

INDONESIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' APPROPRIATING GRAMMARLY FOR FORMATIVE FEEDBACK

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Abstract

Formative feedback both on form and content is generally valued by teachers and students. The development of technology creates the affordances of Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) in generating formative feedback. While many writing classes integrate the machine in the instruction, AWE and technology accesses allow students to utilize the machine independently. This study aims to explore the motivation and perspective of university students in appropriating Grammarly in instruction which does not promote AWE. Employing narrative inquiry, the experience of 2 Indonesian university students was gathered by means of personal narratives and interview. It is found that the participants' independent Grammarly appropriation is to be motivated by the nature of teacher feedback, belief in learning, feedback preference and English proficiency. Also, their proficiency shapes their appropriating behavior and perspective about the machine generated feedback. It seems that students' AWE appropriation is influenced by their belief about learning, preference on feedback and language proficiency.

Keywords: *Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE); formative feedback; Grammarly; EFL writing; perspective*

INTRODUCTION

Formative feedback on form and content are important in writing instruction. The information, which communicates the writing areas students have mastered and need to improve, help students improving their writing knowledge and skill. There has been an ongoing controversy regarding the effect of feedback on form towards learning (e.g. Chandler, 2004; Ferris, 2004; Ferris, Liu, Sinha, & Senna, 2013; Truscott & Hsu, 2008). Also, there is currently no guideline for teacher to deliver feedback to students. This is the case because formative feedback is likely to interact with contextual and individual factors, i.e. the nature of the writing task and achievement as well as learners' prior knowledge and skill. Regardless of the controversy and

absence of guideline, formative feedback on form and content are generally valuable. Research on various ESL and EFL tertiary education contexts reveal that students admit the importance of feedback to their writing skill (Elwood & Bode, 2014; Kahraman & Yalvaç, 2015; Tom et al., 2013; Wingate, 2010; Zhan, 2016). Teachers are also found to own positive perspective on formative feedback (Guadu & Boersma, 2018; Hamouda, 2011; Van der Kleij, 2019; Zhan, 2016).

The current technology development creates the technology affordances in giving feedback. Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) tools use computational method to analyze text then generate feedback on the grammar, mechanics and style. Over the years, a body of research has

investigated different aspects of different products of AWE such as Turnitin, Criterion, Pigai and Grammarly. The studies scrutinized students' perception and the tools' accuracy as well impact on students' writing. Although participants of the previous research own mixed perspective about AWE feedback, the majority of them confirm their positive perception towards the tools (Fadhilah, 2018; Dikli & Bleyle, 2014; Li, Link, Hegelheimer, 2015; Nova, 2018; Pujiawati, 2018). The participants of the studies highlight the timely result of the AWE. It is also found that students can benefit the AWE generated feedback regardless their English proficiency (Ranalli, 2018; Ranalli, Link, & Chukharev-Hudilainen, 2017; Wang, Shang, & Briody, 2013). Although, a more thorough investigations on the students' learning motivation and AWE appropriation style revealed that higher language proficiency is required for more effective use of the machine generated feedback (Ambarwati, 2018; Jiang & Yu, 2020; Koltovskaia, 2020; Zhang & Hyland, 2018; Zheng & Yu, 2018).

However, critiques were posed towards the accuracy of the feedback these AWE tool generated (Bai & Hu, 2017; Dikli & Bleyle, 2014; Nova, 2018; Ranalli, 2018; Jim Ranalli et al., 2017). The body of research has provided the pedagogical impact of integrating the machine to writing instruction. Because AWE feedback is limited only to formulaic correction, it is suggested to supplement instructor's feedback (Bayerlein, 2014; Engeness, 2018; Li et al., 2015; J. Ranalli, 2018; Ware, 2011). Despite the critique, institutions and teachers continue to employ the machine in their writing instructions. More recent studies on the integration of AWE in writing classroom seek the students' internalization and engagement with the machine generated feedback (Jiang & Yu, 2020; Koltovskaia, 2020; Zhang & Hyland, 2018).

Of the many available AWE in the market, Grammarly is popular among university students in Indonesia due to its wide availability and easy access. Research have been conducted to seek the value of promoting Grammarly in EFL academic instructions. It was found that the color-coded feedback and explanation allow students to understand the errors and might lead students to be autonomous learners (Nova, 2018; Pujiawati, 2018). Meanwhile, in an experiment setting, students who received feedback from Grammarly were found to make less error than those who received teacher's indirect feedback (Ghufro & Rosyida, 2018; Wang et al., 2013). Surprisingly, despite receiving feedback from the tool, some students admittedly made little change to their essay (Koltovskaia, 2020). In line with the finding, other research found that students varying appropriation of the feedback is influenced by factors, such as proficiency and belief about learning (Jiang & Yu, 2020; Zhang & Hyland, 2018). In contrast to the previous studies, the current study aims to fill the gap by investigating students' AWE appropriation when it is neither promoted nor integrated in the instruction. The present study used narrative approach in exploring EFL university students' motivation and perspective about appropriating Grammarly to evaluate their academic essay.

METHOD

This study employed a narrative inquiry research where participants tell and provide detailed stories of a particular experience (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Walker, 2010).

Participants

This research focused on individual students to explore their experience in appropriating Grammarly. The participants of this study were two male Indonesian students, Yusuf and Eli. They were recruited because 1) they had several

writing classes which assignments involved writing projects and 2) they appropriate Grammarly independently for checking their writing assignments. They studied in an Indonesian university. They were fifth semester students majoring in English Education. They have passed 4 compulsory writing classes, i.e. Paragraph Writing in the first semester, Essay Writing I (Descriptive and Narrative) in the second semester, Essay Writing II (Argumentative) in the third semester and Academic Writing in the fourth semester. They have also completed 3 Grammar classes, i.e. Basic, Intermediate, and Post-Intermediate English Structure in the first, second and third semester the respectively. Yusuf and Eli were from different classes and were taught by different instructors in every writing class. Yusuf subscribed to Grammarly premium for 4 semesters from the year 2018 to 2020, while Eli used the free version for 1 semester in the fourth semester in the year 2020.

Data collection and analysis

Data triangulation was included in the research design that a variety of personal narratives were gathered to capture the experience of the 2 students in appropriating Grammarly. First, the participants elaborated their experience in using the tool to revise their essay guided by prompts via Google Forms (see Appendix). The data were then complemented by semi-structured interview. The prompts and interview were conducted in bahasa Indonesia, the participants and author's mother tongue. Their narratives were translated into English by the author. Their narratives were analyzed for the emerging patterns and differences. Lastly, in order to validate the researcher's interpretation, member checking was conducted.

RESULTS

1. Yusuf

Yusuf discovered Grammarly advertisement while he was watching videos on Youtube. He looked into the tool and thought that he could benefit it. He then subscribed for the premium version. Yusuf admitted that the Writing and Grammar subjects he completed built his knowledge and skill. However, he mentioned that the nature of the instruction forced him to consult with Grammarly prior to submission.

I need good grades to pass the subjects. Unfortunately, my instructors, except those teaching in the fourth semester, did not give any feedback on the assignments or projects. I was simply afraid of making mistakes because the mistakes lead to low grade. They would give grades on our first submission. They wouldn't give us the opportunity to improve our grade. That's why I needed to use Grammarly before submitting my assignments or projects.

His most frequently used features were plagiarism checker, tone detector and grammar checker. He was overall satisfied with the services, although few errors occasionally occurred. He would obey the grammar checker corrections. He would evaluate the tone detector results as Grammarly occasionally failed to detect the context of his texts.

I think Grammarly is pretty accurate. But again, it depends on the level setting (formal or informal setting). I always revised the grammar according to the grammar checker because grammar is a rule and fixed. I sometimes forget about the rules. But, I don't automatically change the word choice. Sometimes, it provides too formal language when I need just the informal ones.

Since he paid the monthly subscription fee, Yusuf had full access to all the services and had Grammarly connected to his laptop applications and browser. Unfortunately the integration discomforted him.

I had Grammarly connected to all applications in my laptop as well as the browser. It served as the pop-up application. Each time I am typing, auto correct will automatically appear. But it bothers me. I don't always write in English, yet Grammarly will mark the

corrections. It is also difficult to switch off Grammarly when I don't need it.

After spending a huge amount of money on the subscription fee to appropriate the tool for 2 years, Yusuf stopped using the tool. The application integration inconvenience, expensive subscription fee and need to grow his writing ability motivated him to discontinue the subscription and use of Grammarly.

Not only because of the money, I think I need to be independent and trust my English skill. I would like to change. I need to develop my writing skill and improved my confidence. I don't plan to use any tool in the future, even for my final year thesis project. I think I will only use plagiarism checker.

2. Eli

Eli stumbled on Grammarly advertisement while he was browsing for videos on Youtube. The advertisement attracted him then he decided to try appropriating it for free. Eli admitted that he had a decent knowledge on content and organization of academic writing as well as English structure. His prior classes shaped his writing skill.

The English Structure and Writing classes helped me to increase my writing skill. They taught me the correct essay organization, how to write in academic style, etc. I was also taught how to avoid plagiarism and how to paraphrase.

However, he used the grammar checker feature to make sure that his assignments were correct before submission. He persisted to consult the checker although he usually received feedback from his instructor. He found that his assignment quality slightly increased with the use of Grammarly.

I used Grammarly to help me with my assignments. I had few assignments on paraphrasing for my Academic Writing class. I checked whether my paraphrases were correct, in terms of grammar. My instructor sometimes gave feedback on the assignments, but I just want to make sure that

my assignments were good enough for submission.

Eli hardly used the plagiarism checker because he was not pleased with the result. He also thought the tone detector did not modify the sentence tone significantly that he finally did not utilize the tone detector.

I usually use the grammar checker. I rarely use the plagiarism checker because I think the result is not really good. I never use the tone detector. Whenever I change the tone, there is no significant change to the sentences. So I think I don't need to use the tone detector.

After appropriating Grammarly for the whole semester, Eli decided to discontinue his use because of two reasons, i.e. the expensive subscription fee and the quality of the results. He explains that the quality of Grammarly service decreased over the time. Eli no longer found it reliable as Grammarly often mistakenly detected errors.

I don't use it (Grammarly) anymore because the subscription fee is too expensive.

I stopped using Grammarly because the system itself. When it first appeared, Grammarly really helped me. It very rarely gave wrong correction. Instead of fixing these errors, Grammarly added a feature that it now gave wrong corrections (the system highlight the correct sentences/word as wrong).

Interestingly, regardless the experience and current decision, Eli admitted that he is not entirely giving up on appropriating the writing tool. He signaled his intention to reuse a tool in the future.

I will try my best not to use any tool in writing anymore. But, it is still possible that I might use a writing tool in the future.

DISCUSSION

There were 2 themes emerged from the experience of Yusuf and Eli who appropriated Grammarly as their formative feedback tool. The findings are discussed in two sections, i.e. motivation and

perspective. Table 1 summarizes the participants' appropriation behaviors.

Table 1. *Grammarly appropriation behavior of participants*

Grammarly appropriation behavior	Yusuf	Eli
Premium subscription	Yes	No
Appropriation period	2 years	1 semester
Appropriated features (ranked from the most to least frequently appropriated)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Plagiarism checker 2. Tone detector 3. Grammar checker 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Grammar checker 2. Plagiarism checker
Tool evaluation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expensive subscription fee 2. Plug-in inconvenience 3. Writing independence 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expensive subscription fee 2. Inaccuracy and poor quality of results
Verdict	Discontinue	Discontinue

1. Motivation

Grammarly markets their product well by utilizing the ads-in in two most frequently accessed search engines, i.e. Google and Youtube as well most frequently visited websites and phone applications. The web ads-in reaches and broadens Grammarly potential market. Also, their advertisement concept which features college students who are improving their essay receives high rate of engagement. The participants are represented in the advertisement then grew interest on the tool instantly. The structure of class instruction, though, does not affect their decision to appropriate the tool. Either Yusuf who never receives correction or Eli who sometimes receives corrective feedback from his writing instructors appropriated Grammarly. However, the absence of instructor feedback intensifies the appropriation that Yusuf utilized Grammarly longer than Eli. In fact, Yusuf was willing to pay the premium subscription fee so that he could gain all formative feedback features from the tool.

This finding shows that the participants value feedback. This finding confirms

studies in EFL Japanese, Chinese and Turkish university, ESL Malaysian tertiary education institution as well as British university that the participants value feedback that it motivated them to work harder (Elwood & Bode, 2014; Kahraman & Yalvaç, 2015; Tom et al., 2013; Wingate, 2010; Zhan, 2016). In fact, through a longitudinal study, a student attending an educational education institution which does not mandate corrective feedback is found to appreciate corrective feedback and value the written comment (Ene & Kosobucki, 2016). There is currently no “one-fit-for-all” strategy on how feedback should be given in a writing classroom because of the many variables, such as students’ proficiency and types of errors. With the students’ varying variables, EFL teachers need to master the academic writing skill and spend a considerable amount of attention to cater to all students’ need. In the context of the participants of this study, the technology affordance of AWE seems to be a solution due to the absence or infrequent of feedback from instructors. Despite the lack on content-related comments, the participants seem comfortable and satisfy with the formulaic

feedback generated by Grammarly. Indeed, the participants' preference over grammar and vocabulary feedback is similar to the preferences of students in Japanese, Chinese, Turkish and Malaysian university (Elwood & Bode, 2014; Kahraman & Yalvaç, 2015; Tom et al., 2013; Zhan, 2016).

Different from other research contexts in which AWE is part of the instruction, the participants of the current study appropriate Grammarly as self-assessment tool. Yusuf relies heavily on the tool because he never receives corrective feedback from his instructors for 3 consecutive semesters. But, Eli appropriates Grammarly to self-diagnose his work prior to submission only on his fourth semester where he thinks the subject's requirement is higher than previously. The two mainly use the grammar checker and make revisions accordingly. Indeed, unlike other AWE tools which are designed for classroom use, Grammarly seems to be built for self-assessment tool. It does not include features for teachers commonly found on other tools, such as students' error analysis reports and progress across time. The application plug-in allows students to work and revise independently. Language ability is one factor to enable students to thoroughly interpret feedback (Zhang & Hyland, 2018). As English Education majors who studied English Structure for 3 semesters and Writing for 4 semesters, Yusuf and Eli have ample knowledge on English Structure and composition. Thus, they are familiar with the meta language and can make the best appropriation of it because the feedback is usually expressed with language-related terms. This finding echoes empirical findings on students' engagement and appropriating pattern with AWE which suggest that, although students of varying English proficiency generally can benefit from the feedback, more advanced English proficiency is required to utilize the machine generated feedback effectively (Ambarwati, 2018; Jiang & Yu,

2020; Koltovskaia, 2020; Zhang & Hyland, 2018; Zheng & Yu, 2018).

From the surface, the two participants seem to appropriate Grammarly for different goal. But they are actually motivated by the same perception of learning. Yusuf utilizes the tool to ensure his assignments are "perfect" for the submission. Eli also uses the tool to check on his assignment prior to submission. It might seem that they aim to enhance writing accuracy simply to get good grades to pass the subjects. But the fact that they would spend a considerable amount of time in seeking feedback from Grammarly, evaluate the generated feedback thoroughly prior to revision shows their "goal-oriented learning" (Zhang & Hyland, 2018). Students who own this learning belief do not merely avoid making mistakes, but they aim at improving skills and acquiring knowledge. The same pattern was found in a study where high proficiency students appropriate AWE feedback frequently because they aim to enhance writing accuracy and L2 proficiency (Jiang & Yu, 2020).

All in all, feedback has long been valued to help students improve their revision as well as stimulate their attitude on revising and writing in English positively. The technology affordances and highly accessibility of Grammarly influence the participants to appropriate it. Bearing in mind the nature of feedback generated by Grammarly, it shows that the participants prefer feedback on grammar and vocabulary. There is a link between the amount of instructors' feedback and the appropriation duration, in which the least availability of feedback leads to longer appropriation period. The participants are capable of appropriating the machine independently because they are equipped with linguistic knowledge and skill. Lastly, their AWE appropriation is motivated by their belief about learning.

2. Perspective

Grammarly provides 3 services in formative feedback, i.e. grammar checker, word choice, as well as plagiarism checker. Students in different education institutions generally praised the feedback generated by Grammarly, but their overall verdict on how the tool increased their essay quality was mixed (Nova, 2018; Pujiawati, 2018). The participants of this study also own mixed perspective towards the features. Both Yusuf and Eli do not doubt the grammar checker corrections. But they are wary with the tone detector suggestions that Yusuf would evaluate the suggestion before revising and Eli finally gives up on using it. Yusuf praises the plagiarism checker results, while Eli is skeptical.

This finding echoes the research that students with high English proficiency are likely to question the AWE and require longer time to process it as well as make selective appropriation of it (Koltovskaia, 2020). They also critically aware of the potential drawback of the tool and in fact may resist the tool because it fails to meet their writing need (Jiang & Yu, 2020). Indeed, Yusuf and Eli are critical with the three services, especially the tone checker as they have specific writing context to meet. The two claim that Grammarly fails to fulfill their need. Hence, they are selective in the appropriation.

So, after appropriating Grammarly for some times, both Yusuf and Eli discontinue the use. As they evaluate the tool and their writing development, they find that the feedback quality is likely to be fallible and the find the subscription fee is not worth the money. The participants are found to be selective in appropriating the tool.

CONCLUSION

The present study delineated the experience of 2 Indonesian university students' experience in using an automated writing evaluation, Grammarly, through narratives. This study is neither sponsored by nor attributive to the company. The conclusion is limited to the context of the participants of this study. It was found that the students' independent Grammarly appropriation is motivated by the nature of the teacher feedback and the unavailability of teacher feedback leads to longer period of appropriation. The participants' use of Grammarly also reflects their "goal-oriented learning" belief that they want to enhance writing knowledge and skill rather than merely correcting mistakes. Their appropriation reflects their preference over formulaic feedback. Also, their English knowledge and proficiency allow them to understand and utilize the feedback from Grammarly independently. Lastly, it seems that their proficiency shape their selective appropriation and perspective about the quality of the feedback which leads to their discontinuation of the appropriation.

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APPENDIX A

Narrative Prompts

Explain the reason you use <i>Grammarly</i> .
Explain the frequency and duration of your use.
Explain the quality of your writing after you use <i>Grammarly</i> .
Explain your experience in using <i>Grammarly</i> in at least 100 words. (You may answer these questions to help you: 1. Is <i>Grammarly</i> helpful to find error(s) and help you correct the error(s) in your sentences? 2. How did you understand your mistakes? What were your strategies? 3. What do you like about using <i>Grammarly</i> ? 4. What you don't like about using <i>Grammarly</i> ? 5. How did you correct your mistakes? What were your strategies? 6. Are you confident with your writing ability?)
Based on your experience, explain the advantage(s) of <i>Grammarly</i> .
Based on your experience, explain the disadvantage(s) of <i>Grammarly</i> .

APPENDIX B

Interview guide

1. How did you know about Grammarly?
2. When did you use Grammarly?
3. What features you use?
4. Why did you choose Grammarly over other accessible AWE?
5. What is your motivation to Grammarly aside from receiving feedback from your teacher?
6. Writing skill is built upon other language skills, such as Grammar. Are you confident about your English Grammar and writing skill?
7. Does Grammarly help you improving the quality of your writing?
8. How do you know that Grammarly's feedback lacks in accuracy?
9. When and why did you stop using Grammarly?
10. Are you currently using another AWE?