Academic emotions in written corrective feedback situations

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Bio:

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Abstract

Although written corrective feedback (WCF) is often believed to evoke negative emotions, empirical studies on L2 students’ affective reactions to this teaching and learning device are still lacking. Informed by research on academic emotions (Pekrun, 2006; Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2012), the paper reports on two case studies investigating Chinese university EFL students’ emotional reactions to teacher WCF. Self-report data collected from retrospective verbal reports and interviews constituted most of the data, supplemented by observation notes, student writing, and class documents. Qualitative data analysis revealed the richness and dynamicity of the focal students’ emotional reactions to WCF. While both students reported being emotionally undisturbed by WCF, they in fact experienced different discrete emotions with varying object foci, valence, and activation, and these emotions fluctuated in the revision process. The findings question the presumed connection between WCF and negative emotions, suggesting the inadequacy of the positive-negative distinction of emotions and the need for a more nuanced understanding of emotional reactions to feedback.

Keywords: written corrective feedback; academic emotion; valence; activation; object focus
Academic emotions in written corrective feedback situations

Introduction

Academic writing is an emotionally laden process, especially for second language writers, who have to cope with heavy demands on language use (e.g., Belcher & Hirvela, 2005; Duff, 2010; Langum & Sullivan, 2017). To develop L2 students’ confidence and command of literacy resources, writing teachers provide feedback, including written corrective feedback (WCF), as an important teaching and learning tool (Author, 2006). However, a common concern of teachers when providing feedback is its negative emotional consequences for students. Teacher training workshops and courses also instruct pre-service teachers to balance constructive feedback with praise to avoid demoralizing students (e.g., Ferris, 2007). This also applies to the provision of WCF. Many teachers advocate strategies to reduce students’ negative emotions, such as refraining from grading in red ink (Elwood & Bode, 2014) and providing WCF selectively (e.g., Lee, 2008a, 2008b). This concern over the emotional impacts of WCF is a genuine one, as students’ emotions not only mediate their motivation, learning, achievement (e.g., Pekrun, 2006; Pekrun, Frenzel, Goetz, & Perry, 2007; Pekrun, Goetz, Titz, & Perry, 2002), but also help teachers identify “an opportunity for guidance” (Swain, 2013, p. 205).

While research on emotions involved in L2 learning and use has grown (e.g., Pavlenko, 2005; Prior & Kasper, 2016), L2 students’ emotional reactions to WCF remain sidelined. Although L2 students generally value and expect WCF (e.g., Lee, 2008a), much remains to be known about their emotional reactions to WCF throughout the revision process. Moreover,
previous research has primarily focused on the valence of emotional reactions to written feedback, i.e., pleasure-displeasure dimension (e.g., Elwood & Bolde, 2014), rendering other dimensions of emotion under-explored. In addition, aggregated survey responses may also risk averaging out individual variations and restricting answers (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). In-depth qualitative inquiries are thus needed to more thoroughly understand the complexity of L2 students’ emotional reactions to WCF. The study aims to further our knowledge of this area by investigating the emergence and change of two Chinese EFL undergraduate students’ emotional reactions to teacher WCF in a general EAP course.

**Literature Review**

Emotion is an elusive construct encompassing affective, cognitive, motivational, expressive, and physiological processes and components (e.g., Benesch, 2012; Prior, 2016). Compared to closely related constructs of affect and mood, emotions are often considered affective states or episodes with specific referents (Gross, 2014). Emotions are complex also in that they involve both trait emotions, which are habitual and recurring, and state emotions, i.e., “momentary occurrences within a given situation at a specific point of time” (Pekrun, 2006, p. 317). To explore individual EFL students’ emotional reactions to WCF through qualitative methodology, the current inquiry focuses on state emotions. We operationalize emotions as subjective affective feelings momentarily triggered by WCF, which fluctuate or are maintained as individual students receive and make use of that WCF to revise their drafts.

**Insights from research on academic emotions**
Out of various theoretical approaches to researching emotions (see the review in Gross & Barrett, 2011; Prior, 2016), Pekrun and his colleagues’ research on academic emotions has informed the current inquiry into L2 students’ emotional reactions of WCF (e.g., Pekrun, 2006; Pekrun, et al., 2002, 2007). Academic emotions were emotions that “directly linked to academic learning, classroom instruction, and achievement” (Pekrun et al., 2002, p. 91). As feedback, including WCF, is integral to teaching and learning, these studies have great potential to strengthen the current understanding of L2 students’ emotional reactions to WCF.

Pekrun’s research provides a useful analytic framework of emotions emerging in academic settings, which takes multiple dimension of emotions into consideration. Classifying emotions has long been controversial, because the basic emotion approach, the dimensional approach, and the prototype approach all have merits and limitations (Guerro, Andersen, & Trost, 1998). The dimensional approach, which is advocated in research on academic emotions (Pekrun, 2006; Pekrun et al., 2002, 2007), conceptualizes emotions as varying along two dimensions, i.e., valence and activation, and having different object foci. Valence refers to the pleasure-displeasure dimension of emotion, whereas activation refers to the physiologically arousing-relaxing dimension of emotion (Pekrun et al., 2002; Russell, 2003). Taking both valence and activation into account when classifying emotions is necessary in that emotions of the same valence but different activation levels were found to have distinct impacts on learning (e.g., Pekrun, 2006; Pekrun et al., 2002). Negative activating emotions can have ambivalent effects – negatively impacting some students, motivating others, whereas negative deactivating emotions can reduce motivation and effort (e.g., Pekrun, et al., 2010). The differential impacts were also found between positive
activating emotions and positive deactivating emotions (Pekrun et al., 2002). In addition to valence and activation, object focus is another aspect of academic emotions, which refers to the specific referent of emotions (Pekrun et al., 2007). Table 1 categorizes academic emotions by object focus in WCF situations.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Working definition in WCF situations</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Achievement emotions:</strong></td>
<td>Emotions pertaining to the academic tasks at hand (e.g., enjoyment, relaxation, boredom, anger)</td>
<td>Emotions pertaining to processing and using WCF to improve the draft</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Activity emotions</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Achievement emotions:</strong></td>
<td>Emotions pertaining to the expected outcomes of tasks (e.g., hope, anxiety, hopelessness)</td>
<td>Emotions pertaining to: (a) the expected accuracy of the draft before receiving WCF, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prospective outcome emotions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>(b) the expected accuracy of the revised draft during revision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Achievement emotions:</strong></td>
<td>Emotions pertaining to the extant outcomes of tasks (e.g., joy, contentment, shame, sadness)</td>
<td>Emotions pertaining to: (a) the written accuracy of the previous draft(s) after receiving WCF, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Retrospective outcome emotions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>(b) the written accuracy of the revised draft after revision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Epistemic emotions</strong></td>
<td>Emotions pertaining to the cognitive processing involved in the task (e.g., curiosity, surprise)</td>
<td>Emotions pertaining to the cognitive processing of WCF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social emotions</strong></td>
<td>Emotions pertaining to other persons (e.g., envy, contempt, love, hate)</td>
<td>Emotions pertaining to other persons, e.g., teachers and peers, in WCF situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic emotions</strong></td>
<td>Emotions induced by the contents of learning material</td>
<td>Emotions pertaining to the topic and content of the writing task</td>
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</table>
While the dimensional approach has often been used to classify academic emotions, related research has also investigated the emergence and consequences of specific discrete emotions, such as enjoyment, a positive activating emotion (e.g., Goetz, Frenzel, Hall, & Pekrun, 2008), and boredom, a negative deactivating emotion (Pekrun, Goetz, Daniels, Stupinisky, & Perry, 2010). To gain a thorough understanding of L2 students’ emotional reactions to WCF, the current study takes a middle-ground approach to categorizing emotions. In addition to identifying discrete emotions, we investigated object focus, valence, and activation of the students’ emotional reactions to WCF.

**Research on the emotional aspect of academic writing and emotional reactions to WCF**

In the domain of EAP, the emotional challenges that undergraduate and graduate students encounter have been widely acknowledged (e.g., Belcher & Hirvela, 2005; Duff, 2010; Langum & Sullivan, 2017). The emotions of newcomers to academic discourse are affected by their inadequate English writing abilities (e.g., Seloni, 2012), interpersonal relationships and interaction with faculty (e.g., Leki, 2006) and peers (e.g., Morton, Storch, & Thompson, 2015), the high-stake writing tasks (e.g., doctoral dissertations, see Langum & Sullivan, 2017; Russell-Pinson & Harris, in press), and teacher feedback on their writing (e.g., Perpignan, Rubin, & Katzenelson, 2007; Tian & Low, 2012). These emotions have been found to vary, as illustrated by the contrast between enjoyment (e.g., Evans & Morrison, 2011) and anxiety (e.g., Russell-Pinson & Harris, in press). Longitudinal studies have also reported changes in these emotional experiences over time (e.g., Evans & Morrison, 2011; Morton et al., 2015).
Despite the insights gained from the research summarized above, two issues need further investigation. First, although the emotional impact of teacher feedback in EAP classes has been included as one area in studies, little research has looked into feedback-elicited emotions as the main focus. Second, the potential for fluctuations of emotions within a short period of time has received very little scholarly attention. However, a nuanced understanding of the fluctuations of state emotions in EAP settings is needed to enrich our knowledge about emotions related to academic writing and to offer implications for EAP teachers.

In the specific area of WCF research, L2 students’ emotional reactions are recognized as a key aspect of learner affective engagement with WCF (i.e., emotional and attitudinal reactions to WCF, Ellis, 2010a). Emotions elicited by WCF are important as they interact with cognitive and behavioral dimensions of engagement, including their understanding of WCF, revision behaviors, and other related L2 writing and L2 learning strategies (Author, 2015; Ellis, 2010a), and thus constitute the research focus of the current study. WCF is often believed to elicit negative emotions (Semeke, 1984; Truscott, 1996). Although L2 students generally expect WCF and are happy to receive it (Lee, 2008a), their positive attitudes may not translate into positive emotional experiences (McMartin-Miller, 2014).

Previous research has reported variations in L2 students’ emotional responses to WCF and written feedback in general (e.g., Mahfoodh, 2016; Zhang & Hyland, 2018). Case studies indicated that some students may feel proud (Ferris, Liu, Sinha, & Senna, 2013), self-confident (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010), cheated (Author, 1998), frustrated (Zheng & Yu, 2018), indifferent, relieved, or even excited (Author, 2015) when receiving WCF. Also, some may have more fluid emotional experiences than others. In Author’s (2015) study, two
participants expressed frustration and disappointment. These emotions were short-lived and quickly converted into motivation in one student’s case, whereas the other student was immersed in these emotions throughout the revision process. Overall, studies suggest the psychological effects of WCF, while not necessarily negative, vary across individual learners and are mediated by contextual factors (Bruton, 2009, 2010). The presumption that WCF invariably evokes negative emotions (Truscott, 1996) may not mirror L2 students’ actual experiences.

Similar to the issues identified in the field of EAP, research on students’ emotional reactions is also scant in the domain of WCF (Ellis, 2010a), and even less research has considered the multi-dimensional, dynamic, and contextual-sensitive nature of emotions. To advance our knowledge of this area, this study investigates two Chinese university EFL students’ emotional experiences related to WCF, to answer the research question:

a) What emotions do Chinese EFL university students experience in WCF situations, as exemplified by two case studies?

b) Do their emotional reactions change throughout the revision process? If so, how do their emotional reactions change?

Research Methods

Research context

The study is part of a larger project investigating learner engagement with WCF, which lasted one 16-week semester and was situated in two integrated-skills English classes for non-English-major undergraduates in a Chinese university. The course, named level four, was
the university’s most advanced compulsory English course to prepare students for elective courses using English as a medium of instruction. Level four course was thus a general EAP course highlighting critical reading and essay-writing. All writing tasks were to write five-paragraph argumentative essays to critique logical problems in assigned reading materials, and these tasks altogether accounted for approximately 35% of the final grade. The course had multiple classes taught by different teachers, and classes shared course content. However, teachers were given the freedom to decide their own feedback practices.

Participants

Teacher participants were recruited purposely, based on the diversity of their linguistic background and teaching experience. Natalie (all names are pseudonyms), a native English-speaking teacher from the US, and Yao, a local teacher, consented to participate. Both were asked to teach as they normally did. Table 2 summarizes their background information.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background of the teacher participants</th>
<th>Natalie</th>
<th>Yao</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
<td>L1 English, L2 French</td>
<td>L1 Chinese, L2 English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational background</strong></td>
<td>MA in TESOL, EdD in a relevant field</td>
<td>BA in English, MA in accounting</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching experience</strong></td>
<td>More than 20 years’ experience in teaching ESL and EFL, including approximately two years’ experience of teaching level four</td>
<td>Approximately seven years’ experience in teaching English at the university, including more than three years’ experience in teaching level four</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both teachers provided content feedback and WCF on the same draft, and offered various
types of WCF on numerous error categories (for a more detailed description of the teachers’ feedback practices, see Author, 2017a). Natalie circulated a sign-up sheet in her class to encourage students to attend a voluntary one-on-one writing conference after the first writing task (E1). Yao also offered a one-on-one writing conference, but only after the second writing task (E2) and only for those who failed or had almost failed E2. The turn-around time in Yao’s class was also longer.

While students were free to decide the class to enroll in, conversations off the record with multiple English teachers informed us that students that chose to join the class taught by native speakers of English were generally more proficient, motivated, and confident than their counterparts in classes taught by local teachers. We thus focused on two students representing maximum variations (Patton, 2002): Du was a high achiever in Natalie’s class, whereas Hong was a struggling student in Yao’s class. Du’s and Hong’s backgrounds are given in Table 3.

Table 3

<table>
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<th>Focal students’ background information</th>
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<tr>
<td>Du</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performance level in class</td>
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<td>Gender</td>
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<td>Major</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year of college</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pieces of WCF on E1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Errors out of total number of words in E1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Most frequent error type in E1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hong</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<td>Performance level in class</td>
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<td>Pieces of WCF on E1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Errors out of total number of words in E1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most frequent error type in E1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Notes: a E1 was an untimed, take-home essay.

Data collection

Student participants’ emotional reactions to WCF were mainly investigated through semi-structured individual interviews and retrospective verbal reports audio-recorded. The students generated a retrospective verbal report immediately after revising the first draft of E1, and some unscripted follow-up questions were asked at the end of report sessions. Interviews were conducted at the end of the semester, lasting 40 to 65 minutes and following the interview guide. Both verbal reports and interviews were in the language of participants’ choice. Prosodic details (e.g., loudness, stress, speed, laugh, etc., see Appendix A) and bodily movement (i.e., gestures and actions recorded in the field notes) were maintained in the transcripts.

Class observation audio-recordings and field notes, class documents, the students’ first interview at the beginning of the semester, their drafts with teacher feedback, their end-of-semester reflective accounts, and teacher-student one-on-one writing conferences were also collected as supplementary data. These data sources provided information on the students’ L2 writing abilities, L2 competence, perceptions of WCF, and the local context in which the WCF was situated. The data collection procedure is illustrated in Figure 1.

[insert Figure 1 here]

It is necessary to clarify that Du generated a retrospective verbal report immediately after revising the first draft of E1, and after revising E2. However, logistical issues limited Hong to
only one retrospective verbal report, which took place after E1. To ensure comparability across cases, the paper focuses exclusively on their emotional reactions to WCF on E1.

Data analysis

To investigate the students’ emotions elicited by WCF, we started by reading the transcripts of verbal reports and interviews to identify data excerpts informative of the research questions. The first round of coding labeled the discrete emotions elicited by WCF within each case. Both in vivo codes (students’ original words, e.g., the term “no ripples” used by Du) (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013) and emotion codes from Pekrun and Linnenbrink-Garcia’s (2012) taxonomy of academic emotions were used. However, being aware of the impact of language on L2 learners’ expression of their emotions (Pavlenko, 2005; Prior & Kasper, 2016), we did not assume a one-to-one correspondence between English and Chinese in expressing emotions. To avoid losing or distorting meaning in translation, two strategies were taken: (a) multiple data sources were used to understand the students’ emotional reactions, including their emotional words and expressions, prosodic clues, their reported thoughts and strategies taken to understand WCF, and their revision; (b) when revising the codes recursively, we shuttled between literature and empirical data to search for appropriate terms in English that fit with the students’ emotional experiences. To capture the nuances of emotions, four discrete emotions were added to Pekrun and Linnenbrink-Garcia’s (2012) taxonomy: (a) tranquility, a feeling with neutral valence and neutral activation; (b) awe, a feeling mixed of admiration, respect, and fear; (c) guilt, uneasiness elicited by the awareness that one’s specific actions has led to the failure (Lewis, 2016); and (d)
unconsciousness of emotion, a state in which the students reported they were not aware what emotions they had experienced. Definitions of the discrete emotions are given in Appendix B.

In addition to identifying discrete emotions, informed by research on academic emotions, a dimensional approach was also taken to identify the object focus, valence, and activation of emotions. The discrete emotions were categorized by object focus following Pekrun and Linnenbrink-Garcia’s (2012) classifications (see Table 1). However, topic emotions, i.e., emotions pertaining to the content of the writing task, did not emerge based on the current data, and were thus eliminated from the original analytical framework. Although the literature often dichotomizes valence as positive/negative, and activation as activating/deactivating, as we repeatedly read the transcripts, we found these binary distinctions were not always applicable to the data and thus made adaptations. For instance, tranquility and being unconscious of emotion both indicated a neutral response, so this was added to the pleasure-displeasure continuum.

Activation of emotions was operationalized as the energy mobilized in an emotional state (Barrett & Russell, 1998; Lazarus, 1999). Rather than dichotomizing emotions into activating/deactivating categories, we stayed open to levels of activation emerging from the data. Since no neurobiological instruments were employed to examine physiological arousal directly, activation of emotions were coded based on (a) students’ self-reported thoughts and revision behaviors, as an indicator of mental and physiological alertness in preparation of subsequent action plans (Russell, 2003); (b) prosodic clues (Laukka, Juslin, & Bresin, 2005), with louder voice, higher rate of speech, and uncontrollable stutter indicating a state of arousal; and (c) bodily movements (Lewis, 2016), including hand gestures and laughing.
Three levels of activation emerged from the data: activating, neutral, and deactivating. When the students were in a neutral state of activation, they neither reported active thoughts and action plans, nor indicated an inclination to withdraw effort; they spoke at a normal rate and with a normal volume; and no noticeable bodily movements, such as laughing, patting one’s chest, or leaning back, were captured. When there was little information about the level of activation of individual students’ emotional reactions, these excerpts were labeled as unknown. The coding schemes for students’ emotional reactions to WCF are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes of emotional responses to WCF</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discrete emotions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surprise, curiosity, disappointment, guilt, relief, tranquility, awe, contentment, gratitude, trust, like, anxiety, hope, hopelessness, NC (lacking consciousness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Object focus</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement emotions (including prospective outcome emotions, retrospective outcome emotions, and activity emotions), epistemic emotions, social emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Valence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive, neutral, negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activating, neutral, deactivating, unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two strategies were employed to validate the data analysis process. Triangulation was conducted through cross-referencing individual participants’ emotional experiences described and captured by different data sources (e.g., verbal reports, interviews, and field notes). Their verbalized emotional experiences were compared to bodily movement and prosodic clues, when possible. We also invited a trained doctoral student to code half the data, yielding an

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1 The entire research project also involved analysis of students’ linguistic errors, teacher WCF, and WCF-elicited revisions, as well as content analysis of data collected from interviews, verbal reports, writing conference, reflective accounts, field notes, and class documents to understand individual students’ cognitive and behavioral engagement with WCF based on Author’s (2015) coding scheme. This part of data analysis was beyond the scope of the current paper and was thus not presented.
initial inter-coder agreement of 76%. The disagreements were discussed, which helped clarify the operational definitions of discrete emotions, activation, and intensity. Disagreements were resolved after discussion and revision, yielding an inter-coder reliability of 95%.

Findings

Du: Subtle changes underneath tranquility

Du, a high-achieving, highly motivated student in Natalie’s class, considered learning English “indispensable for my university life and the primary thing in college” (first interview). Although she was willing to help classmates polish their drafts in and outside class, Du believed the teacher was the only trustworthy source of knowledge. She did not trust peer feedback (Author, 2017a), and was critical of the online resources: “I still have doubts about the grammar instruction on the computer. I don’t know if it is really accurate” (first interview). When informed about the one-on-one writing conference after E1, she immediately signed up for it. Her draft was returned at the conference, receiving nine pieces of coded WCF, one piece of direct WCF, and two pieces of indirect WCF. Du and Natalie spent 17 minutes discussing content issues and linguistic errors (Author, 2017b).

Du perceived her overall emotional reactions to WCF as being tranquil and free from “drastic changes” (verbal report). However, underneath this tranquility her emotional responses continually evolved.

[Final interview]

Researcher: While you were revising the draft (0.3) as for grammar feedback were there

\[2\] Research aims of Author (2017a, 2017b) were different from that of the current study.
any (.↑) feelings?

Du: Just::Basically::there were no drastic changes(0.5) And then because you SAW(.) the
draft at THE FIRST GLANCE- at the beginning (.) it must be::AAAH:::>the teacher
was very serious and careful<

The extract revealed Du’s mixed feelings of surprise, gratitude, and even awe. Her louder
exclamation and higher rate of talk indicated an activating state. Surprise emerged because
Du was expecting feedback on content and structure, which was the focus of Natalie’s writing
instruction (Author, 2017a, 2017b). When she realized WCF was also provided, she was
impressed, seeing WCF as indicative of Natalie’s work ethic: “If the teacher didn’t give me
feedback, […] I think the teacher probably didn’t read it and was probably not serious. I
wouldn’t believe it was because I wrote too well” (final interview). She was grateful for
Natalie’s work and very respectful of her as a dedicated teacher.

In general, Du was positive and activated upon the receipt of WCF. Although
disappointment also emerged, it was not intense and quickly diminished.

[Final interview]

There might have been <slight DISAPPOINTMENT> but ((it was)) usually: <within the
normal range> (. I) still feel that the teacher hhh (was) very serious and careful then I
should also value it. Just just there appears a kind of- (I) feel <the teacher values (it) very
much>I myself will also (. value the revision of this draft even more

Du’s disappointment was a retrospective outcome emotion, indicated a discrepancy
between her expected and actual accuracy of the first draft. Compared to the first data extract,
this extract contains slow-downs and fewer loud sounds, suggesting that she was less
activated than before. However, this disappointment was quickly overridden. Interpreting WCF as Natalie’s message about the importance of linguistic accuracy, Du redirected her attention to revision and was not worried about the outcome (grade or errors).

[Final interview]

And then when you were revising (0.2) then you (.) your FOCUS (was) just not about that whether <how much the grade was (or) whether it was wrong- (I was) just-just THINKING: ↑aay? In what exact ways can I CORRECT it (.)Then how to write well (.) Just what SHOULD be done- (I) just threw myself on that (grammar) POINT (.) Focusing on that (grammar) point and see (how to revise it).

As shown above, when Du was concentrating on addressing errors, the negative retrospective outcome emotion, i.e., disappointment, faded away. Meanwhile, an epistemic emotion, curiosity, was induced by the cognitively-engaging, problem-solving nature of the revision task. She returned to a more activated state, using a normal rate of speech and articulating some words more loudly. Du also formed new expectations of her future writing, which induced a prospective outcome emotion, hope: “When the teacher helped you to revise, you would feel, aay, after grammar (errors) were picked out, I will know (them) in the future” (final interview).

Du’s emotional experiences were further complicated by her participation in the teacher-student writing conference. First, she believed the writing conference precluded frustration, dislike, and mistrust caused by confusion and misinterpretation: “If you don’t ask and just think on your own, (…) the more you think about it, the more confused you may become. You might develop an ad hominem fallacy and believe the teacher is too fussy, being
picky about the grammar structure” (final interview). Second, anxiety emerged in at the beginning of the writing conference, albeit transiently.

[Final interview]

>What I thought ↑more was< ↑aay: this (. ) uh (. ) is it good or not if I stare at her for a long time>why don’t I just<take a look at this. £Maybe (this is) not respectful. £ Why not look at £here£ hhh ((laugh))

Holding the teacher in awe, Du was anxious about the appropriateness and effectiveness of their face-to-face interaction. The quick change in her thoughts, together with the accelerated speed of speaking, indicated she was both cognitively and physiologically active. This anxiety distracted her from focusing on the discussion. However, her concerns about miscommunication were alleviated when she realized Natalie was able to understand her. As her attention returned to the draft, curiosity reemerged: “It turned out that even if I just blurted out two words, she still knew what I was saying. Just in the rest of the conference (…) at least I still have my desire to explore” (final interview).

Third, although Natalie had a tight schedule on the day of the writing conference, Du was still able to go over all the issues marked with feedback and asked Natalie to confirm possible revisions (Author, 2017b). During the conference, Natalie often praised Du for her effort, smiled and nodded to encourage her, and occasionally whispered to soften negative feedback. This meant Du placed more trust in her teacher and became more active and involved: “Her attitude makes you have a desire to tell” (final interview).

Since Du was able to use the writing conference to find out about her errors, she concentrated on revision and finally returned to a neutral emotional state in terms of valence
and activation. She reported being unaware of her emotional reactions to WCF after revising the draft.

[Verbal report]

Researcher: Just (0.2) now you have (. ) finished the revision: Then these things, you’ve READ (them) ALL: Now you look back at the grammar feedback (. ) What are your feelings now?

Du: ((flipping and scanning her draft))↓“What feelings” (0.2) I don’t know what I feel (.)

I simply revised £an assignment£

**Hong: Emotionally “immune” to negative feedback**

Hong, an under-achieving student in Yao’s class, stated: “I am not really interested in English, so my English has always been pretty poor” (first interview). This negative attitude developed after he immigrated to Macau at age 12. Having received his elementary education in a rural area, he had no knowledge of English, while his Macanese classmates could read books, write short essays, and give presentations in English. Hong was overwhelmed and often scolded by his parents for scoring poorly on English exams, although he performed reasonably well in other subjects.

Hong continued to struggle with English for years, lacking motivation and confidence. He acknowledged the importance of English in job hunting, and tried strategies such as memorizing vocabulary and keeping an English diary. However, these never lasted long. He attributed his failure to a constant pursuit of short-term pleasure over long-term achievement.

[Final interview]
I know this is something psychological. I read about it somewhere. Nowadays common people emphasize short-term gains. For example, if I don’t do this now, I can play video games and I’ll be relaxed. (…) Uh, I just think, as long as I am happy now, I don’t care about the future. I know this psychology, but I just can’t change it.

Hong frequently had difficulties with assignments and classroom participation. He sometimes adapted previous assignments and submitted them to other English courses to get by. He never spoke in class unless called on. When he had to speak, he often got stuck, made long pauses, and could hardly complete a sentence. In addition, he was often observed to lower his head, scratch his hair, giggle nervously, and cover his mouth as if he were too nervous and embarrassed to complete a turn, and trying to use humor to cover his embarrassment and anxiety.

When Hong reported his immediate emotional reactions to WCF, the nervous giggle appeared.

[Verbal report]

Researcher: Just when I gave you this draft just now (.) what feelings do you have? Emotionally speaking?

Hong: I just saw a lot of red (h) (stuff) "hhheheheh" ((giggle))

Researcher: And then?

Hong: Then:: >(I) was thinking (I) might have < MADE A LOT OF ERRORS (.) Then I read those problems closely > (It) turned out to be those < POINTS "hhheheheheheh" ((giggle))

His nervous giggle was attached to the end of a word (“red” and “points”), quiet, and not
triggered by amusement. This nervous giggle is in sharp contrast with his genuine laugh, as shown in the excerpt below. His genuine laugh was more salient, prefaced by a “smiley” voice, accompanied with the action of patting his chest, and lasted longer. He even voluntarily explained why he laughed.

[Verbal report, continued]

Researcher: Uuhh. Then?

Hong: Then (I) just said “ahh” (I was) relieved £so (h)much£ (“hahaha”hehehe ((laugh, pat his chest))

Researcher: [hhahahahahah ((laugh))]

Hong: .hhh £BECAUSE I WAS THINKING- I <£ HOW COME (I have) MADE SO £ MANY ((errors)) £?

The two excerpts above indicate that Hong immediately anticipated and worried about his pending failure (i.e., making many severe errors) when he glimpsed over WCF in red ink. His nervous giggle reflected his anxiety. Moreover, his subsequent bodily movements, i.e., patting his chest, exhaling, and laughing, are common actions indicating that one has just relieved from tension.

His anxiety was alleviated as soon as he realized the negative feedback was on linguistic errors (“points”), which he downplayed as “silly errors” resulting from carelessness, rather than incompetence.

[Verbal report]

Many things were all:: just many errors were all somewhat silly (. ) Just (they) seemed to be >quite-< Just AFTERWARDS myself: after the teacher pointed them out I also found
them somewhat SILLY

Calling his errors “silly” implies that Hong experienced the feeling of guilt, albeit not intensely (“somewhat silly”). His voice was steady and calm when he confessed that many of his errors should not have been made. Nervous giggles, genuine laughs, or sudden rises of pitch or loudness did not appear. Hong seemed to stay at the neutral level of activation despite feeling slightly guilty.

[Verbal report]

Researcher: Then what about later? During the revision process (. ) I mean what other emotions did you feel?

Hong: Actually:: (I) might feel that I have- many (errors) should not have been made

Hong revised his draft efficiently by accepting overt corrections. He was satisfied with the revised draft, calling it “not bad”, nodding, and smiling (verbal report). His contentment in just responding to WCF, especially direct WCF, was positive but deactivating: While he was aware of the content and structure problems with this draft, neither his intention nor action was mobilized to address these problems.

While the verbal report revealed fluctuations in his emotional experiences, Hong claimed he was not at all disturbed by negative feedback, including WCF: “As a failing student, I think, in general… If a motivated, straight-A student sees (WCF), he or she may feel guilty, but I would not” (final interview). Hong described himself as being “immune” to the emotional consequences of negative feedback: “Because I had made so many errors such as these, I could psychologically take it. […] I wouldn’t feel happy, nor would I feel unhappy like others. It’s just like we see ordinary things” (final interview).
As Hong protected himself from negative activating emotions, WCF neither stimulated his curiosity nor motivated him to carry out any further revision. Instead, he distanced and differentiated himself from high-achieving students who were more involved in the process of revising and learning.

**Discussion**

The two case studies have investigated: (a) what emotions of these Chinese EFL university students were evoked by WCF; and, (b) whether and how their emotions evolved in the revision process. In general, the data from multiple sources revealed that the students had rich and varied emotional reactions to WCF, and these reactions changed in the revision process. The richness of emotional reactions to WCF is first manifested in the wide range of discrete emotions found in the two cases, which aligns with previous findings concerning the diversity of L2 students’ emotional reactions to WCF, to content-based feedback, and to academic writing in general (Author, 2003, 2015; Lee, 2008b; Rowe, Fitness, & Wood, 2014; Perpignan, et al., 2007). By adding tranquility, awe, trust, and unconsciousness of emotion, the study suggests that the taxonomy of academic emotions (Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2012) needs to be expanded and adapted in WCF situations.

The students’ emotional reactions to WCF were also rich in terms of the various object foci of discrete emotions. These object foci suggest that both the cognitive and social aspects of WCF can evoke emotions. By indicating the incongruity between errors and target-like forms, WCF triggers epistemic emotions such as surprise and curiosity. On the other hand, the provision of WCF is also perceived by students as a sign of teachers’ sense of
responsibility for and concerns about individual students (Author, 2017a; Lee, 2008b), evoking social emotions such as trust and awe. Additionally, WCF was seen as a key indicator of how (un)successful the students’ first drafts were. Outcome emotions emerged when the students perceived an expected or actual failure to achieve a cognitive goal (i.e., achieving higher written accuracy) and/or a social goal (e.g., interacting with the teacher appropriately). The dual nature of WCF revealed in this study confirms the need to consider multiple roles of WCF in addressing L2 students’ cognitive and affective needs in the situational context (Ellis, 2010b).

Also contributing to the richness of the students’ emotional reactions to WCF was that their discrete emotions varied along the dimensions of valence and activation. The current findings confirmed the previous research into academic emotions (e.g., Pekrun, 2006; Pekrun et al., 2002, 2007; Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2012) in showing that emotions of the same valence but different activation levels can have distinct impacts on students’ motivation and revision. For instance, although anxiety and hopelessness were both negative emotions, the former was activating, whereas the latter was deactivating. Anxiety did not demoralize Du and Hong, which mirrors studies uncovering the ambivalent effects of negative activating emotions (e.g., Pekrun, 2006; Pekrun et al., 2002). However, hopelessness could account for Hong’s unwillingness to go beyond just mechanically incorporating teacher corrections.

The current data further suggest that the dimensions of emotion also need to be fine-grained to capture the nuances of WCF-elicited emotions. This is mainly because, as the two cases exemplified, L2 students’ emotional reactions to WCF do not always fit the binary distinction of positive/negative and activating/deactivating emotions. When the students
reported feeling tranquil about or unaware of their emotional reactions to WCF, they seemed to return to the neutral baseline of valence and activation. The current study thus extends the categories of emotions adopted in previous research on academic emotions (e.g., Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2012) by incorporating neutral states, and provides evidence that emotions are situated along a continuum rather than falling into dichotomous categories.

In terms of the second research question, Du and Hong’s emotional reactions to WCF changed during their revision processes, which suggest the dynamic nature of L2 students’ emotional experience in WCF situations. While negative emotions emerged in both cases, they were not necessarily dominant; rather, they were either evanescent or being overshadowed by positive emotions. As for the activation of their emotions, both students returned from the activating state to the neutral or even the deactivating state after revision. Although neither student was demoralized by WCF, differences were observed between the cases. When receiving WCF, Du was surprised, anxious, curious, and in awe with the teacher, making active mental efforts and taking actions (e.g., attending the writing conference, negotiating with the teacher, and regulating her attention and motivation as a return of the teacher’s effort). As she focused exclusively on problems in her writing, she was no longer aware of her emotional reactions. In contrast, although Hong felt his initial anxiety had also been relieved, and was content with his revisions, he remained pessimistic about subsequent writing. His tranquility was closer to disinterest and hopelessness.

These differences between the two cases suggest that academic emotions in WCF situations are deeply contextualized rather than being in a vacuum. Their emotions were mediated by their learning history (e.g., Author, 1998), motivation (e.g., Ferris et al., 2013),
beliefs (e.g., Author, 2017), the feedback that they received (e.g., Mahfoodh, 2016), and the requirements of the writing tasks. In Du’s case, given her belief that the teacher was authoritative and trustworthy, Du perceived WCF as an indicator of Natalie’s dedication to helping students, and thus felt grateful and even in awe with the teacher for her effort to offer WCF. Although she was slightly disappointed, that disappointment quickly dissipated as Du made efforts to meet what she perceived as Natalie’s expectations. When receiving WCF, Hong was at first struck by anxiety. However, that anxiety did not last long either, probably because: (a) he perceived his errors as not severe, (b) most errors could be conveniently corrected by incorporating Yao’s overt corrections, and (c) the final draft was only suggested, rather than required. Lacking any ambition to excel in English, Hong became relieved and contented after accepting Yao’s corrections to complete this assignment. However, reflecting on his countless failures in the past, Hong was pessimistic about making long-term progress in written accuracy, allowing hopelessness to emerge. The contextualized nature of the students’ emotional reactions to WCF suggests that their emotions are not simply induced by WCF per se, but the interrelationship between WCF, their own background as learners (e.g., L2 competence, learning history, beliefs, motivation, and goals), teachers, errors, writing tasks, course requirement, and other aspects of the broader context.

The importance of a contextualized understanding of the emotional experiences of L2 student writers has been discussed in the field of EAP, in which academic discourse has been conceptualized as a social practice involving emotional investment (Duff, 2010). Our study contributes to the literature of EAP by investigating emotional reactions to teacher feedback in their own right, rather than positioning emotions as a supplement to the cognitive and/or
participatory aspects of academic writing practices. The multi-dimensional, nuanced, and
dynamic nature of emotions documented in this study also extends the existing literature on
student writers’ emotional struggles and their sense of well-being in EAP classes (e.g., Evans
& Morrison, 2011; Morton et al., 2015; Russell-Pinson & Harris, 2018), especially in terms
of the fluctuations of L2 student writers’ emotional experiences within a short period of time.
We hope that this paper can prompt more research on emotions elicited by other types of
feedback, such as content feedback and voice-based feedback, in EAP classes. Future
research could also investigate the factors that contribute to fluctuations in emotions (or lack
thereof) involved in academic writing and, more importantly, how these factors possibly
interact.

One limitation of this study was that it was methodologically challenging to capture and
analyze the students’ emotional reactions to WCF. First, the students’ verbalization of
emotions may be influenced by the language of their choice. It requires researchers to be
highly sensitive to differences in emotional expressions across languages, and to carefully
triangulate the analysis using multiple data sources. Another daunting task is to investigate
activation of emotions. Informed by the literature on the relationship between activation and
prosodic clues (Laukka et al., 2005), we used prosodic features and gestures as clues, together
with the students’ reported thoughts and actions. This approach was limited in that subtle
facial expressions and bodily movements were not recorded, and that its analysis of speech
rate, loudness, and breath was to be further fine-grained. However, the approach shows the
potential of bringing together thematic content analysis, conversation analysis (Prior &
Kasper, 2016), and even quantitative-oriented phonetic analysis to advance the knowledge of
L2 students’ emotions in feedback situations. We join Pekrun and his colleagues (e.g., Pekrun et al., 2002; Pekrun, 2006) in calling for more interdisciplinary mixed-method studies that combine quantitative psychometric measures and qualitative instruments.

The study is also limited by its reliance on self-report data to investigate emotions. Self-report data may be problematic in that emotions can be unconscious (Pekrun, 2006) and unavailable for verbalization (Zentner & Eerola, 2010). The study also offered little information about teachers’ emotion regarding WCF, which might influence the students’ emotions. Follow-up studies are needed that involve more data collection methods and explore the emotional impacts of WCF on teachers, and how teachers’ emotions in turn shape students’ emotional reactions to feedback in EAP classes.

Conclusion

Using the analytical framework provided by research on academic emotions, the two case studies have shown that the students’ emotional reactions to WCF were rich, dynamic, and varied across cases. Regarding teachers’ concerns over the red pen syndrome described at the beginning of this paper, the findings challenge simplistic assumptions about L2 students’ emotional responses to WCF. WCF can elicit both positive and neutral emotions, not just negative emotions. Negative emotions are not necessarily devastating, as (a) they may be evanescent and overridden by positive or neutral emotions; and (b) negative emotions at different activation levels can have distinct influences on students’ motivation and revision. Another interesting insight is that positive emotions, if they are deactivating, may reduce mental effort and undermine L2 students’ commitment to long-term learning goals.
Researchers and teachers should appreciate the complexity of students’ emotions, and explore how emotions can be harnessed in WCF situations, rather than fixate on students’ negative emotions induced by WCF.

The study also offers some preliminary pedagogical implications. Academic writing teachers should not hastily label WCF as destructive or demoralizing. They should reflect on the appropriateness of their WCF strategies in local contexts, invite students to express and reflect on their WCF-evoked emotions, and increase students’ awareness of the value of academic emotions (Goetz, Frenzel, Pekrun, & Hall, 2005). Moreover, as Belcher and Hirvela (2005) pointed out, more explicit support for emotional issues involved in academic writing are needed to help L2 student writers regulate their emotions. Professional training should raise EAP teachers’ awareness of the complexity of academic emotions, and prepare them to flexibly address the impact of WCF and other feedback on students’ emotions.
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Appendix A


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbols</th>
<th>Meanings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[</td>
<td>Point of overlap onset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>]</td>
<td>Point of overlap ending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.5)</td>
<td>Silence measured in tenths of seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(.)</td>
<td>A brief pause of about one tenths of a second</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:</td>
<td>Prolongation of the immediately prior sound; the longer the colon row, the longer the prolongation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↑</td>
<td>A shift into especially high pitch in the next sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.</td>
<td>Falling intonation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Rising intonation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>,</td>
<td>Slightly rising intonation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORD</td>
<td>(Used in Chinese transcripts) Especially loud sounds compared to the surrounding talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORD</td>
<td>(Used in translated transcripts) Especially loud sounds compared to the surrounding talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'word'</td>
<td>Especially quiet sounds compared to the surrounding talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>word</td>
<td>Emphasized segment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£word£</td>
<td>“Smiley” voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(word)</td>
<td>Transcriber’s best guess of the words or speaker; Words added to complete a sentence after translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>word-</td>
<td>A cut-off sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;word&gt;</td>
<td>Decreased speed compared to the surrounding talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;word&lt;</td>
<td>Increased speed compared to the surrounding talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.hhh</td>
<td>Audible inbreath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hhh</td>
<td>Audible outbreath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(h)</td>
<td>Plosiveness, often associated with laughter, crying, breathlessness, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>((description))</td>
<td>Transcriber’s description</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Codes and explanations of discrete WCF-induced emotions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surprise</td>
<td>Unexpectedness, usually induced by the gap between expectation and the actual amount of WCF or the nature of errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>Becoming interested in understanding the errors marked with WCF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disappointment</td>
<td>The feeling of sadness induced by the failure to meet certain standard or expected outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td>The feelings that the failure was due to one’s specific, local action and corrective action could be made toward reparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relief</td>
<td>The positive feeling induced by the fact that the expected failure did not actually occur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tranquility</td>
<td>Being neutral in terms of valence and activation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awe</td>
<td>A feeling mixed of admiration, respect, and fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contentment</td>
<td>Satisfaction with the achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gratitude</td>
<td>The feeling that the student wanted to thank the teacher for her good will and effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>The feeling of having a strong belief in the quality of feedback provided by the teacher or in the teacher’s good will in providing feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likeness</td>
<td>The feeling that the teacher was nice and enjoyed being with her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Being worried about and fearful for the failure anticipated to occur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>The feeling of anticipating future success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopelessness</td>
<td>Being pessimistic about future success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC (no consciousness)</td>
<td>Reporting being unaware of the emotions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note. Only Du attended a writing conference after E1.

Figure 1. *Data collection procedure of the entire research project*
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