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What are the differences? Tutor interactions with first- and second-language writers

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Abstract

This paper reports on a decade of research into the nature of interactions between writing center tutors and native speaker (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS) tutees. It explores and describes the structure of this interaction and the behaviors of NNS tutees, and of tutors when interacting with both NS and NNS tutees. It characterizes writing center tutorials with NNSs as a balancing act among potentially conflicting forces. Finally, it suggests applications of these insights to tutor preparation and practice. © 2004 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

In “Tutoring in the ‘Contact Zone,’” Wolff (2000), elaborating on Pratt’s metaphor (1991), argues that it is the tutor’s job to create “zones where different cultures meet, often cultures with language barriers” (p. 44). When faced with the prospect of tutoring a non-native speaker (NNS), tutors often have difficulty doing this. Some simply avoid tutorials with NNSs; others try to tutor NNSs the same way they would native speakers (NSs); still others make the NNS tutorial a language (rather than a writing) lesson, with or without the tutee’s permission. Are these approaches useful? How would one know which approach to take? How *does* one effectively tutor a NNS? And what specifically in tutorials with NNSs causes tutors the degree of anxiety reported in the literature (Blau & Hall, 2002; Powers, 1993; Thonus, 1993, 1999b)?

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The research attending to these questions is, thankfully, growing year by year, with dissertations by Young (1992), Carter-Tod (1995), Thonus (1998), Anglada (1999), Kim (2001), and Ritter (2002); articles, starting in the early 1990s, including those by Harris and Silva (1993), Powers (1993), and Thonus (1993); as well as many “how to tutor ESL students” pieces in tutoring newsletters and manuals. In my own discourse-analytic work in writing centers, I have sought to begin with descriptions of “what is” rather than provide prescriptions of “what should be”. My purpose has been to heed the admonition of North (1984) that in writing center tutorials, “Talk is everything. If the writing center is ever to prove its worth . . . it will have to do so by describing its talk: what characterizes it, what effects it has, how it can be enhanced” (p. 444). In specifically addressing NNS tutorials, an examination of talk may reveal both similarities to and differences from NS tutorials. From there we may speculate on whether these differences are the cause of tutor anxiety or a reflection of the different frames that tutors create in an effort to establish effective contact zones.

What are the specific challenges faced by tutors of NNSs? Recent investigations of NNSs in the writing center suggest there are several (Thonus, 1999a, 1999b; Williams, 2004; Young, 1992). Tutors, especially peer tutors, are already faced with a delicate balance of providing guidance to their tutees without taking ownership of the writer’s text. Most tutor preparation includes specific instruction on asking questions, prompting writer reflection, and ensuring that the writer remain in charge of the revision process. This is seen as the most effective way of meeting writers’ needs, particularly those of novice writers. Yet, in working with NNSs, tutors face competing needs. The received wisdom of tutoring, just described, assumes that there is a great deal that even novice writers already know, knowledge that tutors simply need to draw out. However, this may not be the case with NNS tutees; indeed, there is much they do not know and may need to be told. But telling flies in the face of tutor training, causing considerable tutor anxiety.

In addition, tutors face a second tension, common to all interaction with non-proficient NNSs. In English conversational interaction, indirectness is considered a form of politeness (see e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1996; Blum Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989). Indirectness is considered appropriate in potentially face-threatening situations (see Thonus, 1999a; Williams, 2004; Young, 1992, regarding politeness in writing center interaction). Writing center tutorials present a situation in which the tutor is offering what amounts to criticism of a writer’s work. NSs will tend to mitigate anything their interlocutors, in this case, their tutees, might regard as critical; this is simply conventional politeness. Yet, for NNSs, this politeness strategy can be a barrier to comprehension: Considerable research has demonstrated that indirect speech acts are more difficult for learners to understand (see Bardovi-Harlig, 2001, for a review). Thus, the tutor of NNSs is presented with another dilemma: Maintain politeness and risk lowering comprehensibility; increase comprehensibility and risk offending the tutee. Both of these tensions contribute to how the tutor and tutee co-construct their roles during the writing center tutorial and to how those roles are reflected in the structure of their interaction.

This report summarizes the results of my investigations (Thonus, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 2001, 2003) as well as the findings of other studies of writing center interaction. As a whole, the research I have done represents a broad exploration of tutor–tutee discourse in

writing center tutorials using an *interactional sociolinguistics* framework (Schiffrin, 1996). Consistent with this approach, transcripts of tutorials were coded for topic initiation and persistence, turn length, volubility, overlaps, backchannels, laughter, suggestions, and acceptances/rejections.

The data consist of tutorials with NS and NNS writers from a cumulative corpus taped over a four-year period at the Indiana University Writing Tutorial Services. Twenty graduate-student tutors (including the author) from various university departments participated in the data collection; at the time of taping, each had had at least one year of tutoring experience. They tutored 44 different graduate and undergraduate students, some of whom had visited the center before and some who had not.

Twenty-five tutorials with NSs and 19 with NNSs were recorded and transcribed. The majority of the tutees in the sample were undergraduates; several of the NNSs were graduate students. This distribution of NS and NNS undergraduates and NNS graduate students reflects the clientele of this particular writing center. Native languages represented in the sample are English as well as Arabic, Bahasa, Cantonese, Farsi, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, and Thai. Tutees presented their tutors with writing assignments from 14 different content areas (biology, business, comparative literature, education, English composition, English and world literatures, history, journalism, library science, music, political science, professional writing, religious studies, and sociology). The distribution of academic disciplines reflected in the content areas of student papers also mirrors the diversity of courses for which the writing center tutees seek assistance. Despite this writing center's emphasis on discipline-specific tutoring, the appointment secretary was not always able to match tutor expertise with tutee paper content area because of time conflicts and the large number of students seeking assistance. In addition to the data from the transcripts, for 12 of the tutorials (6 with NSs and 6 with NNSs), interviews were conducted with both the tutor and tutee in an effort to include their perspectives on the sessions.

Analysis of studies of writing center tutorials with NS and NNS tutees offers four related themes: (1) communicative dominance by tutors, (2) conflicting perceptions of tutor roles among participants in the tutorial, (3) tutor involvement, and (4) variability and uncertainty in tutor–tutee behavior.

2. Communicative dominance

Tutor talk shows many signs of interactional dominance. Thonus (1999b) specifically addressed the issue of tutee gender and NS/NNS status on tutor verbal behavior. Results indicated that institutional context has more to do with tutorial interaction than tutees' gender or NS/NNS status. That is, dominance and its expression reside not in individuals but in speech situations that confer status and authority on institutional representatives. As lower status discourse participants, both NS and NNS tutees are invariably less dominant than their tutors and more likely than not to accept their evaluations and suggestions. Evidence of the dominant status of tutors has been found in numerous studies of NNS writers (Cumming & So, 1996; Ritter, 2002; Thonus, 1999a, 2001; Williams, 2004; Young, 1992).

These signals of interactional dominance include longer turn length, less mitigation, or softening, of face-threatening acts, less use of negotiation in favor of greater use of directives, and a general “take-charge” approach to the tutorial in which tutors direct the course of the session and make the major decisions.

2.1. Turn length

Tutors have consistently longer turn length than their tutees; Thonus (2003) reports that they talk on average 50% more than their tutees. This pattern is accentuated when the tutee is a NNS (Thonus, 2003; Williams, 2004). This has the obvious consequence of decreasing the amount of time during which the tutee holds the floor, where *floor* is defined in individual terms as one person at a time (Edelsky, 1981; Liska, 1992).

2.2. Less mitigation

Tutors’ use of mitigation, or softening, of directives varies widely, with suggestions generally manifesting less mitigation in NNS tutorials. Tutors are far more likely to mitigate directives offered to NS tutees; Thonus reports that the lowest incidence of mitigation appearing in any NS tutorial was greater than the highest incidence in any NNS tutorial in her corpus (1999a, 2003). Her results are corroborated by Williams (2004), who found that not only did tutors use less mitigation with NNSs than with NSs, but they also used more upgraders with NNSs. Upgraders strengthen the force of directives, with the use of modals such as *you have to* and imperatives. Thonus (1999b) suggests that tutors avoid mitigation and use a more direct style in order to improve the comprehensibility of their suggestions to L2 writers. It is likely that upgraders, though perhaps less polite, serve the same purpose. The tutors in Williams (2004) claimed in retrospective accounts that this was indeed their strategy.

2.3. Less extended negotiation sequences

Tutorials with NNSs show evidence of less extended negotiation sequences than NS tutorials (Thonus, 1999c). The tutor in the following excerpt pursues the NS tutee’s thesis statement topic through four exchanges and beyond:

- (1) (For transcription conventions, see Appendix)
- ⇒ S: **Like what would a thesis statement be?**
- ⇒ T: **Um (5s) What do you think?**
- S: ***.
- T: O.K. What’s this paper about to you? What’s the purpose of this paper, if you could say it?
- S: The purpose of the paper? The purpose of this paper is to get an “A.”
- T: uh-huh
- Oh, that’s very goal directed! ((laugh))
- ⇒ S: **Um I mean something how I want to be a doctor and how I’m going to get there*****.

- T: After what?
 S: After***.
 ⇒ T: **Right and so maybe, and this is just a thought, coming down to this little narrative where you ditch medicine . . .**

(Tutorial 13, female tutor with NS male, English composition, unacquainted)

Extended negotiation sequences like these are infrequent in tutorials with NNSs. With NNS tutees, tutors are more likely to resort to question–answer interrogation sequences rather than the give and take of negotiation. Notice the question–answer structure of this NNS tutorial (tutor questions are in bold):

- (2)
 ⇒ T: Oh, O.K. **I mean I guess one question we could ask is “What causes ozone loss?” Do we know what causes um ozone loss?**
 S: uh-huh
 Yeah, I think it’s some kind of spraying and and pollution or something like that?
 T: O.K. so we have sprays, (.) pollution. (4s) **Does car exhaust?**
 S: Car, yeah, it does.
 ⇒ T: Car exhaust. (.) O.K. **Um (.) well then the question would be (5s) how much of this, of these items are being produced or used or whatever, here in Bloomington?** Right?
 S: uh-huh
 Yeah, um I mean the cars, because they use everything almost
 T: Is used.
 O.K. so now are you supposed to, **I’ll ask another question,**
 S: yeah
 ⇒ T: **are you supposed to be talking about the effects of ozone loss or the causes of ozone loss?**
 S: Both um the causes and um***.
 T: o.k.

(Tutorial 12, male tutor with NNS female, professional writing, unacquainted)

In four exchanges, the tutor asks four questions. Note that three of these are overtly marked as questions: *One question we could ask*; *the question would be*; and *I’ll ask another question*. It is interesting to note that Thonus (2003) found tutorials with this sort of rapid-fire exchange were perceived as less successful by the participants than tutorials with a more conversational turn structure.

This directness also manifests itself in a greater willingness on the part of tutors to give explicit answers to NNSs, rather than the evasive response they may give to NSs, a strategy designed to make writers find their own solutions. Excerpt (3) illustrates what typically occurs in tutorials when NS tutees ask questions during the directive phase. Note how the tutor fails to answer the tutee’s direct question regarding the wisdom of a certain course of

action with the rejoinder *What do you think?* The tutor is also evasive when asked *So how do we do that?* (tutor's emphasis on the *we*).

(3)

- T: Or maybe, here's another alternative. Maybe the thesis doesn't have to say everything changed one way or the other. And what's the alternative
- S: right
- T: [to that?
- S: **[So just talk about the culture in general, I mean [or just?**
- ⇒ T: **[Well, does it have to change [for you to talk about it?**
- S: [Like, I mean
- No. (.)
- T: So maybe that's part of the [thesis, too.
- S: **[So I can introduce that, right?**
- ⇒ T: **What do you think?**
- S: I think so. I want to. (.) **So how do we do that? ((laugh))**
- T: o.k.
- ⇒ **O.K. What have you got so far?**

(Tutorial F, male tutor with NS female, sociology, unacquainted)

Tutors are less likely to deflect requests in interactions with NNSs (Thonus, 1998). At first, the tutor in (4) evades her NNS tutee's direct request (*Do you have anything suggest?*) but the second time at his insistence (*What do you want to know about the end of my paper?*), gives in:

(4)

- S: Um (.) um I was going to add the story about the lady and son.
- T: yeah
- S: Maybe I put this here. Yeah. And then, actually um I haven't
- T: yeah
- ⇒ S: decided how (2s) I can finish the paper. (.) **Um I don't know, I don't have any idea. (.) Do you anything suggest [like? ((laugh))**
- T: **[Well ((laugh)) no, because I, I, I, what I can do is maybe ask you some questions to help jar your memory so that you can remember more and write more.**
- S: uh-huh
- ⇒ **Good. Let's say um you're the reader of the paper. What could you expect (.) an, in end of the paper? What do you want to know about the end of my paper?**
- T: By the end of your story I want to have a, a good sense of some of the experiences you had at this job.

(Tutorial J, female tutor with NNS male, English composition, unacquainted)

2.4. Taking charge

Taking charge of the sessions manifests itself in a variety of ways. Tutors frequently instruct their NNS tutees on how a tutorial should be conducted, something that was not found in the NS sessions. In part, this may result from tutor perceptions that NNSs view tutoring as a correction service (Thonus, 1998). The NNS in this next excerpt was a first-timer at the writing center, and the tutor felt it necessary to inform him that a tutorial was a teaching experience. Central to this task, she believed, was convincing the student that writing, not grammar, was the main issue:

(5)

T: And then we'll work on expanding, and we'll, we'll talk about um grammar and sentences as well, but um I don't know, I don't know if, have you been to the writing center before for tutoring?

S: No.

T: We don't really do corrections of grammar and [sentence-level. We can talk

S: [You don't?

T: about the grammar issues [and definitely we can help you with your concerns.

S: [yeah

O.K.

⇒ T: **But um I don't, I don't fix what's wrong.**

S: ((laugh)) You're not supposed to?

T: No [no. Because the philosophy behind that is, if I do it for you, you're

S: [o.k.

T: never going to, to figure out how to do it for your[self.

⇒ S: **[So you want um teach me how to [fish, then?**

T: [Ex-

Exactly. [Teach a person to fish and they'll eat for their lifetime, is that how it

S: [((laugh))

T: [goes?

S: [*** giving me a fish. (.)

⇒ T: **I'm not going to give you [a fish.** O.K. [((laugh)) O.K. Here's your book

S: [o.k. [((laugh))

T: back, and I'll take a look at this. . .

(Tutorial J, female tutor with NNS male, advanced composition, unacquainted)

Another sign of tutors' authority is their willingness to make diagnoses themselves without inviting NNS tutee input, a move that NNSs often appear to accept. Notice how the tutor shifts attention away from the student's concern (mostly grammar) and nominates her own, organization. There is no indication that the student objects to this change in direction. Indeed, the NNS tutee's reaction, *I don't know*, suggests that he believes it is the tutor's prerogative to decide what to work on: The tutor is *supposed* to know

what's wrong:

(6)

- T: So this is supposed to be very descriptive, [it's not supposed to be
 S: yes, [yes
 T: analytical [at all.
 S: [No, no, no, no.
 ⇒ T: O.K. **And you were concerned mostly, you said, about your grammar. Was there any other concern that you wanted me to look for?**
 S: **I don't know.** ((laugh))
 T: You don't know? O.K. Well, one thing, and you might think about this when I
 ⇒ finish reading it, I'll probably ask you, whenever I write about two things, **I'm always really worried about organization.**
 S: hmm

(Tutorial 14, female tutor with NNS male, library science, unacquainted)

Furthermore, tutors will often reject NNS self-evaluations and self-suggestions (Thonus, 2003). The tutor in (7) categorically rejects his tutee's self-suggestion that she must find reasons to support the arguments of the writers she is quoting:

(7)

- S: I just quoted some words from there, then I just write my, my thinking about this should be, [probably should be, even though it, it doesn't said about this.
 T: [uh-huh
 It's doesn't say, you mean he doesn't give a reason [why he thinks this?
 S: [no
 ⇒ **Yes, so [so I just think we have to just, we have to find the evidence which**
 T: [uh-huh
 S: **supported, which has [support**
 T: [To support his claims?
 S: Yes.
 ⇒ T: **Oh, that's not going to be your job is to try to support his claims.**
 T: It doesn't seem to me that your job is to try to find evidence to,
 S: uh-huh
 T: sometimes writers simply say things um and don't necessarily
 S: uh-huh
 support them with, [with solid evidence, whether it's statistical, [or whether
 S: [uh-huh [uh-huh
 T: they sort of reason it out.

(Tutorial K, male tutor with NNS female, English composition, unacquainted)

2.5. Holding the floor

Tutors are less likely to cede the floor to a NNS tutee than to a NS or pursue topics nominated by a NNS tutee (Thonus, 1999b). Williams (2004) also found that tutors were

more likely to control the floor in their interactions with NNSs through interruptions, topic nominations, and topic shifts. The tutor in the next excerpt acknowledges her tutee's concern about grammar, but as the tutorial progresses, she fails to address the "sentence-level stuff" that the tutee has requested. At the end of the tutorial she reveals that her own agenda has not been to address grammar but to address the essay's argument:

(8)

- ⇒ T: Go ahead. **What sorts of things do you want me to look for? You, you said grammar** [issues
S: **[Grammar (.) grammar and conclusion**
T: uh-huh
S: **and um (.)citation.**
T: And the citing that you [use, the citations that you use? O.K. (.)
S: [yeah
I'm not sure they're correct or not...
[7 turns]
⇒ T: O.K. (.) So I'll read through, and **I'll look for um some sentence-level concerns...**
[96 turns]
⇒ T: Now what we haven't addressed is any of the sentence-level stuff. We've been, we've addressed your argument all along (.)

(Tutorial 7, female tutor with NNS male, history, unacquainted)

2.6. Tutee behavior

Because status is interactionally achieved, it is important to also examine the interactional behavior of the tutees. The non-dominant party in interaction often collaborates to allow the dominant party to lead and to hold the floor, and this is what often occurs in tutorials that involve NNSs. Compared to NS tutees, NNSs exhibit less volubility, fewer overlaps, more backchanneling, and less laughter (Thonus, 1999c). Interview data show that NNS tutees expected their tutors to behave as higher status interlocutors. Consistent with norms of positive politeness, these tutees interpreted tutor behaviors such as volubility, directive frequency and forcefulness as consistent with their constructions of tutors as a type of teacher with inherent rights to such behavior. When interviewed, one NNS tutee said she believed it was her tutor's job to be talkative because his role was to "give some advices." Another commented that "of course" his tutor spoke more than he did because she was answering the questions he asked of her. Numerous reports on writing center tutees show that many of them, especially NNSs, expect and want their tutors to act as authorities (Blau & Hall, 2002; Harris, 1997; Thonus, 1999c; Williams, 2004; Young, 1992).

3. Participants' perception of tutor role

Equally important are the participants' perceptions of the tutor's role. Thonus (2001) investigated tutor, tutee, and instructor's perceptions of the tutor role. Work by Thonus

(1998, 2001, 2003), Williams (2004) and Young (1992) included retrospective participant interviews. These interviews suggested that tutee perceptions of the tutor role differ substantially from the idealistic characterization of the collaborative peer common in writing center theory and training manuals. There are also differences between NS and NNS perceptions of tutor role. In general, NSs perceive the tutor's role as different and less authoritative than that of the course instructor. In contrast, the characterization of the tutor as an authority figure is one of the constants in NNS tutees' talk during tutorials and interpretations of their interactions afterwards. One of strongest themes running through all of Thonus's work is NNS tutee's unshakeable belief in the authority of the writing tutor. No amount of appeal to what Kim (2001) calls "the collaborative frame" seems to pry them away from this position, putting their view at odds with mainstream writing center philosophy. As Healy and Boshier (1992) note, the dominant writing center theory of collaborative tutoring is based on challenging educational authority, an authority perhaps less easily questioned by NNSs because the expertise of tutors as NSs of English places the NNS tutee in a learner's, not a collaborator's, position.

This NNS perception of the tutor as an authority figure can also be seen in expressions of appreciation that often prolong the closing phase of the tutorial, as in this excerpt (9). These appear only in NNS tutorials (Thonus, 1999b):

(9)

- S: I must say thank you to you. Writing is very important skill to me [to get a good
T: [yeah
S: grade. ((laugh))
T: Your writing's good, you just have some little word order problems in it and
articles, but um but generally you get your point across very well.
⇒ S: Um very difficult, very difficult to write English. **Maybe this**
T: yeah
S: **semester I must drop by your office (.) dozens of, dozens of um times.**
T: Pardon? If you want to make an appointment, um [well let's see (day secretary)
S: [um o.k.
T: is gone.
S: I'd like to make another appointment this week.
T: Yeah, I think they have, she may have left, but um (night secretary) can take
care of you.

(Tutorial 11, female tutor with NNS male, education, unacquainted)

4. Involvement

Analyses of tutor–tutee interaction indicate that tutors were consistently less conversationally involved with their NNS tutees than their NS tutees. Overall, tutorials with NNSs were shorter (both in terms of number of turns and clock time) and contained fewer topics than those with NSs (Thonus, 1999a). One clear and consistent difference is the shorter (or zero) opening phase. With NNSs, tutors were more likely to jump immediately to

evaluation–suggestion sequences rather than engage in small talk or negotiate an agenda for the session. Note that this NNS tutorial (10) begins with no opening phase; the tutor gets right down to business.

(10)

⇒ T: **How far along are you now?**

S: I'm fourth paragraph, which is um um comparison between exposition and recapitulation.

T: Uh-huh. And yesterday you talked to someone. Did you work on the computer yesterday?

S: No, actually, um I came here like late, so um she didn't have time

T: oh, I see

S: to like put you know every everything, so.

T: everything?

⇒ **O.K. So what do you want to do today?**

S: I just want to make sure that it makes sense, from the beginning of the paper.

T: So, O.K. I'll just read it. (51s)

(Tutorial 2, male tutor with NNS female, music, unacquainted)

This lack of greeting, getting-to-know-you, or discussion of the history of the tutee's assignment creates a situation in which the tutorial exhibits the transactional character of a service encounter (Fiksdal, 1990) rather than a conversation.

With NNS tutees, tutors exhibited fewer overlaps, less laughter, and greater volubility, creating an uneven distribution of talk. Overlaps, laughter, and small talk are considered signs of conversational involvement and a reduction of social distance (Aston, 1993, Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993; Thonus, 2001, 2003).

5. Variability, uncertainty and pragmatic failure

There is considerable evidence that both the tutor and the tutee are hesitant about how the tutorial should be conducted. Tutors demonstrate more variable behavior and uncertainty in their interaction with NNS tutees. For example, the diagnosis phase of the session, in which the tutor and tutee come to an agreement as to what needs to be done, varies considerably in length in NNS sessions (Thonus, 1998, 2003; Williams, 2004), compared to the more consistent duration of this phase in NS sessions.

Tutors are also more likely to deflect problems they encounter during the session and send NNS tutees back to their instructors for advice. Here (11), the tutor responds to a tutee question with *I'm not sure if I'm going to be able to answer that for you, primarily because I'm not your instructor*. He goes on to suggest that she consult her:

(11)

T: And you know, my, one sort of general suggestion I would have is that you seem to have a lot of questions that um um my guess is the inst-, if you ask

them directly to the instructor before you started your drafting or before you did the final draft, you might feel more confident going into the, into the writing of that.

⇒ [And um I think that your instructor could answer a lot of these

S: [uh-huh

T: **questions.** . .

[2 turns]

T: I still think, maybe even all the more reason, the more questions

S: uh-huh

T: you can ask um

⇒ S: **Yeah, she, she has office hours, [but just because**

T: [o.k.

S: **I can't finish that I just don't go** (((laugh))).

⇒ T: **[It's very hard, especially [because you're trying to write in a language that's not your own.**

S: uh-huh

T: So I understand that, so um(.) Yeah, O.K.

(Tutorial K, male tutor with NNS female, English composition, unacquainted)

In summary, with NNS tutees, tutors are more both likely to offer explicit directives, as noted earlier, but also to opt out of advice giving, potentially opposite behaviors, suggesting they are less certain of their role with NNSs. Tutors may appeal to instructor expertise more in these NNS tutorials because the tutees are more insistent that they be authoritative.

There is also evidence that the tutees sometimes take missteps. In particular, they fail to mitigate their rejections of tutor suggestions or to support them with accounts (justifications for what is perceived as socially unacceptable behavior). Thonus (2003) showed that tutor authority and expertise are generally assumed and not negotiated. Both NS and NNS tutees are more likely to accept tutor evaluations and suggestions than to reject them. NS rejections, when they do occur, are generally supported by accounts; NNS rejections, however, often lack the support of these accounts. In fact, some demonstrate pragmatic failure (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990, 1991; Salsbury & Bardovi-Harlig, 2000).

In this excerpt, the NS student rejects her tutor's suggestion because she had already done what he was directing her to do; that is, she provides an account:

(12)

T: O.K. In, on page three, this might even be restatement at this point, but I think um you need to remind the reader at least of, of

⇒ S: **I already looked that one up.**

T: Oh, you did? O.K.

S: Because I saw that, I'm like ["O.K.!"]

⇒ T: **[Way ahead of me, huh?**

(Tutorial A, male tutor with NS female, political science, acquainted)

The tutor accepts the student's refusal (*Oh, you did? O.K.*) and even praises her (*Way ahead of me, huh?*).

Contrast this with the oblique rejection offered by this NNS tutee to her tutor's suggestion that she write out an outline of her argument. The tutor, perhaps not convinced that *Yeah, we can do that* constitutes an acceptance of her directive, asks the tutee twice what she thinks. Her response, *I'll think about that*, stands for a rejection:

(13)

- T: Well, what might be helpful, I mean it seemed to be helpful last time but then you didn't use the outline, I don't know. But would it be helpful to (.) write out (.) just an outline of what you want your argument to look like?
- S: uh-huh
- T: And then you can look at, as we've been doing here, the paragraphs you have and say, "I want to lead my reader through these points.
- S: uh-huh
- T: What's the easiest way to do that?"
- ⇒ S: **Yeah, that's a good plan. (.) Yeah, we can do that.**
- T: **What do you [think?**
- S: [An outline of that.
- T: **What do you think at this point?**
- S: Um I'm actually really thinking about this paragraph and how I can include it
- ⇒ um at the beginning, so (.) **I'll think about it.**
- T: o.k. o.k.

(Tutorial I, female tutor with NNS female, religious studies, acquainted)

6. Implications for tutoring

As demonstrated, significant differences exist between tutorials with NS and NNS writers although the interactional patterns are not usually exclusive to either NS or NNS tutorials. My aim is to show interactional tendencies upon which writing center tutors can base a more flexible practice. It is important to note that any application of specific insights to writing center practice must depend on the fit between this research site and other writing centers, between these tutors and colleagues in different situations, and between these tutees and varied tutee populations.

Ritter (2002) recommends, "Writing center research needs to further examine how the tutor provides or denies learning opportunities in all kinds of tutorials" (p. 276). One interpretation of these data is that tutors are still searching for adequate frames for tutorials with NNSs. With NNS tutees, tutors are less consistent in their interactional behavior. Tutees may perceive this as inconsistent and confusing. An alternative, and more hopeful, interpretation of NNS tutorials is that tutors and their NNSs tutees are creating a type of collaboration distinct from that created by NS tutees. Rather than characterizing these tutorials as lacking adequate frames, one might argue that the

frames are more fluid, mirroring Powers' (1993) argument for a more flexible approach to tutoring NNSs.

Important questions are whether NNS tutees should be trained to act and think like NS tutees and whether tutors should receive training for what many perceive as different practice (with NNSs), or whether some of both should occur. It seems unnecessary to create another orthodox set of frames that makes tutors feel guilty when they cannot or do not fit into them (Blau & Hall, 2002). What often emerges are subcurrents of fear and frustration: *As a tutor, I'm supposed to employ a Socratic approach, to let the student take ownership of his/her writing, avoid telling him/her what to do. So how do I deal with the "I don't know" and the silence? What do I do when I can't answer a question about grammar or vocabulary? Do I simply send the student back to his/her instructor?*

My personal approach to training tutors to work with NNS students is to demonstrate "what is"—basically, the summary of findings above—and then ask tutors to imagine why we might interact as we do with NNSs. Tutors must be reassured that there are *reasons* for their frustration—first and foremost, they (and their supervisors) must be willing to relinquish the orthodoxy of the collaborative frame and permit more realistic and appropriate "contact zones" for tutorials with NNSs. Tutor observation and taping and transcribing tutorials is key to consciousness-raising. For tutors of NNSs, this technique can be even more fruitful, especially if the transcription style selected reveals more than the bare content of the interaction and includes the features of interaction as well (see Gilewicz & Thonus, *in press*). There is no easy way to achieve a paradigm shift in writing center theory that promotes more than a "one-size fits all" tutoring frame. But as our centers fill with NNSs of diverse backgrounds, we can ill afford to ignore our tutors' frustrations.

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Appendix A. Transcription conventions

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Pause: | (.) Short pause (1–2 seconds) (5s) Timed pause (2+ seconds) |
| Filled pause: | <i>um, hmm</i> |
| Overlap: | Beginning shown by a right-facing bracket ([) placed vertically. Overlaps between participant contributions are marked using brackets aligned directly above one another. Overlaps continue until one interlocutor completes his/her utterance. |
| Backchannel: | <i>uh-huh, yeah, o.k., (all) right</i> Contributions made by other participants while the first speaker maintains the floor. Backchannels are written in lower-case (o.k.) to distinguish them from minimal responses. |
| Minimal response: | <i>Uh-huh (=yes), Uh-uh (=no), Yeah, O.K., (All) Right</i> Brief responses made by participants when they have the floor. |
| Paralinguistic: | Nonverbal features (()) Additional observation—laugh, cough, sigh, etc. ^^ Finger snaps >> Hand striking a surface |
| Analytic: | *** Indecipherable or doubtful hearing ⇒ Turns focused for analysis |

For greater detail, see Gilewicz and Thonus (in press).