1	Professional English language coordinator/ English language teacher/ one-to-one proofreader tutor	BA MA (TESOL) MPhil (Education) CELTA TESOL Diploma	Director of Studies at a language institute Teacher trainer EFL teacher Business English teacher General Manager Executive Officer	□	8 years	Average of 20 per month, but can range "between 5- 40+"	Animal science Horticulture Design

Moira L1	Part-time/ temporary freelancer English and Spanish language tutor Business English teacher	BA (TEFL and Modern Languages) MA (TEFL)	English language tutor Pre-sessional and in- sessional English teacher	□	5 years	5-10 per year	All disciplines
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Table 2
Proofreaders' profiles: Part B

Proofreader	Types of texts proofread	Level of English texts proofread¹	While-proofreading contact?	Post-proofreading meeting?
Jackie	Undergraduate term papers Undergraduate dissertations Master's term papers Master's dissertations PhD thesis chapters Articles and books for publication Consumer reports Company training materials	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	Yes	Yes (but for payment)
Fiona	Master's term papers Master's dissertations PhD chapters and theses Articles and books for publication CVs Letters of application PhD proposals	Mainly 1 and 2	Sometimes (but rarely)	No
Sheila	Master's dissertations PhD thesis chapters	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	Yes	Sometimes
Eleanor	Undergraduate term papers Undergraduate dissertations Short stories Business and policy documents	3	Yes ('but only if something is ambiguous')	Sometimes
Sally	Master's dissertations PhD thesis chapters Conference abstracts	3, 4, 5	No ('unless an important question crops up')	Sometimes

¹ 5 = Native speaker/near-native speaker level of English; 4 = Very good level of English; 3 = Fairly good level of English; 2 = Limited level of English; 1 = Very limited level of English.

Norman	Undergraduate term papers Undergraduate dissertations Master's term papers Master's dissertations PhD thesis chapters Articles and books for publication	1, 3, 4	Sometimes	No
Linda	Undergraduate term papers Undergraduate dissertations Master's term papers Master's dissertations MPhil thesis chapters PhD thesis chapters Articles and books for publication Job and university applications Academic presentations	2, 3, 4, 5	Yes ('frequently')	Yes ('most of the time')
Andy	Undergraduate term papers Master's dissertations	4, 5	Yes	Yes
Ana	Master's term papers Master's dissertations	3, 4	Sometimes	Yes
Helena	Master's term papers Master's dissertations	2, 3	Yes	Sometimes
Martha	Master's term papers Master's dissertations PhD thesis chapters Articles and books for publication	2, 3, 4, 5	Yes	Sometimes
Adrian	Master's term papers Master's dissertations	1, 2, 3	Yes	Sometimes
Bernard	Foundation student (pre- undergraduate) papers Undergraduate term papers Undergraduate dissertations Master's term papers Master's dissertations MRes thesis chapters PhD thesis chapters	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	Yes (always)	Yes (nearly always)
Moir	Undergraduate term papers Master's term papers	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	Yes	Yes

Informants had various disciplinary backgrounds, with several having teaching or lecturing experience. Some lacked subject knowledge of second language writing, the subject of the essay they were proofreading (although most were willing to proofread outside their own disciplines when clients approached them). Only one of the fourteen proofreaders had any formal proofreading training, Jackie having completed a distance learning qualification. This qualification neither focused on academic writing in general nor student academic writing in particular, but rather on proofreading for publishers, including training on proofreading symbols and print layouts. That other informants lacked proofreader training was expected—these informants’ profiles have much in common with those in other studies of proofreading academic writing (e.g., Harwood et al. 2009; Lillis & Curry 2010; Luo & Hyland 2016; Willey & Tanimoto 2015), whose proofreaders were similarly without qualifications.

5. Results

I look at the data quantitatively and qualitatively, beginning with how often the proofreaders made different types of interventions.

5.1 How often did proofreaders intervene?

The frequencies with which proofreaders intervened in the text are shown in Table 3, enabling us to begin to compare and contrast their proofreading.

Table 3
Proofreaders' interventions: complete text²

Proofreader	Addition	Deletion	Substitution	Reordering	Rewriting	Recombining	Mechanical alteration	Consultation/Teaching Point (Number of words devoted to comments)	Micro	Meso	Major	TOTAL
Jackie	116	48	180	22	4	1	101	0	341	7	0	472
Fiona	71	40	152	9	1	9	101	45 (492 words; mean length of comment: 10.93 words)	260	3	1	428
Sheila	72	59	131	28	9	7	62	39 (514 words; mean length of comment: 13.18 words)	255	15	1	407
Eleanor	73	22	117	9	1	9	107	25 (119 words; mean length of comment: 4.76 words)	211	2	0	363
Sally	51	25	111	10	5	4	54	23 (87 words; mean length of comment: 3.78 words)	185	7	0	283
Norman	58	30	106	6	0	5	74	4 (4 words; mean length of comment: 1 word)	194	0	0	283
Linda	65	28	103	10	3	3	47	10 (6 words; mean length	194	4	1	269

² When making a Teaching/Consultation Point, sometimes the proofreaders simply drew a line in the margin or underlined/highlighted a word or part of the writer's text. Hence there were sometimes no words to count, explaining why in Linda's and Andy's case the mean length of the Teaching/Consultation Point comments comes to below one word.

								of comment: 0.6 words)				
Andy	43	39	85	16	3	9	56	3 (1 word; mean length of comment: 0.33 words; consultation points italicized)	165	5	0	254
Ana	22	20	74	11	1	4	77	42 (446 words; mean length of comment: 10.6 words)	116	1	0	251
Helena	66	17	102	7	3	4	30	17 (20 words; mean length of comment: 1.18 words)	185	3	0	246
Martha	60	19	87	7	3	3	42	21 (396 words; mean length of comment: 18.86 words)	164	5	0	242
Adrian	56	17	96	12	3	14	31	8 (0 words; consultation points highlighted)	169	2	1	237
Bernard	24	10	63	5	0	4	52	3 (0 words; consultation points highlighted)	97	0	0	161
Moira	6	5	8	0	0	0	10	84 (118 words; mean length of comment: 1.4 words)	19	0	0	113

These figures emphasize the marked differences in practices: for instance, in terms of the overall number of interventions, Jackie made over four times the number of interventions as Moira (472 vs. 113 interventions); and Fiona, Sheila, and Eleanor all made over double the number of interventions as Bernard (428, 407, 363 vs. 161). It was often the case that proofreaders who made the greatest number of interventions overall also made the greatest number of interventions in a said category. So for instance, Jackie, Fiona, and Sheila used the Substitution category more than any of the other informants. However, this was not always so: although she made the greatest number of interventions overall, Jackie's proofreading featured no Consultation/Teaching Points; whereas Moira, who made the fewest overall interventions, recorded the most Consultation/Teaching Points (84). Another point of difference concerned the number of Meso changes to the writer's text: Sheila made five times as many Meso interventions as Fiona, despite Fiona intervening more frequently overall.

When we analyse the length of the Consultation/Teaching Points, again marked differences are apparent: Martha's Consultation/Teaching Points were the longest, with a mean length of almost 19 words (e.g., "*You might want to add more detail about these limitations. For example, why is a random sample important and why should more students have been enrolled in this experiment?*"). In contrast, the Consultation/Teaching Points of Eleanor (4.76 words), Sally (3.78 words), Moira (1.4 words), Helena (1.18 words), Linda (0.6 words), and Andy (0.33 words) were all far briefer (examples from Sally's comments: "*important?*," "*effect?*"). Adrian and

Bernard's Consultation/Teaching Points consisted of simply highlighting problematic passages with no accompanying commentary or questions. And Moira, the proofreader using the most Consultation/Teaching Points, largely used abbreviations to indicate problematic parts of the text (e.g., WW [=wrong word]; Punct [=punctuation]; WF [=word form]) rather than supplying direct corrections.

These differences indicate informants' diverse interpretations of their role and of legitimate interventions. All of the previous research reviewed earlier on student proofreading (Harwood et al. 2009; Kruger & Bevan-Dye 2010; Lines 2016; Rebuck 2014) suggested there are varied conceptualizations of 'proofreading', and the quantitative differences recorded here vividly substantiate this claim.

I now describe how different informants proofread the same sentence from the text, beginning with another quantitative overview, then analysing excerpts of their proofreading, drawing on talk aloud and interview data to explain their reasoning.

5.2 Proofreaders' interventions: some examples

A flavour of the proofreaders' differing practices can be provided by comparing informants' treatments of the same faulty sentence from lines 206-209 of the essay:

During the pre-sessional period, error correction became a novel aspect with enormous influence in academic writing because multiple choice, spot dictation and comment has become three main aspects in China examination, however, assignment do not included in education system.

In addition to featuring language problems characteristic of the text throughout (e.g., number, article, and tense errors), the message of this sentence is obscure, as the writer suddenly begins to talk about an English pre-session course when there has been no previous mention of it in the essay. (This is in fact the writer's attempt to address the part of the essay question asking her to relate the error correction debate to "her personal teaching context"—although she was involved as a learner rather than a teacher.) Other parts of the sentence which are unclear and require further explanation and contextualization include the reference to "spot dictation and comment" as featuring "in China examination." This sentence was therefore selected for close analysis because potentially proofreaders could address issues of both language and content—but how far would informants go?

Table 4 provides a quantitative summary of the proofreaders' interventions for this small part of the essay.

Proofreader	Addition	Deletion	Substitution	Reordering	Rewriting	Recombining	Mechanical alteration	Consultation/Teaching Point (Number of words devoted to comments)	TOTAL
Jackie	6	1	4	1	0	0	2	0	14
Fiona	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	4
Sheila	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	3	5
Eleanor	3	0	3	0	0	1	1	2	10
Sally	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Norman	2	1	5	1	0	0	5	0	14
Linda	2	0	5	0	0	0	0	2	9
Andy	2	0	4	0	1 (meso)	2	0	0	9
Ana	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2
Helena	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Martha	2	0	2	1	0	0	2	1	8
Adrian	3	1	5	0	0	1	1	1	12
Bernard	1	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	6
Moir	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2

Table 4
Proofreaders' interventions: single sentence

Once again the quantitative data helps lay bare the variation in proofreaders' work, this sentence attracting between one and 14 interventions. Andy was the only informant to employ a Meso intervention (Rewriting). Some proofreaders included Consultation/Teaching Points, pointing to difficulties in understanding what the writer was trying to say, and/or making suggestions as to what the writer could do rather than suggesting specific rewrites themselves. Three informants (Ana, Martha, and Sheila) made interventions relating to argumentation and content.

Because of space limitations, rather than presenting data from every proofreader, I present three informants' interventions, each of which signifies a different approach to proofreading:

- (i) proofreading featuring a larger number of changes;
- (ii) proofreading featuring fewer changes; and
- (iii) proofreading beyond the level of language, suggesting changes at the level of argumentation, ideas, and content.

(i) Proofreading featuring a larger number of changes

As an exemplar of this approach I focus on Jackie, who made the greatest number of interventions overall (see Table 3). For ease of reference, below I provide the writer's original sentence alongside Jackie's version.

Writer's original sentence	Jackie's version
During the pre-sessional period, error correction became a novel aspect with enormous influence in academic writing	<i>During the pre-sessional period, it became clear that error correction had an enormous influence on academic</i>

<p>because multiple choice, spot dictation and comment has become three main aspects in China examination, however, assignment do not included in education system.</p>	<p><i>writing, because multiple choice questions, spot dictation and comment now constitute three main aspects in examinations held in China; however, assignments are not included in the Chinese education system.</i></p>
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Jackie makes various changes to the writer’s sentence. She changes awkward phrasings: “became a novel aspect” (*it became clear*), “has become” (*now constitute*), “China examination” (*examinations held in China*); corrects a faulty preposition (*on academic writing*); makes additions to clarify the writer’s message (*questions*); and replaces a comma with a semi-colon near the end of what is a lengthy sentence (; however). The multiple interventions here are typical of Jackie’s heavier style of proofreading. However, nothing is said about the potentially puzzling term “spot dictation.”

At interview, Jackie spoke of her aim to make a text “something that reads more cleanly and is hopefully as error free as possible,” helping to explain her greater number of interventions. The fact that Jackie sees her role “as editing and proofreading, not just proofreading” also helps to explain why she did not limit herself to intervening when something was grammatically incorrect. For instance, when accounting for why she changed the writer’s *more and more* in line 4 to “increasingly,” Jackie says: “because it sounds better in an academic essay.” Indeed, Jackie speaks of how, when clients ask her to make their writing “sound as English as possible,” “I kind of use my own style [when proofreading] to think, ‘How would I

express this?’.” Another example of this was when Jackie changed *composition structure* in the writer’s text (line 51) to “the structure of the composition,” in her talk aloud remarking that this was done “*because it reads better*”. Clearly there was no grammatical error and no correction needed here, and Jackie elaborated at interview that although this was “not a necessary change,” she made it because the revised version was “more like I would say it.” A similar kind of stylistic change and justification came when Jackie changed the writer’s *So* (*So Truscott’s criticisms of error correction was not supported in this essay*, lines 237-8) to “Therefore”:

I don’t think it’s necessarily a good idea to start a sentence with so and to me...in English you would be more likely to say therefore [...] “So” just seemed a bit weak to me somehow and I felt “Therefore” would be stronger and would be more the type of word that you would tend to use in academic writing.

As illustrated below, proofreaders who took a lighter-touch approach tended to restrict themselves to making the text comprehensible rather than also stylistically accomplished. Alternatively, where they felt the writer’s expression could be improved, they might point this out and leave it to the writer to revise to the degree to which s/he was able, rather than supplying a better rewrite themselves.

(ii) Proofreading featuring fewer changes

Unlike Jackie’s proofreading which featured more frequent interventions, Helena made just one intervention. Helena’s reasons for making few changes related to her characterisation of ethical proofreading, and to an envisaged pedagogic benefit for writers of her approach.

Helena declined to attempt to correct anything in the sentence, merely underlining it to indicate a Consultation/Teaching Point as its meaning was unclear for her:

During the pre-sessional period, error correction became a novel aspect with enormous influence in academic writing because multiple choice, spot dictation and comment has become three main aspects in China examination, however, assignment do not included in education system.

Interestingly, Helena remarked at interview that one thing she is *not* is a “professional proofreader” as she doesn’t believe it is ethical to “make things easy” for the writer by doing their work for them. Helena does not feel her role should be to make the text flawless or “grammatically perfect”: “As long as they get the message across, leave it like that.” The alternative would be to rewrite too much to be ethically acceptable:

Even if you make this paragraph perfect..., you don’t add much really. And you make it more inconsistent: some bits look really nice; and some others very messy. [...] I don’t try to make it grammatically perfect. Because since their English is very poor, I will make it a bit better, just to help them get the message across to their teacher.

Helena emphasizes that she will not work with writers of low English proficiency, and declines to work on texts such as the one constituting the task: she suspects the text would perhaps be awarded a fail by the marker, and it is not her job to try to get it to pass and to do the amount of rewriting required. Rather than rewrite sentences, Helena would signal to the writer that their message is unclear and they must try to rewrite it; or she would ask them questions (“Did you mean this? Did you mean that?”). She would then be willing to look at the rewritten version to determine

whether it is any clearer (“I will help them to the extent that they are willing to help themselves”). She believes UK universities routinely accept international students onto programmes possessing an inadequate level of language proficiency, and that such students often turn to proofreaders for help instead of taking responsibility to improve their English themselves. Engaging in only light-touch proofreading enables Helena to stay within the bounds of ethical practice, while also sending a message that the onus is on the writer to develop their academic literacy rather than relying on someone else to enhance their text:

And I can sleep quiet with my conscience if I do that, because I think it’s not immoral. And you don’t make them misunderstand anything. You give them the message, your friend or the writer you are proofreading for. You have to try more yourself, you have to try more yourself.

(iii) Proofreading suggesting changes of argumentation, ideas, and content

Ana proposes very substantial changes to the focal sentence, going much further than traditional notions of proofreading:

Writer’s original sentence	Ana’s version
<p>During the pre-sessional period, error correction became a novel aspect with enormous influence in academic writing because multiple choice, spot dictation and comment has become three main aspects in China examination, however, assignment do not included in education</p>	<p><i>During the pre-sessional period, error correction became a novel aspect with enormous influence in academic writing because multiple choice, spot dictation and comment have become three main aspects in China examination, however, assignment do not included in education</i></p>

system.	<i>system.</i> ^{1.} Consultation/Teaching Point: ^{1.} The paragraph needs to be rewritten. You could add a description of the teaching context you are referring to.
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Ana makes the suggestion that the writer should add more detail, thereby strengthening the clarity and force of her argument by saying more about the teaching context she is referencing. In her interview she stressed the need for the reader to be provided with additional contextual information for clarity:

Actually, it was not obvious whether the writer was a teacher or a student. [...] Yes, because, actually, he or she was reporting something that happened in China, and either she was a student or a teacher, and said then that during the pre-sessional periods..., I don't know what the sessions were about. It says: "multiple choice, spot dictation and comment...have become three main aspects in China examination." [...] Yes, I think that certain things are missing for me to understand what exactly is going on.

And this was not the only time that Ana made interventions of this nature; here are a few other instances from her Consultation/Teaching Points which clearly deal with argumentation and content rather than language issues:

- Define what the article distributed to the students was about. Add certain information about the experiment (what is the control group & the experimental? what was the exact procedure & result of the exper[iment].).*
- You need provide details on what the form of instruction is.*

-Support your view with more arguments. You just describe what researchers did, but you don't actually support or criticise Truscott's criticisms.

At interview, Ana was clear that for her these interventions could legitimately be included, conceptualizing the role of proofreader as having the right to intervene in these areas as well as at the level of grammar and syntax:

If some things are blurry for the student, if they don't understand an article or the [essay] question, and if the proofreader belongs to the same discipline, then, yes..., he [i.e., the proofreader] could clarify some things. And...he can help the students put their minds or their thoughts into order..., correct the language they use, the structures, the expressions. So I think...on two levels: the levels of content and of the language and structure.

5.3 Making a bad text worse

The final portion of my qualitative analysis is devoted to a disturbing finding—that some proofreaders—including both L1 and L2 speakers of English—introduced inaccuracies into the text. This was particularly so in the case of Andy, but I also include examples from other proofreaders in what follows.

Andy introduced various errors into the text and at times made the intended meaning of the text less clear, as we see in the example below:

Writer's original sentence	Andy's version
There are three types of feedback for teachers to correct errors. Firstly,	<i>There are three types of feedback for teachers to correct errors. Firstly,</i>

<p>selective error feedback which is focus on Second Language students' most serious and frequent patterns of errors and comprehensive error feedback which teachers need more time and consideration to concentrate on. (lines 31-34)</p>	<p><i>selective error feedback, which is focus on Second Language students' most serious and recurring errors, of which are feedback to the student after much time and consideration from the teacher.</i></p>
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In Andy's rewrite, the writer's distinction between selective and comprehensive correction has been removed, comprehensive feedback is not mentioned at all, and the meaning of the final part of the sentence (*of which are feedback to the student after much time and consideration from the teacher*) is unclear. A little further on, the writer differentiates between direct and indirect types of feedback, but again in Andy's rewrite, this distinction is obscured as Andy removes the writer's reference to the latter term entirely:

Writer's original sentence	Andy's version
<p>There are three types of feedback for teachers to correct errors. [...] Thirdly, direct feedback which teachers correct errors directly on the original draft and indirect feedback which students are required to self-correct with or without underlined errors. (lines 31, 40-42)</p>	<p><i>There are three types of feedback for teachers to correct errors. [...] Thirdly, direct feedback which teachers correct errors directly on the original draft and, students are required to self-correct with or without underlined errors.</i></p>

There follow examples of interventions from other informants that similarly increase the obscurity of the writer’s message. Take Linda’s treatment of a sentence near the beginning of the essay:

Writer’s original sentence	Linda’s version
<p>The purpose of this essay is to discuss the different experts opinions of the effort of error correction in order to explore which one of these arguments, based on the experiments these experts employed, maybe considered more reasonable and sensible for developing accuracy in Second Language students writing. (lines 10-13)</p>	<p><i>The purpose of this essay is to discuss the different experts opinions of the effort of error correction in order to explore which one of these arguments, based on the experiments these experts have under, and which maybe considered more valid for developing accuracy in Second Language students’ writing.</i></p>

Linda rewrites “experts employed” as “experts have under,” which is unintelligible. Perhaps she meant to write “experts have underemployed”? But if so, again, the intended rewrite is obscure in terms of meaning and makes the text more difficult to follow.

We now consider two excerpts from Adrian’s proofreading. In the first excerpt, the writer successfully contrasts selective and comprehensive approaches to error correction; but in Adrian’s version, as in Andy’s rewrite reproduced earlier, this distinction is lost and the message obscured:

Writer's original sentences	Adrian's version
<p>There are three types of feedback for teachers to correct errors. Firstly, selective error feedback which is focus on Second Language students' most serious and frequent patterns of errors and comprehensive error feedback which teachers need more time and consideration to concentrate on. (lines 31-34)</p>	<p><i>There are three types of feedback teachers provide when correcting errors. Firstly, selective error feedback that focuses on Second Language students' most serious and frequent patterns of errors and which is comprehensive error feedback and for which teachers need more time and consideration.</i></p>

In the second excerpt, while the writer's meaning is retained, Adrian's rewrite is stylistically awkward ("Experimental group and control group."):

Writer's original sentence	Adrian's version
<p>...forty-seven students were divided into two groups- experimental group and control group-to be enrolled in three sections of a writing seminar. (lines 53-55)</p>	<p><i>Forty-seven students were divided into two groups. Experimental group and control group. Students enrolled in three sections of a writing seminar.</i></p>

I now discuss and compare my findings with previous research on proofreading in general and proofreading of student writing in particular. I then consider the

implications of my study for university proofreading policies and close with reflections on the design of the study and on future work.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Time for moral panic?

As described earlier, some pieces on proofreading, particularly in the educational press, adopt a discourse of moral panic (e.g., Baty 2006; Scurr 2006; Shaw 2014). Although she ran a proofreading company for many years, Lines (2016) takes a similar view based on her experience of incompetent and unethical proofreaders. Are such fears justified on the evidence of my research? In a word, yes: not only were there very marked differences in what the proofreaders did, there were also examples of major interventions at the levels of argumentation and content which must raise ethical concerns. Furthermore, some ‘proofreading’ introduced errors into the writer’s text, making a poor text even worse in places. These findings resonate with those of previous studies: Harwood et al. (2009), Luo & Hyland (2017), Rebuck (2014), and Willey & Tanimoto (2012) show how conceptualizations of proofreading and editing can vary enormously. And Ventola & Mauranen (1991) found proofreaders can make inappropriate interventions, as did Lines (2016), Rebuck (2014), and Willey & Tanimoto (2012). My findings not only point to the unsuitability of some proofreaders of student writing; they also indicate the unevenness of the proofreading writers are receiving, raising questions of fairness. If two students approach two different proofreaders who differ in their competence and understanding of their proofreading role, it is likely that one may offer more helpful and valuable interventions than the other. One may enhance and the other may even vitiate the quality of the text; one

may furnish writers with sensible hints and tips about the norms of academic writing and the other may dispense advice which is unwise and inaccurate. The educational press has recently fixated on the problem of essay mills when discussing the ethics of assessment (e.g., Adams 2015; Lancaster 2016; Marsh 2017); but it seems to me on the evidence presented here that proofreading gives further grounds for deep concern in the academic community.

So should all proofreading be banned? Writing is, of course, social, and it is useful (and potentially formative) to have a reader give feedback on one's text pre-submission to simulate the 'real' audience's reaction. Indeed, English language and writing centre tutors may perform this function in institutionally approved roles. But if universities are to permit proofreading, it must surely be regulated. Policy makers should also think carefully about how to ensure proofreaders' interventions are maximally formative. Just as writing centre tutors follow North's (1984) maxim of seeking to improve the writer rather than just the writing, eschewing a passive "fix-it shop" tutorial, so proofreaders could be asked to correct using more indirect techniques which place the onus on the writer to respond to their comments rather than having the work done for them.

Baxter's (2010) guide to proofreading theses and dissertations published by the Society for Editors and Proofreaders is an important reference for policy makers seeking to author substantial proofreading regulations, discussing fundamental issues such as proofreaders' remit, ethics, timescales for completing the work, maintaining contact with the writer while proofreading, and pricing structures. Yet it is striking how brief some UK universities' guidelines appear to be; and an example of how

regulation could work can be seen in the University of Essex's much fuller proofreading policies, formulated in response to Harwood et al.'s (2009, 2010, 2012) findings (University of Essex no date).^{vi} The guidelines recommend that student writers check with their lecturer/supervisor before approaching a proofreader, "to discuss whether proofreading is required or acceptable for any given item of coursework." This addresses Lines' (2016) contention that many lecturers are unaware that their students are utilizing proofreading services, and are unaware of how poor their students' writing really is—although of course this recommendation could be easily ignored if students decided to approach proofreaders directly. The guidelines also urge supervisors to consider directing students to other university writing support tutors whose aims and methods would presumably be more explicitly formative.

Should the supervisor/lecturer agree the writer may approach a proofreader, the University of Essex has an official proofreader list students can consult. These proofreaders have agreed to proofread in line with officially sanctioned boundaries and provide details of their skills, preferred disciplines, qualifications, experience, and fee structure 'to help students make informed choices' as to who they approach. Two legitimate forms of proofreading are described: "final editing" and "language correction." The lighter-touch final editing "entails checking for...occasional spelling or punctuation errors; word processing errors such as repeated phrases or omitted lines; inconsistency in layout, formatting, referencing, etc." There is a pedagogic flavour to this section of the guidelines; in discussing cases "[w]here an entire bibliography is set out inaccurately or inconsistently,"

...proofreaders are recommended to amend a section of it only, as an example for students to follow. Students should then make the necessary remaining changes themselves.

The second permitted form of proofreading, language correction, has a wider remit; it “extends to errors in grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure and expression.” The guidelines then list types of interventions which are off-limits:

Proofreading should not entail any intervention that would substantially change the content of a piece of work. Proofreaders should avoid:

- x Rewriting sections where argumentation or logic is faulty.
- x Significantly rearranging paragraphs with the intention of improving structure.
- x Correcting data calculations or factual errors etc.

However, proofreaders are advised that upon encountering these kinds of major problems, they can suggest students seek advice from their tutor/supervisor.

Rather than merely correcting the student’s work, proofreaders are encouraged to provide “formative feedback”

...in the form of a list of the main or common errors noted, so that the student writer can hopefully progress their future writing as a result of the proofreading process.

Finally, students are told they must acknowledge the proofreader’s help when submitting their work for assessment.

There is much good sense in the Essex guidelines. Where they do not go far enough is in ensuring the competence of the proofreaders who apply to be placed on the list.

Proofreaders' competence should be measured via their work on a sample text—and those who turn out to be incompetent or to make inappropriate interventions should be debarred. Whatever guidelines are formulated though, it must be conceded that they will not eliminate cheating: those students who are determined to seek out unethical forms of proofreading can do so via a simple Internet search and then not acknowledge the help received from whoever they hire. Although a recent study suggested that much ghostwritten text is detectable by markers (Dawson & Sutherland-Smith 2018), there will always be some which slips through, and unscrupulous operators will continue to ply their trade.

6.2 Reflections on the design of the study

Criticisms can be made of my study design. How fair was it to ask proofreaders without a TESOL background to read an essay on second language writing? A number of informants spoke in their post-proofreading interviews of how they found the task difficult because of their lack of subject knowledge. Nonetheless, many proofreaders were happy to take on proofreading work outside of their disciplines, a finding similar to that of Harwood et al. (2009). And if many, perhaps most, proofreaders of student writing routinely take on work focused on topics with which they have less than a moderate degree of familiarity, in that sense my task was an authentic simulation. Criticism may also be levelled at the fact I recruited a mixture of informants who had a teaching background and those who did not, in that pedagogic knowledge clearly impacted upon the way some proofreaders chose to intervene. Moira, for instance, largely used the indirect technique of correction symbols she reported learning during her time as an MA TEFL student, while other informants

with teaching backgrounds (Bernard and Helena) spoke of how they wished their proofreading to have a formative effect. However, Harwood et al. demonstrated that UK proofreaders of student writing come from a wide range of backgrounds, and the fact I recruited a similarly diverse set of informants inevitably meant that some would draw on pedagogic resources and knowledge bases which were lacking in others. Then there was the choice of essay topic informants were asked to proofread: correction. Could the content of the text have influenced how proofreaders responded to it? Could it have made them even more sensitive to and conscious of the types of corrections they were making in a way that impacted upon their normal proofreading behaviour? Perhaps assigning an essay to proofread on an alternative topic would have been a wiser choice.

Given that the ethical issues associated with proofreading partly motivated the study, I could have asked my informants for their beliefs about the ethics of their work at interview; and I could have asked them whether they were aware of the university's guidelines on proofreading. I didn't do either of these things as I was preoccupied with exploring their practices in this research; nevertheless, as we saw from Helena's data, ethical issues featured strongly in the data of some informants. There was little mention of regulation, with two informants (Bernard and Eleanor) referencing the university's rules and a third (Fiona) confessing to being unsure what the regulations were. We could speculate that the fact that most informants said nothing about regulation meant they were unaware of the university's guidelines, and if this is indeed the case, it is a cause for concern. However, since I did not address the issue directly, this is conjecture.

I could have used keystroke logging in my research, obliging all proofreaders to work on a computer rather than allowing some to work on paper. Doing so would have given me far richer data about their proofreading processes: for instance, keystroke logging would have allowed me to determine the amount of time proofreaders devoted to consulting other sources (e.g. Google searches, online dictionaries). However, I believed some informants would customarily proofread on paper—a belief which proved correct—and my priority was to simulate authentic conditions as far as possible in the interests of validity.

Most proofreaders described how they maintain contact with the writer while they are working on the text so they can seek clarification when, for instance, they encounter words which look inappropriate to them but they suspect may be technical terms. Obviously, contact with the writer during/after proofreading was not possible in this case, and it was clear that had such an opportunity been provided, proofreaders would have had fewer questions (expressed via Consultation/Teaching Points) and been more confident that they had faithfully conveyed the writer's messages in their rewrites. Andy, for instance, explained how the proofreading he had done was only a first run-through, and he would next need to have a lengthy meeting with the writer in order to better understand what she wanted to say. He would question the writer about Truscott's theory of the harmfulness of error correction and the criticisms other researchers have made of Truscott's ideas. One can also find accounts of lengthy and systematic post-proofreading meetings in the literature (e.g., the three-six hour Skype chats reported in Flowerdew & Wang 2016) which again suggests that merely studying a proofreader's interventions during one sitting, out of contact with the writer, is insufficient for a complete understanding of proofreading.

In defence of the research design, however, making the proofreading experience more authentic by enabling face-to-face or virtual exchanges between proofreader and writer would be very challenging in terms of recruiting and retaining informants; and in the main, proofreaders reported that the exercise had resulted in a fairly typical proofreading process and a piece of proofreading generally characteristic of their work. Moreover, the present research design is stronger than the design of Harwood et al. (2009), in that I collected and elicited *examples and explanations* of proofreaders' work rather than merely self-reported *accounts*.

6.3 Future work

This is the first in a series of articles reporting results from my dataset. I have provided an overview of the study, its design, and quantitative and qualitative findings regarding proofreaders' interventions, informants' practices being influenced by conceptualizations of their roles. Subsequent articles will focus squarely on beliefs about proofreader roles and ethical proofreading by drawing more substantially on the talk aloud and interview data. Two obvious follow-up projects would be (i) to canvass lecturers' opinions regarding the proofreaders' interventions, ascertaining the degree to which lecturers are happy for proofreaders to intervene in their students' work; and (ii) to solicit student writers' opinions: to what extent do they wish proofreaders to intervene and why? Regarding the first project, Lines (2016) claims that many doctoral supervisors are unaware of how substantially their students are having their work proofread. If this is indeed the case, it would be interesting to investigate how lecturers feel about more substantial forms of 'proofreading'. Baty (2006) claims a

policy in a UK university to provide undergraduates with a list of proofreaders has “split opinion” amongst lecturers, some believing proofreaders provide “legitimate support” for the students, while others worry they provide a “spoon-feeding” service; and Kim & LaBianca (2018) report that US faculty is divided on the ethics of proofreading services. Clearly further investigation is needed. As for the second project, Lines claims she received many inappropriate requests for unethical forms of proofreading or ghostwriting from students, a claim echoed by some of Harwood et al.’s (2009) proofreaders. In addition to surveying US faculty about proofreading, Kim & LaBianca (2018) sent their questionnaire to students, finding evidence of student “uncertainties, or confusion concerning various types of help they may seek” (p.48), including the extent to which proofreading is permitted. Studies which investigate how prevalent inappropriate expectations and uncertainties are and the reasons for them would be useful additions to the literature; they would provide further implications for rethinking how proofreading should be enacted.

11,101 words (excluding tables)

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Appendix 1
Proofreader preliminary profile questionnaire

Proofreading non-native student writing

About you

1. Name: _____
2. Your main job:

3. Previous jobs:

4. Academic qualifications:

5. Any other training relevant to proofreading (including any formal proofreading qualification):

6. Number of years' experience proofreading:

About the proofreading you do

7. Number of texts proofread per month:

If you proofread fewer than one or two texts a month, please indicate how many texts you proofread per **year** here:
_____ a year
8. For what reason(s) have you proofread students' texts? Please tick **as many as apply** from the list below.
 - on a fee-paying basis
 - as a favour to a fellow student
 - as a favour to a friend
 - to help your own student(s)
 - as part of a service offered by a university department
 - other (please specify) _____

9. In which subject areas are the texts you have proofread? Please tick **one** choice below.
- **all/any** subject areas/disciplines (e.g. philosophy, physics, sociology, etc.)
from **several** subject areas. Please provide details of which subject areas:

 - in a **specific** subject area. Please provide details of which subject area:

10. What kinds of texts have you proofread? Please tick **as many as apply** from the list below.
- undergraduate term assignments
 - postgraduate (MA/MSc) term assignments
 - undergraduate dissertations
 - postgraduate (MA/MSc) dissertations
 - MPhil thesis chapters
 - PhD thesis chapters
 - articles, chapters, or books which students are trying to publish
11. What levels of English language proficiency have you proofread? Please tick **as many as apply** from the list below.
5. As proficient as or nearly as proficient as a native speaker. Problems are generally linked to academic style and/or are the types of errors a fairly proficient native speaker writer might make.
 4. Generally very good level of English, but with occasional non-native speaker errors or turns of phrase.
 3. A fairly good level of English i.e. the text displays a good range of sentence structure and vocabulary, generally used appropriately. However, there are regular language errors, for example associated with grammar, vocabulary, turns of phrase, and/or punctuation.
 2. A limited ability in English. The writer makes frequent grammar and vocabulary mistakes, or uses a limited range of sentence structures and vocabulary.
 1. Very limited ability in English. The text is error-laden, making the meaning often impenetrable to the reader.
12. In what format do you receive the script to be proofread? Please tick an item from the list below.
- Electronic (e.g. as an email attachment)
 - Paper
 - Electronic AND paper

13. What format do you use to work on the text? Please tick an item from the list below.
- Electronic (e.g. as an email attachment)
 - Paper
 - Electronic AND paper
14. What computer programs, websites, and other resources do you use to help you proofread? Please provide details below.
- Computer programs (e.g. Microsoft Word):
- _____
- _____
- _____
- Computer tools (e.g. Microsoft Word's Track Changes):
- _____
- _____
- _____
- Websites:
- _____
- _____
- _____
- Other resources:
- _____
- _____
- _____
15. Do you communicate with the student while you are proofreading?
Yes/No/Sometimes
16. Do you meet up with the student when returning their work?
Yes/No/Sometimes
17. Do you proofread texts written by non-students? Yes/No
If so, please specify who these writers are, and the kind of texts:
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Appendix 2

Original essay

1 **The Argumentation of Error Correction in Second Language Writing**

2 **Introduction**

3 During the recent decades, the effort of error correction and feedback become a
4 more and more controversial issue. Truscott's(2008) mentioned that error
5 correction, especially grammatical error correction has no or even harmful effort
6 on improving accuracy in Second Language students' writing, because this kind
7 of error correction could reduce teachers and students time and energy on more
8 important and significant aspects, such as students' thoughts and structure.

9

10 The purpose of this essay is to discuss the different experts opinions of the effort
11 in error correction in order to explore which one of these arguments, based on
12 the experiments these experts employed, maybe considered more reasonable
13 and sensible for developing accuracy in Second Language students writing.

14

15 Firstly, a brief introduction will be given to show the definition of error and
16 different types of error correction feedbacks. Secondly, Truscott's opinion of
17 error correction will be described with his supportive experiment. Following
18 with some other experts arguments with their experiments to support their
19 argument such as Ferris DR & Hedgcock JS, Bitchener, J. et al, Chandler J,
20 Lalande.JF. After that, personal teaching context will be given to substantiate
21 personal arguments.

22

23 **Errors and Error Feedbacks**

24

25 Ferris DR & Hedgcock JS (2005) define that 'Errors consist of morphological,
26 syntactic, and lexical deviations from the grammatical rules of a language.'

27 Usually, Second Language writers have trouble with 'verb inflection errors',

28 'English determiner system' and 'word order', such as verb tense, aspect, voice;
29 subject-verb agreement; and active or passive constructions, etc.

30

31 There are three types of feedback for teachers to correct errors. Firstly, selective
32 error feedback which is focus on Second Language students' most serious and
33 frequent patterns of errors and comprehensive error feedback which teachers
34 need more time and consideration to concentrate on. Secondly, error feedback
35 on larger categories and error feedback on smaller categories. Error codes are
36 used in both larger categories and smaller categories.

37

38 However, teachers and students need time to familiar with these various and
39 complex error codes. For example, 'G' means grammar error, 'SS' means sentence
40 structure, and 'SP' means spelling, etc. Thirdly, direct feedback which teachers
41 correct errors directly on the original draft and indirect feedback which students
42 are required to self-correct with or without underlined errors.

43

44 **Truscott's opinion of error correction**

45

46 Truscott's(2008) indicates that error correction, especially grammatical error
47 correction (as one of the most controversial issue in error correction) has little
48 or no efficiency on developing accuracy in Second Language writing. Because
49 error correction could enforce students and teachers to focus on and reduce
50 their energy and attention from other aspect in writing, such as students'
51 thought and composition structure.

52

53 In order to support Truscott's view, he design an experiment(2008): forty-seven
54 students were divided into two groups- experimental group and control group-to
55 be enrolled in three sections of a writing seminar. After the first article,
56 experimental group received their article with errors underlined and need to
57 revise their article, but controlled group received no-marked draft. It is easily to
58 see that experimental group performed better than control group on revisions
59 and error feedback made a positive effect on students' rewrite.

60

61 One week latter, students had a new article. Compared error rate of the second
62 article with the first one, both group received the equal results, that is to say,
63 there is no positive effort on experimental group second article although they
64 have their first article revised and rewritten. There are some limitations in this
65 experiment: firstly, students could gain knowledge in a short time; secondly, the
66 Truscott's experiment only focus on one type of feedback. At last, Truscott draw
67 a conclusion that there are no evidence to show the effectiveness and efficiency
68 on improving students' writing ability by correcting errors.

69

70 **Lalande's view on reducing students' errors**

71

72 Lalande(1982) contends that there are four strategies which could have an
73 effective influence on developing students' writing skill. For instance,
74 'comprehensive error correction' with which students could fully improve their
75 skills (although this kind of correction could take more time and energy from
76 students); 'systematic marking of composition' which would effective in reducing
77 errors of students' compositions; 'guided-learning and problem-solving' which
78 could encourage students in Second Language writing abilities; 'instructional
79 feedback' on which error codes were used to show the location and nature of
80 errors.

81

82 Lalande employed an experiment to measure the effectiveness and efficacy of
83 these four strategies on 'grammatical and orthographic correctness' of Second
84 Language writing. Four classes were divided into two groups-experimental
85 group and control group. Lalande collected date before the experiment to ensure
86 that there is no important and considerable differences between experimental
87 group and control group. The feedback was also be strictly controlled and no
88 detail or information should be involved in the feedback. A large number of short
89 articles had been read by students in control group and teacher of control group
90 give comprehensive corrections on students' article and demanded for
91 'incorporating' by same aspects. The error code and 'error awareness sheet'
92 were used in experimental group students' writing for them to realize the nature
93 of error and to understand deeply immediately before the next article. As a

94 result, students in experimental group developed their 'grammatical and
95 orthographic' abilities much more than students in control group. There are
96 some limitation in this experiment: firstly, subjects may not been chosen that
97 random; secondly, more students should be enrolled in the experiment.

98

99 **Bitchener's view on various kinds of correction feedback**

100

101 Bitchener(2005) states that incorporate different sort of correction feedback
102 such as oral feedback and written feedback could improve students' writing
103 abilities, especially linguistic error corrections, not only improve in the original
104 rewrite essay but also another new essay as well.

105

106 To support Bitchener's issue, he designed an experiment and 53 new students
107 were acted as participants into this experiment. The participants has been
108 divided into three units by different educational time. The students of the first
109 unit who gained the longest educational hour could receive direct written
110 correction feedback and a short time students- teacher tutorial which students
111 and teacher could discuss the unsure issues and example of the essay and then
112 teacher would give students extra or further examples or textbook questions
113 with the same type of errors as exercises. The students from the second unit who
114 obtained the moderate educational hour could receive direct written correction
115 feedback but no tutorial combined. The students from the third unit who had the
116 limited educational hour should receive feedback about their 'quality and
117 organisation of content'. While during classes, teachers could discuss some 'form
118 of instuction' as part of courses.

119

120 Participants finished writings in four separated weeks using the provided
121 linguistic forms. This experiment shows several result. Firstly, it could be easily
122 commend that the improvement of individual feedback are different due to the
123 different time of writing. Secondly, the feedback gain a small effect according to
124 the separation of targeted linguistic forms. Thirdly, the indirect feedback has
125 more positive effort than direct feedback when students improve accuracy by
126 write another essay. Fourthly, direct oral feedback connected with direct written

127 feedback showed the significant influence than any other type of feedback. The
128 last but not least, 'rule- governed linguistic features' are easily improved by oral
129 feedback connected with written feedback. However, further research would be
130 needed to investigate long-term accuracy.

131

132 **Chandler's research about error correction and accuracy**

133

134 Chandler(2003) noted that students improve accuracy when they are
135 recommended to self-correct and self-edit 'grammatical and lexical errors' after
136 receiving teachers feedback. And she also wanted to find out the result if
137 students correct latter after receiving the teacher's error correction feedbacks.

138

139 Chandler employed a study to find out the relationship between error correction
140 and accuracy. In her experiment, the two classes students were asked to write
141 about five types of essays. And the only difference between experimental group
142 and control group is that experimental group were asked to to self-correct their
143 errors which teacher had underlined before submitting next essay. However,
144 control group self-correct all their errors at the end of semester. Ten weeks
145 latter, she found out that both the experimental group and control group
146 improved in fluency over the term. However the control group which did not
147 correct their errors between each essay did not improve their accuracy while the
148 experimental group has a positive effort on accuracy after self-correct between
149 each essay. It is also the fact that if students did not self-edit or self-correct their
150 errors after receiving feedback from teachers the result is equal to receiving no
151 feedback. There is no improvement between non- feedback and non-correction.

152

153 **The agree and disagree argument between Truscott and Ferris**

154

155 Truscott(1996) state 'grammar correction' as 'correction of grammatical errors
156 for the purpose of improving a student's ability to write accurately.....correction
157 comes in many different forms, but for present purposes such distinctions have
158 little significance.' However, Ferris disagree with this argument. She(1999)
159 mentions that error correction does have positive effort on error correction

160 according to many research evidence. Then, Ferris pointed out three main
161 mistakes of Truscott's review:(1)The themes could not to be contrast because
162 they are in different studies and based on different experiments. (2)The
163 investigation and strategies changes thought the different research. (3) By ignore
164 the effort of research, Truscott's passive evidence could not controvert his
165 statement. She also remarks that problems which teachers may not recognize an
166 error, or teacher could not explain the error ,or even teacher explain the error
167 but students may not understand that error could be conquered. At last, Ferris
168 claimed that teachers and students should not avoid error correction only
169 because students do not develop their self-correct or the shortage of teachers
170 error correction feedback.

171

172 Ferris(1999) agree with Truscott(1996) that 'syntactic, morphological, and
173 lexical knowledge' are seperated by different categories, so one structure of
174 error correction could not suitable for all of these three types. And she also
175 suggested that the significant and necessary of correction, practicing on
176 recognize and correct the 'frequent and serious errors', clarification the rules of
177 error 'patterns' could improve teaching self-correction. At the end of her
178 argument with Truscott, she appeal for further research.

179

180 **Ferris's suggestion on how to gain accuracy in grammar error correction**

181

182 Ferris(2004) suggested honestly to both teachers and students how to treat
183 error in students' writing. First, the attendance of lesson and reading book-based
184 materials and web-based materials, practicing the recognize errors from
185 students' exam paper and course works, familiar with grammar knowledge and
186 corrective abilities could encourage teachers ready for correct students' error
187 effectively and efficiently. Second, focusing on students' desire and educational
188 background information when teachers create error correction feedback because
189 error correction is not the unique aspect of students' writing. Third, 'linguistic
190 accuracy and editing skills' could be gain not only by error feedback but also by
191 social activities.

192

193 There are six suggestions as follow. (1)Error feedback is one of the essential
194 aspects in students' writing, so teachers need much more motivation on devising
195 courses and take error correction seriously. (2)Indirect error correction
196 feedback could encourage students' automaticity in self-correction. (3)Some
197 error may be unsuitable for students' self-correction, such as 'lexical errors,
198 complex and global problems with sentence structure'. (4)Revision is
199 considerably necessary for students to find out their weakness and drawbacks.
200 (5)'Grammar instruction' could be easily reduced in accuracy with other sources
201 of error treatment. (6)'Error chart' could enhance students attention of
202 drawbacks and development of writing.

203

204 **Personal teaching context in error correction**

205

206 During the pre-sessional period, error correction became a novel aspect with
207 enormous influence in academic writing because multiple choice, spot dictation
208 and comment has become three main aspects in China examination, however,
209 assignment do not included in education system.

210

211 The error codes were hard to familiar at the beginning, so the checklist of error
212 codes information is extremely suitable for a beginner. Error correction, such as
213 'grammatical and orthographic correctness' were not that important and
214 significant in pre-sessional period, error codes were usually employed in the
215 essay followed by underlined errors which students need to self-correct. Tutors
216 were usually focus on the structure and organization of the essay. And detailed
217 feedback was divided into several aspects, for instance, overall issue shows the
218 improvement for the former draft; introduction focus on the proficiency of
219 introduction which is useful for readers have an overview of essay and
220 understand the importance of the essay issues; 'academic line of enquiry' shows
221 the abilities of using relevant according to the topic of the essay; 'reporting of
222 ideas from source texts' is about the student's personal ability to summarize and
223 paraphrase; language and style states the development and improvement of the
224 syntactic structures and academic vocabulary; conclusion focus on the abilities of
225 summarize and related to the essay topic.

226

227 **Conclusion**

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229 These decades, the argument of whether error correction could developing the
230 accuracy of Second Language students writing becomes more and more
231 crystallizing. The important and significant role which error correction plays
232 changes the teaching strategies of English language.

233

234 The benefits and inadequacies of using error correction for students' writing has
235 been discussed in this essay based on the arguments of different experts to show
236 that error correction do has important and significant effort on efficiency and
237 effectiveness of accuracy in Second Language student's writing. So Truscott's
238 criticisms of error correction was not supported in this essay.

239

240 Firstly, 'error' was defined at the beginning of this essay and the different
241 categories of error correction also be located. Secondly, Truscott's issue that
242 error correction do not have positive effort on accuracy in Second Language
243 students writing was stated and his experiment also be employed to support his
244 argumentation. After that other experts opinions such as Ferris's, Bitchener's,
245 Chandler's, Lalande's were supported with their experiments. Finally, personal
246 teaching context was pointed out to emphasize that the important and significant
247 role error correction plays in improving accuracy in Second Language student's
248 writing.

249 To sum up, from the previous explanation of error correction followed by the
250 discussing of several experts opinion, it is clearly noticeable that in developing
251 students' writing, using error correction could enhance student's efficiency and
252 effectiveness in accuracy.

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Appendix 3

Textual analysis: taxonomy of proofreaders' interventions

ADDITION

Insertion of words, phrases, or sentences.

Examples

Original:	<i>in second language</i>
Proofread text:	<i>in a second language</i>
Original:	<i>opinions of the effort</i>
Proofread text:	<i>opinions of the amount of effort</i>

DELETION

Subtraction of words, phrases, or sentences

Examples

Original:	<i>received the equal results</i>
Proofread text:	<i>received equal results</i>
Original:	<i>53 new students were acted as participants</i>
Proofread text:	<i>53 new students acted as participants</i>

SUBSTITUTION

Replacement of 1-5 consecutive words OR the replacement of the writer's text by 1-5 new consecutive words by the proofreader. Includes changes to verb tense (*design* → *designed*), number errors, such as replacement of nouns erroneously thought by the writer to be countable with the correct uncountable equivalent (*feedbacks* → *feedback*), and agreement (*both group received* → *both groups received*).

REORDERING

Repositioning of words, phrases, or sentences.

Examples

Original:	<i>then teacher would give</i>
Proofread text:	<i>teacher would then give</i>
Original:	<i>no tutorial combined</i>
Proofread text:	<i>no combined tutorial</i>

REWRITING

Replacement of 6 or more consecutive words in the writer's text OR the replacement of the writer's text by 6 or more new consecutive words by the proofreader.

Examples

Original:	<i>It is easily to see that</i>
Proofread text:	<i>As we might expect</i>

[= replacement of 6 consecutive words of writer's original text]

Original:	<i>a positive effect on students' rewrite</i>
Proofread text:	<i>a positive effect on the quality of the revised piece</i>

[= replacement of writer's original text by 6 consecutive words by proofreader]

RECOMBINING

Combining of one or more sentences, or division of one sentence into two or more sentences.

Examples

Original: *equal results, **that is to say***
Proofread text: *equal results. **Thus,***

MECHANICAL ALTERATION

Changes to punctuation, spelling, and formatting (e.g., paragraphing, font, indenting, ampersand in a citation changed to 'and', comma after a journal title in the reference list changed to colon).

CONSULTATION/TEACHING POINT

Places where proofreaders address questions, comments, or suggestions to the writer of the text. These questions, comments, or suggestions may be rhetorical and have formative/pedagogic intentions:

Examples

Should this reference be Truscott & Hsu [rather than Truscott]?
These quotation marks are in different fonts. Support your view with more arguments.
Perhaps could go as an opening sentence.
Don't say 'opinion' as this sounds informal and unscientific.

Alternatively, the comments may express genuine puzzlement or uncertainty, as the proofreader seeks further information to enable them to properly proofread the text and/or the proofreader believes the writer needs to transmit their intended message more effectively:

Examples

What are you trying to say?
What are the "linguistic forms"?
Could you explain this further?
This is a bit confusing.

Alternatively, the interventions may be less explicit, consisting merely of underlining, highlighting, question marks, symbols ("^" indicating missing words), etc., which point to problematic parts of the text.

Also classified as Consultation/Teaching Points are places where proofreaders give writers alternatives from which to choose (e.g., *conducted/designed*) as the writer has to decide which, if any, of the possibilities put forward is appropriate, and therefore a degree of proofreader-writer consultation is present.

Minor = Revisions of 5 words or fewer (applicable to the categories of Addition, Deletion, Substitution)

Meso = Revisions of 5-9 words (applicable to the categories of Addition, Deletion, Rewriting)

Major = Revisions of 10+ words applicable to the categories of Addition, Deletion, Rewriting)

The **Substitution** category was reserved for **Minor** revisions;

The **Rewriting** category was reserved for either **Meso or Major** revisions.

Appendix 4

Interview codebook

PROFILE

-Current and previous *employment, occupation, and qualifications*, e.g. research assistant, PhD student, teacher, A-levels in languages. Also includes *description of what job involves/involved*: duties, skills and the time job takes/took. Includes *previous proofreading experience*, e.g. as a secretary, proofreading own books. And leisure interests, where relevant (e.g. writers' forums, doing crosswords). Where stated, how all this information is relevant to proofreading, e.g. writing in law requires succinctness and correctness.

-Informant's *subject-specific knowledge*, e.g. knowledge of psycholinguistics, eye-tracking

-Informant's *language skills and abilities*, e.g. L1 or L2 speaker. Also self-evaluation of these skills and abilities, e.g. 'not great at spelling but good at English'.

-*Impact of past/present (work) experience, education, and qualifications on proofreading skills and abilities*, e.g. PhD writing and GTA work have helped informant develop a sense of what good writing is, being a TEFL teacher helped with error spotting, teaching certificate had no impact on informant's proofreading or views on proofreading, receiving unhelpful feedback on writing when informant was a student.

-*Impact of proofreading on informant's language skills/abilities*, e.g., proofreading has helped improve his/her writing ability.

-*Self-evaluation of informant's proofreading skills and abilities and lack of abilities*, e.g. s/he is able to proofread 'instinctively', has no knowledge of proofreading annotation conventions which may make informant's proofreading less effective.

-Proofreader's *personality*, e.g. a perfectionist.

ASK PR

REASON INFORMANT ASKED TO PROOFREAD/RECRUITMENT

-*Reason informant is asked to proofread*, e.g. because s/he's a native speaker and has L1 intuition, because s/he's good at English, because s/he was a teacher, is helpful.

-Also *how informant recruits 'customers'*, e.g. through word of mouth, recommended by writer's lecturer.

BECOME PR

HOW INFORMANT BECAME A PROOFREADER/REASONS INFORMANT PROOFREADS

e.g., need for income.

TYPETXTSWRITERS

TYPES OF TEXTS PROOFREAD

-e.g., CVs, covering letters, PhDs.

-*Fields/disciplines* of texts read, e.g. normally in informant's own discipline

-Also includes *quality* of texts customarily proofread, e.g. good quality, poor quality.

-Includes *relationship with the writer*, where applicable, e.g., partner, friend, and native/non-native status of writers.

NB May be double-coded with EVALUATION OF PROOFREADING TASK AND TEXT

FEES

-Details of fees charged (or whether informant proofreads for free)

-Reasons for charging, not charging, and rates

-How rates are calculated, e.g., per word, per page, per hour.

-How payments are made.

NUMBERTEXTS

NUMBER OF TEXTS/EXPERIENCE OF PROOFREADING

- Number of texts informant has proofread to date, if information given.
- Amount of time informant has been proofreader.

FORMAT

FORMAT USED TO PROOFREAD

Preferred format used to proofread and reasons, e.g. pen and paper, rather than the computer because informant finds errors easier to spot.

DECLINING

DECLINING PROOFREADING

- Includes types of texts declined, e.g. PhD theses
 - Reasons for declining proofreading work, e.g. too busy, too much responsibility, lack of proofreading training
- NB This may be double-coded as PROFILE (because of self-evaluation of informants' abilities)

WRIT KNOWL

INFORMANT'S KNOWLEDGE OF WRITER AND WRITER'S KNOWLEDGE BASE AND HOW THIS IMPACTS ON INFORMANT'S PROOFREADING

- e.g. does writer know linguistic terminology or not? So can informant use this terminology when making comments?

PR ROLE

PROOFREADER ROLE AND WRITER ROLE, including EXTENT and TYPE OF PROOFREADER'S INTERVENTIONS

- What proofreader does and does not do; and what writer is expected to do*, e.g. make a decision about how best to respond to proofreader's questions and comments. And why.
 - Informant's views on *appropriate and inappropriate roles of proofreader and areas of intervention*, e.g. should a proofreader be 'remoulding' rather than just 'polishing' writing? Is the assignment title the proofreader's concern or not? And how far the informant is prepared or not prepared to go with the text. Is/Should the role be pedagogic?
 - Also includes *comparison and contrast of proofreader role with other roles and roles of other parties*: proofreader, writer, lecturer, e.g. proofreader role vs. TEFL teacher role; role of proofreader vs. role of lecturer=more/less responsibility to explain errors. This can involve explanation of proofreading practices, e.g. when proofreader writes a question mark, this means it's the writer's responsibility to decide on appropriate rewrite.
 - Comments about interventions and/or non-interventions*: how far proofreader goes, and why, e.g. will only correct language and not content, willing to make text read more elegantly even though original version is comprehensible, unwilling to risk correcting discipline-specific terminology in case 'correction' is wrong, declines to correct text when s/he can't understand intended message, more wholesale interventions would take too much time. Includes comments informant makes about differences in marking up/correcting task text compared to other writers who are more familiar with his/her methods.
 - Comments vs. corrections*: informant explains when s/he corrects, and when s/he comments, and why, e.g. when s/he can't understand meaning/content of text can only make a comment or suggestion, rather than a confident correction. Also includes suggestions by informant to writer to look up dictionaries, grammars, etc., and reasons behind these suggestions.
 - Comments could be *about the task or intervention behaviour generally*
 - Includes comments about *actual or possible impact of proofreading on writer and on the text*, e.g. it makes them better writers, it may improve the writer's mark. [Indirectly relates to proofreader and writer roles.]
- NB Sometimes double-coded with ETHICAL ISSUES

METAPHORS

PROOFREADER ROLE: METAPHORS (PROMPT CARD)

-Informant's response to proofreading role prompt card (cleaner, teacher, mediator, leveller, etc.), and how closely s/he identifies with each metaphor.

-Plus any other metaphors used, e.g. proofreader as firefighter, including metaphors expressing what the proofreader is not, e.g. 'I'm not a thesaurus'; but double-code with PROOFREADER ROLE AND WRITER ROLE.

TERMINOLOGY

TERMINOLOGY FOR 'PROOFREADING'

-Informant's understanding of what 'proofreading', 'editing', etc. is and whether 'proofreader' is the most appropriate term. Includes doubts about how clear the terms are, and comparisons/contrasts of informant's understanding of these terms with what s/he does, e.g. 'proofreading' means very minor changes like adding semi-colons, unlike the changes informant makes to students' texts.

NB

Sometimes double-coded with PROOFREADER ROLE AND WRITER ROLE

UNIREGS

KNOWLEDGE OF UNIVERSITY REGULATIONS ON PROOFREADING

-The extent to which informant is aware of/versed in *university's regulations on proofreading*, and what it deems permissible, etc., e.g. informant not aware of whether writer obliged to disclose that their text has been proofread.

-Includes how the informant found out this information about regulations. And includes lack of knowledge.

TASK COMMENTARY CODE

EVAL TASK TEXT

EVALUATION OF PROOFREADING TASK AND TEXT

-*Difficulties/ease and uncertainties/certainties of/associated with task*, e.g. frustrating, hard work, tiring, unfamiliar discipline/subject matter, sometimes unsure what to do, easy to comprehend subject matter, became fed up with the task.

-*Evaluation of writer's text and writer's language abilities*, e.g. atrocious, lots of grammar problems, incoherent, poor language skills. Informant may compare and contrast this text with texts normally proofread, e.g. task text much lower quality than informant accustomed to. More about overall evaluation of text (or a substantial part of text), rather than a remark about the deficiencies of a word or phrase.

-Includes informant's *self-evaluation of proofreading performance on the task*, e.g. informant thought his/her performance was unsatisfactory because s/he couldn't understand the writer's meaning

NB Only use code when informant *explicitly* commenting on nature of the specific task or the writer's task text. If informant is speaking more generally, use other codes (such as DIFFICULTIES).

NB Sometimes double coded with TYPES OF TEXTS PROOFREAD

Sometimes double coded with DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES OF PROOFREADING

Sometimes double coded with PROFILE (when informant talking about skills and abilities)

TASK COMMENTARY CODE

PROCESSES

PROOFREADING PROCESSES WHEN RESPONDING TO TASK AND TEXT

-*Proofreading processes engaged in while tackling the task*, e.g., the need for the informant to continually re-read the text to try to comprehend the message, looking at assignment worksheet near the beginning of the process to ascertain the assignment length, checks a citee's name is spelt consistently throughout text. And reasons for enacting these processes, if included.

-Includes *informant's explanations about how his/her process would differ if task was performed under more naturalistic conditions*, e.g. if informant had calculator with him/her, s/he would calculate length of text, use a thesaurus, use Internet/Google, etc.

DIFFICULTIES

DIFFICULTIES, UNCERTAINTIES, AND CHALLENGES OF PROOFREADING

-These can relate specifically to *difficulties/challenges when proofreading the task or generally*, e.g. trying to figure out writer's intended meaning, discipline-specific terminology, low proficiency texts and proofreading them, trying not to cover everything in red ink, trying not to discourage writer, trying to come up with a suitable reformulation of writer's (faulty) message, writer refuses to accept suggested amendments from proofreader, time-consuming and tiring nature of proofreading, informant will make mistakes in proofreading because of the time-consuming/tiring nature of the work. For difficulties such as retaining writer's ownership of the text, double-code as ETHICS.

-Also includes information on *how informant attempts to solve these problems*, e.g. by consulting Google to check whether writer has said things correctly.

-Includes *difficulties and challenges when proofreading earlier in career*.

NB Sometimes double-coded with ETHICS

Sometimes double-coded with EVALUATION OF PROOFREADING TASK & TEXT

ETHICS

ETHICAL ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH PROOFREADING

Doubts and uncertainties (or certainties) about ethical/moral dimension of proofreading, e.g., about how far it is morally right for proofreader to intervene, whether or not proofreader should leave text which is not strong in terms of content alone, refusing to move paragraphs around because it's beyond the role permitted by university, about how proofreading may put L2 writers at a slight advantage compared to L1 writers who don't seek proofreaders out. Also that proofreading helps writers with an ethical/moral message, e.g. to expose corruption, etc.

-NB Sometimes double-coded with PROOFREADER ROLE

Sometimes double-coded with EXTENT & TYPE OF PROOFREADER INTERVENTIONS

Sometimes double-coded with DIFFICULTIES, UNCERTAINTIES, & CHALLENGES OF PROOFREADING

CONTACT

CONTACT WITH WRITER BEFORE, WHILE, AND AFTER PROOFREADING

-*When and why informant may contact writer*, e.g. to seek clarification on meaning of writer's assignment title or meaning of text, to explain meaning of proofreading symbols. *Content of cover email sent to writer when returning work*, etc.

-*Mode of contact* (face-to-face, virtual (e.g. by email), etc.)

-Includes *actions proofreader will take at these times of contact*, e.g. be willing to read a 2nd draft after handing back the writer's text.

NB SOMETIMES DOUBLE-CODED WITH DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES

BELIEFS

BELIEFS ABOUT GOOD ACADEMIC WRITING AND ESSAY WRITING REQUIREMENTS

-Informant's beliefs about *good academic writing*, e.g., not good to use too many rhetorical questions, writing 'firstly, secondly, thirdly' is inappropriate, the way to reference correctly, different disciplines have different conventions.

-Informant's beliefs about *essay writing requirements*, e.g., some essays/lecturers require students not to make writing personal, not to refer to themselves in text.

WRITER BELIEFS

BELIEFS ABOUT WRITERS, WRITERS' DIFFICULTIES, WEAKNESSES, EXPECTATIONS, AND WRITING STANDARDS

-Informant's beliefs about *nature and causes of writers' difficulties*, e.g. language deficiencies, L2 writers mix up tenses.

-Includes informant's beliefs about *writer weaknesses when comparing/contrasting L1 and L2 texts*.

-Includes informant's beliefs about *student writers' behaviour in general*, e.g. students hand work in for proofreading at the last minute, students don't have time to check work thoroughly when it is returned by proofreader, students won't have time/enough money to ask proofreader to take a 2nd look at their text, students' expectations of what proofreaders will do for them and their text, what interventions they expect, etc.

-Informant's views on *the standard of writers being permitted admission into university*, e.g. writing proficiency should be better. Also includes *standards university requires for work to achieve a passing grade*, e.g. informant believes standards are too low.

-Includes informant's beliefs about *students' satisfaction/dissatisfaction with his/her proofreading*, e.g. writers satisfied with the work.

INTIMPACT

IMPACT OF INTERVIEW ON INFORMANT

e.g., proofreader found task interesting, questions the extent of his/her interventions.

ADDCOMM

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

-Additional comments informant makes when invited to at end of interview.

ⁱ In fact as Baxter (2010) points out, UK universities may vary in the types of 'proofreading' they permit—although it is evident that they are increasingly setting out explicitly the types of interventions deemed to be ethically acceptable and unacceptable (such as Essex University, discussed later). However, Shaw's blog highlights how official policies may be unofficially ignored—not least because proving unscrupulous proofreading practices can be difficult.

ⁱⁱ The emphasis of Lines' article is on L2 rather than L1 students of English, but of course we should not forget that L1 students can also avail themselves of unscrupulous forms of 'proofreading'. However, while it is clear that much more work needs to be done to get a fuller picture of the prevalence or otherwise of 'contract cheating' (see Curtis & Clare 2017 for a review), Maxwell et al.'s (2006) study found that a larger proportion of international students than local Australian students admitted to having purchased an essay that they then submitted as their own work.

ⁱⁱⁱ The title the writer provides, *The argumentation of error correction in second language writing*, does not appear in the lecturer's list. However, it becomes clear from the essay that the writer is attempting question 2, *To what extent do you agree with Truscott's criticisms of error correction? Refer to a teaching context with which you are familiar to substantiate your arguments*.

^{iv} All informants' names are pseudonyms; full details about participants and their profiles follow.

^v Kruger & Bevan-Dye (2010) compiled a list of various interventions for their student proofreader questionnaire reviewed earlier, but they mix revision strategies (e.g., *Correcting incorrect spelling*) and motivations for making revisions (e.g., *Correcting to ensure that text conforms to the higher education institution's house style or house rules*). As it can be difficult for the text analyst to identify the *why*, the reason an intervention is made, as opposed to the *what*, the change made, their inventory was found

to be unsuitable for my purposes. And it should be stressed that they did not design their inventory of editorial tasks for the use of a text analyst—the inventory was solely for use as a survey instrument for proofreaders to self-report their behaviours.

^{vi} For other, briefer, examples of UK universities' approaches, see <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/right-cite/Student/proofread.php> (Newcastle University);

<https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/policyonproofreaders/> (University of Oxford);

and <http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/exams/policies/exa-proofreading.aspx> (University of Reading).