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## New Approach to Chinese Writing: an Exploratory Study of Writing Performance on Social Q&A Online Community

Lin Zhu

*University of Mississippi*

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### **Cover Page Footnote**

Lin Zhu University of Mississippi Chinese Language Flagship Program Email: lzhu@olemiss.edu Phone: 662-638-9565 Address: 212 Croft Institute, University, MS, 38677

# New Approach to Chinese Writing: an Exploratory Study of Writing Performance on Social Q&A Online Community

Lin Zhu

Chinese Language Flagship Program, University of Mississippi

## Abstract

Many studies have investigated how the online community has informed language acquisition and teaching. In the scholarship of Computer-Mediated Communication Theory (CMC), while most of the studies have emphasized second language English writing using the CMC framework, evidence is shown to support CMC in foreign language instruction. However, there is a lack of research on how feedback from native speakers of Chinese influences Chinese learners' writing in a web environment. In response to the research gap, drawing on sociocultural and CMC, the current exploratory study probes the nature of feedback on *Zhihu*, the largest Chinese social question-and-answer website, and how feedback affects advanced Chinese learners' writing performance. Eight American university students learning Chinese as second language participated by completing two writing tasks on *Zhihu*. After posting essays on the website, these participants read and responded to online feedback within two weeks, followed by a revision of their original posts. Tokens of feedback, revised language items and learners' response to feedback were coded by the researcher. Findings reported feedback types from *Zhihu* users, exchanges between learners and feedback providers, and correlations between first and second drafts. Feedback on *Zhihu* is proven to be beneficial to advanced Chinese learners' writing performance, and pedagogical implication is suggested for the inclusion of *Zhihu* in advanced Chinese curriculum.

*Keywords:* computer-mediated communication, collaborative learning, Chinese, writing

## Introduction

Because of the potential for authentic interaction with people of diverse linguistic backgrounds and proficiencies, different forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC) have been studied as sites for language learning and teaching (Belén Díez-Bedmar & Pérez-Paredes, 2012; Jin, 2009; Jin, 2018; Lee, 2008; Xie, 2007; Xu, Dong & Jiang, 2017; Zhang, 2009). Feedback plays an important role in students' language learning (AbuSeileek & Abualshar, 2014), and some forms of CMC provide learners with feedback from native speakers (NS) and/or near-NS, which can serve as input in addition to that of their language teacher (Lee, 2008). Some forms of CMC, like online fora, offer innumerable opportunities for learners to receive comments and suggestions from different perspectives in a social context. The term "online forum" refers to the online discussion sites where people post and respond to comments on a certain topic. According to the online Oxford Dictionary, an online forum is a facility on the

Internet for users to share information or opinions on a specific topic, especially a website dedicated to such discussion (“online forum”, 2018).

Previous research has extensively explored how online tools affect second language (L2) learning. In particular, research has shown the immense benefits of CMC in L2 writing (Elola & Oskoz, 2017; Yu & Lee, 2014; Zhang, 2009). As many interactive and accessible online tools are available for pedagogical application in current Chinese classrooms, a wide spectrum of online tools has been closely investigated, such as wikis (Elola & Oskoz, 2017), word track change (AbuSeileek & Abualsha'r, 2014), discussion chatrooms (Lee, 2008), blogs and podcasts (Xie, 2007). These studies included both synchronous as well as asynchronous CMC tools, all of which were reported to be effective for foreign language learning. The role of CMC feedback, either in synchronous or asynchronous environments, is given special attention in feedback research, because learners have access to a larger NS community than they normally would in a classroom. In addition, they could learn in a more collaborative way where they are offered help from people in an online setting (Belén Díez-Bedmar & Pérez-Paredes, 2012).

## **Sociocultural Theory**

Sociocultural theory is the fundamental theoretical framework supporting the current research design. The perspective of sociocultural theory, as proposed by Vygotsky (1962, 1978), illuminates the important role that society plays in humans' development of higher functions. In L2 learning, interaction within a social context is essential for ongoing learning (Lantolf, 1994, 2000, 2001). Zone of proximal development (ZPD), refers to the gap between the knowledge that the learner originally has and the advanced knowledge he potentially could gain with assisted mediation from people with expertise, who are considered the “experts” (Lantolf, 1994), and it was proven that the interaction and negotiation within ZPD can lead to foreign language development (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). Learners differ in proficiency level and knowledge of the target language, not to mention the difference between learners and NS. Heneda (2007) stated that in the surge of foreign language curriculum reform, writing has transformed into a social practice that needs to be developed beyond the classroom. This view is in accordance with the sociocultural perspective in that writing is indeed a social act, which underpins the rationale for the instruction of foreign language writing.

Multiple studies point to the adoption of sociocultural theory in foreign language instruction. Potts (2005) drew on Vygotsky's model, supporting the co-construction and scaffolding of meaning in communication. AbuSeileek and Abualsha'r (2014) studied the effect of peer-written corrective feedback on English as a foreign language learners' writing performance. Learners accessed corrective feedback on the errors, and progressed by interacting with peers. The interaction triggered higher awareness of erroneous forms compared to when they wrote alone without mediation from experts. Hampel (2006) suggested that educators incorporate sociocultural perspective to inform the process of language task design. Similarly, in Zhang's study (2009) of Chinese learning on WebCT discussion boards, sociocultural theory underlined the design of the writing experiment. The social interaction, which referred to the heritage-to-nonheritage peer review in that paper, was found to be advantageous for learners to reach writing goals, as well as creating a more supportive learning community.

## Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)

Theory and practice of CMC were discussed in Warschauer's conceptualization (1997). CMC was found to greatly promote engagement, reflection, and interaction in learning. Previous empirical studies have explored the social efficacy of CMC in language instruction. Sullivan and Pratt (1996) conducted a contrastive study of CMC and the traditional oral classroom, and the results indicated a 50% increase concerning participation in the CMC classroom. Similarly, in Lee's investigation (2004b, 2008) of a synchronous CMC community, both the quality and quantity of learners' output were improved. Both results indicated that CMC offered favorable conditions for feedback between novices and experts. In addition, students' form-focusing was also facilitated via usage of the CMC instrument. Therefore, CMC serves the purpose of scaffolding knowledge, especially linguistic form, for learners. Lee (2008), however, examined NS-to-NNS networked collaborative interaction. The study found that collaborative efforts in online community are fundamental for successful scaffolding to take place. Likewise, Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) reported evidence that collaboration was beneficial for L2 English learning. In terms of writing studies, collaboration was also found to positively influence learners' writing performance. Wu (2015) examined the benefit of L2 English writing via blogs. The study focused on a contrastive analysis of anxiety level and writing performance using blogs versus a traditional class. The conclusion showed that interaction was largely facilitated through blogging, and blogging improved students' writing performance and lowered anxiety when compared to the traditional in-class collaborative writing.

## Feedback

Although there is tremendous controversy debating the effectiveness of corrective feedback (Guénette, 2007), much empirical evidence highlights the benefits of feedback to foreign language learning (AbuSeileek & Abualsha'r, 2014; Belén Díez-Bedmar & Pérez-Paredes, 2012; Lee, 2008; Xu & Peng, 2017). Based on Ur (1996), feedback is broadly categorized into two types: corrective feedback (CF) and positive feedback (PF). CF is subclassified into six types by Lyster & Ranta (1997), including explicit correction, recasts, elicitation, metalinguistic clues, clarification requests, and repetition. Verbal praise (e.g., such as good job) and affirmations (e.g., I agree with you) are subcategories of PF (Reigel, 2008).

As discussed above, based on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theoretical framework, feedback features the interaction between learners and experts. Meanwhile, virtual world extended the spectrum of face-to-face classroom and written feedback, where learning occurred through collaboration with learners and experts regardless of time and distance. Thus, synchronous CMC tools, such as text chat, helped to create a social context for corrective feedback to happen and assist in filling learners' ZPD (see Lee, 2008). In comparison to classroom feedback, studies discussing the advantages of CMC feedback illuminated that the socially-situated online feedback was more personal and less immediate so that learners felt less anxiety (Xu, Dong & Jiang, 2017). Elola & Oskoz (2017) took on a different perspective by investigating the affordance of CMC feedback. Affordance refers to the action possibilities that the environment provides a learner (Gibson, 1979), and one particularly effective affordance provided by technology is to create multimodal feedback for L2 writing. In other words, the integration of digital tools is conducive for initiating feedback from various dimensions for L2 learners.

However, most of the studies focusing on CMC interaction are limited to a class context using CMC tools (Jin, 2009), so the interaction is mostly monitored by the instructor. Additionally, studies related to CMC feedback have largely pointed to English language learning (AbuSeileek & Abualsha'r, 2008). Very few studies are found to investigate the link between online forum and foreign language teaching; particularly social Q&A and the learning of languages other than English. The role that social Q&A tools play in foreign language learning takes on both research and pedagogical significance because, not only is there a lack of research on such tools, but also it is a valid CMC tool to post and receive feedback in the target language.

Thus, this exploratory study attempts to fill the empirical and pedagogical gap by examining learners' writing performance mediated with online feedback on an asynchronous social Q&A website. The research questions proposed in the current investigation set out to explore: 1) the nature of feedback on a social Q&A website; 2) the exchanges between participants and users who offer feedback and; 3) how feedback affects their writing.

## Methodology

The present study examines how online feedback from NS affects learners' writing performance. The first research question focuses on the nature of feedback as the major independent variable. Before the correlation between feedback and writing performance is demonstrated, a description of feedback categories needs be addressed. CF can be viewed from two perspectives: the different types of feedback and the linguistic features that are addressed in the feedback. As previously mentioned, feedback includes two overarching types: CF and PF (Ur, 1996). As for PF, Reigel (2008) classifies it as praise and affirmation. However, some feedback items on culture or language did not correct errors, and they do not belong to CF or PF (e.g., "*Chinese people also eat fish on the Spring Festival in addition to dumpling.*"). The original classification is unable to address this type of feedback. Thus, feedback should not be simply classified exclusively as CF and PF. In this paper, general comments combined with PF are termed as commentary feedback. To distinguish corrective and commentary feedback, corrective feedback is termed as CF1, and commentary feedback as CF2. To better understand the nature of feedback, learners' response to feedback and its impact on writing, three questions are proposed:

- 1) What is the nature of NS feedback in CMC with L2 writers of Chinese on *Zhihu*? Is it more CF1 or CF2? What kind of writing components receive CF1: content, structural organization, grammatical accuracy, character correctness or lexical appropriateness? What types of CF2 do learners receive? Praise, affirmation or general comments?
- 2) How do learners react to users' feedback in CMC on *Zhihu*? Are there any follow-up discussions after learners respond to the initial feedback?
- 3) Compared to learners' original drafts on *Zhihu*, how does the writing change for second drafts, potentially including but not limited to content, organization, grammar, lexicon and culturally-related issues?

## Participants

The participants of this study are eight (n=8) advanced level Chinese learners who major in Chinese at a southeastern U.S. university. Five of them are female, and three of them are male.

The average age is 18. All of them are English NS, and they are enrolled in the third-year Chinese class, which focuses on learning about Chinese society and traditions through online resources. The participants have been taught by the same instructors since they started learning Chinese in college. Based on the OPI scale (Oral Proficiency Interview Score) taken one month before this study, seven of them scored Intermediate High and one scored Advanced Low. The researcher was the Chinese instructor of the course in which the participants were enrolled, and the writing experiment was originally included in the course curriculum. Therefore, no recruitment of participants was needed since the task was a component of class design. The participation rate of this study is 75%. Three participants did not complete the assigned task, and they were excluded from the data collection.

## Instrument

*Zhihu*, a social Q&A online community, is the website employed and examined in this study. *Zhihu* is accessible and free to anyone who has an account, and it has a large user group. Users may post, edit and answer questions as well as comment on posts by other users on the forum. The goal of *Zhihu* is for its users to gain and share knowledge. Questions proposed on the website are comprehensive, including knowledge of a specific discipline or/ domain (e.g., What is the fundamental reason behind rising housing prices?) and personal experience (e.g., What is your experience traveling to Scotland?). This website has increased rapidly regarding user number since its launch in 2001, with 160 million registered users as of May 2018, and it is currently the social Q&A tool with the most users in China (Dudarenok, 2018). To ensure maximized involvement and interaction of learners, *Zhihu* is selected for this study to engage students in active and frequent online participation.

## Task Design

Writing task design in foreign language instruction should emphasize meaningfulness (Vygotsky, 1978). Learners posting on *Zhihu* answer the questions raised by other users, thus the writing tasks serve a meaningful purpose. Two questions were selected for the study on the website *Zhihu* as in the following screenshots (see *Figure 1* and *Figure 2*).



Figure 1. Screenshot of the First Writing Task on Zhihu (What is the Food Culture like in China?)

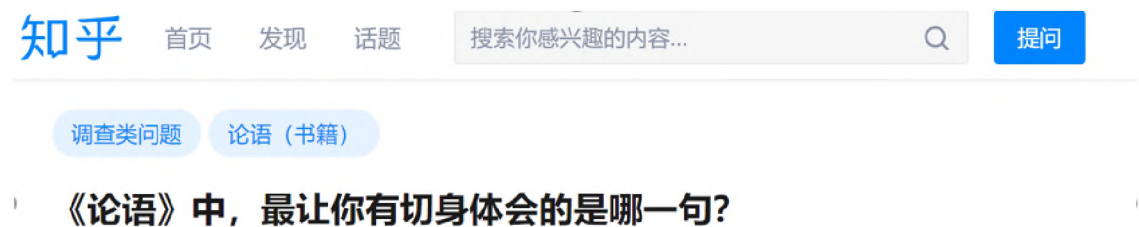


Figure 2. Screenshot of the Second Writing Task on Zhihu (Which Saying in the Collection of the Analects is Related to Your Personal Experience the Most?)

Both selected topics were taught immediately before the writing tasks were assigned. Hence, the questions were chosen based on their relevance to the class content. As for the first task, the participants first learned the characteristics of Chinese eating habits and food culture for two weeks. Roughly one hundred food-related lexical items and a text on Chinese food culture were taught in the class. Therefore, question one was selected for students to post based on what they had just learned in class. The participants were encouraged to adopt newly-learned expressions and apply their knowledge on this topic to answer this question. As for question number two, the in-class discussion was comprised of the fundamental Confucius philosophical ideas. The philosophy was elaborated on with several sayings from *the Analects*, so the participants were also able to answer the questions with what they had learned in class. The second writing essay aimed to explore the relevance between one of the sayings from *the Analects* and people's personal lives.

## Procedure

The collaborative writing tasks lasted six weeks in total covering two topics, and each assignment lasted a total of three weeks to complete. Each of the writing assignments included three stages: pre-treatment writing, two-week online feedback period and post-treatment writing. First, participants were assigned a writing task on Zhihu right after a two-week instruction on that topic. The first stage was to write up the first draft of the essay. The writing instruction included composing an essay of 300-500 characters on Zhihu to address the question, using the lexical items and content that were taught in class. The first draft was followed by the two-week feedback period, which served as the second stage, during which participants were required to spend one hour each week on reading and responding to NSs' feedback on the website. For the third stage of post-treatment writing, the participants needed to revise their original drafts based



on the feedback and submit to the instructor for grading (see Appendix A and B for detailed task guideline). The timeline and assignments are as follows (Table 1).

Table 1. *Timeline and Task Description*

Question	Timeline	Task
1. Food culture Question: What is the Chinese food culture like?	weekend of week 1	Task 1: compose first draft on <i>Zhihu</i>
	week 2 & 3	read and respond to feedback for one hour a week
	week 4	update the original essay and submit to the instructor
2. Confucianism Question: Which saying in the collection of <i>the Analects</i> is related to your personal experience the most?	weekend of week 4	Task 2: compose first draft on <i>Zhihu</i>
	week 5 & 6	read and respond to feedback for one hour a week
	week 7	update the original essay and hand in to teacher

## Data Collection

Three sets of data were collected, including 16 pre-treatment and 16 post-treatment essays. Exchanges on *Zhihu*, both feedback and responses from the participants were extracted with screenshots and stored to build a corpus of online posts for this study.

All the feedback exchanges were coded by the researcher for further classification. Total feedback tokens were coded first, including feedback and participants' response. Specific feedback tokens were categorized into two overarching classifications: CF1 and CF2 before being counted respectively. CF1 types were classified in terms of linguistic forms (i.e., character correctness, lexical items, content). CF2 types were classified as either affirmation (e.g., I agree with your view.), praise (e.g., Good job.) and general comment (e.g., Seems like you have travelled to China.). Coding of feedback categories is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. *Types and Subtypes of Feedback*

Feedback type	Subtype
Corrective (CF1)	character correctness content lexical items
Commentary (CF2)	affirmation praise general comment

As for exchange between users and participants, a first-time response from a participant to the feedback was coded as “first-time exchange.” If a feedback provider followed up with another round of exchange, each thread was coded as “follow-up exchange.”

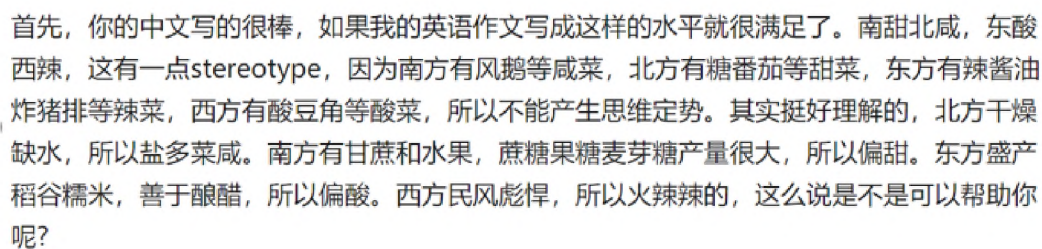
After the final submission, 16 post-treatment essays were collected. Counts of revised items were coded based on the CF1 classification (character, content, lexicon, etc.). In addition, revised items that were not mentioned in the feedback were also counted, coded as “self-initiated feedback.”

## Findings

### Research Question 1: Types of Feedback

The first research question investigated the feedback types participants received on *Zhihu*. CF1 and CF2 account for a relatively similar percentage, with 55.2% and 44.8% respectively. For CF1, content accounts for the largest proportion with 62% of the total CF1, followed by character accuracy (20%), and lexicon items (18%). Therefore, content is the most commonly revised writing aspect.

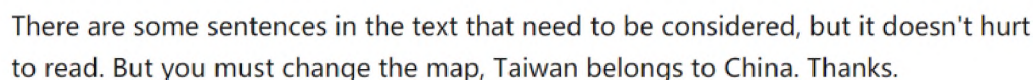
CF1 on content contains various types. In *Figure 3*, the *Zhihu* user commented on the learner’s writing regarding flavor diversity. The user commented that the generalization of flavor made by the learner (southerners prefer sweet, northerners salty, easterners sour and westerners spicy) was somewhat “stereotypical,” and he/she further elaborated on the geographical and cultural complication to illustrate the accuracy of the generalization. In another learner’s post where the map of China did not include the island of Taiwan, five different users suggested that the learner either delete or change the map due to the political identity and stance of Chinese people (see *Figure 4*). One of the five comments first politely asked the learner to photoshop or change the map, and further explained the reason being “it is a very sensitive topic to us Chinese people.”



首先，你的中文写的很棒，如果我的英语作文写成这样的水平就很满足了。南甜北咸，东酸西辣，这有一点stereotype，因为南方有风鹅等咸菜，北方有糖番茄等甜菜，东方有辣酱油炸猪排等辣菜，西方有酸豆角等酸菜，所以不能产生思维定势。其实挺好理解的，北方干燥缺水，所以盐多菜咸。南方有甘蔗和水果，蔗糖果糖麦芽糖产量很大，所以偏甜。东方盛产稻谷糯米，善于酿醋，所以偏酸。西方民风彪悍，所以火辣辣的，这么说是不是可以帮助你呢？

👍 1    ↩ 回复    🗨 踩    🚩 举报

*Figure 3.* Screenshot of content CF1 on regional differences regarding food



There are some sentences in the text that need to be considered, but it doesn't hurt to read. But you must change the map, Taiwan belongs to China. Thanks.

👍 1    ↩ 回复    🗨 踩    🚩 举报

*Figure 4.* Screenshot of content CF1 on the map of China

All character CF1s were corrected by means of overt correction. *Figure 5* shows one of the examples, where the *Zhihu* user pointed out two characters that were used wrong “*zuo*” (to sit) and “*yin*” (because). Lexical items are corrected in a metalinguistic manner (see *Figure 6*). The user explained explicitly how the adverb item “*gang cai*” (just now) should be used and provided the correct word.

有 and 是, 坐 and 座 is different. not 应为, is 因为, you are a beautiful girl. i like you.

👍 2

*Figure 5.* Screenshot of character CF1

"刚才"一般指很短的时间前 比如我刚才在麦当劳吃了汉堡, 换成"不久前去了西班牙"更好

👍 赞

*Figure 6.* Screenshot of lexical CF1 on *gang cai*

Most of the praise highlighted learners' Chinese proficiency (*Figure 7*), such as “your Chinese is pretty good”. General comments are comprised of different aspects, such as learners' profile pictures, and additional related cultural phenomena.

中文水平可以。

👍 赞

*Figure 7.* Screenshot of CF2 on participant's Chinese level

### Research Question 2: Response to Feedback

There were both first-time exchanges from the learners and follow-up discussions. Out of the 52 tokens of participants' responses to users' feedback, 76.9% are first-time responses and 23.1% refer to follow-up feedback. Types of responses include expressions of gratitude, follow-up discussion, and clarification questions. *Figure 8* displays an example of one participant's expressing gratitude and further explaining her experiencing eating crawfish. The *Zhihu* user provided CF1 on two linguistic items and commented with amazement on the experience of eating crawfish posted by the participant (“*So jealous that you came to China and had crawfish. Eating crawfish is a very fashionable thing to do in China. Isn't it too spicy for you? Most foreigners cannot endure it!*”). In response to the user's feedback, the participant first expressed gratitude (“*Thank you for correcting my errors. I am very grateful.*”). Then she followed up with more details of the crawfish experience (“*There were three flavors in the crawfish restaurant, so we ordered the garlic one*”).

先纠正一下错误哦。第一，标准很高，而不是标均。第二，'你不能马虎不得'，用了double negation，应该是'你不能马虎'，或者'你马虎不得'。很羡慕你来中国吃过小龙虾，这可是很时髦的，你难道不觉得特别辣吗？一般外国人都受不了的！

👍 1    ↩ 回复    👎 踩    🚩 举报

谢谢你纠正错误，我很感谢！我吃小龙虾的饭馆有三个味道的小龙肉，所以我们点了大蒜的味道！

👍 赞

Figure 8. Screenshot of exchange between one participant and *Zhihu* user

### Research Question 3: Impact on Writing Performance

The accuracy of the sixteen second drafts improved after the two-week feedback period. Among all the CF1 tokens that participants received, 76% were revised successfully in the second drafts. Among the three CF1 types (i.e., content, lexical items, and character), 90% of the character errors were corrected successfully, which is the highest correction percentage when compared to content (74.2%) and lexicon (66.7%). The high rate of successful revision demonstrates a clear tendency for learners to correct the errors based on CF1.

From the perspective of individuals, two out of the eight participants (25%) successfully revised all the errors suggested in CF1, while one participant had the lowest revision rate of 61.5%. The overall percentage range for error correction was between 61.5%-100%. Thus, the tendency is that errors are generally corrected successfully for each participant.

Another finding on the second drafts reported that nine tokens (9.4%) which were revised were not referred in the feedback. In other words, when participants revised their first drafts, they re-evaluated their essays and self-initiated revisions. The types of feedback included character and content CF1.

## Discussion

This empirical study substantiates that feedback on *Zhihu* is beneficial to Chinese learners' writing performance. Considering asynchronous CMC has a slower pace, learners can spend more time focusing on form and error correction. Learner's general writing performance, in the aspects of lexical items, character correctness and content, have improved with the feedback they received from NS. The improvement of writing indicates language acquisition (Elola&Oskoz, 2016). Thus, the collaborative writing project on a social Q&A social website like *Zhihu* contributes to Chinese learners' writing and language acquisition.

Over the past decade, writing is increasingly viewed as a social practice (Heneda, 2007), and *Zhihu* facilitated social interaction between learners and NS users. As supported by Lee's (2008) study, the networked collaboration between NS and NNS is essential, especially in the context of international collaboration. In addition, from the perspective of L2 learning, NS modified input for NNS language learners, which could be an effective way to serve as scaffolds to each other (Smith, 2004, p.24). On *Zhihu*, learners not only share their knowledge, they also access a richer cultural and linguistic resource from the Chinese online users, and this normally cannot be achieved in a classroom setting where the linguistic/cultural authenticity depends largely on the language instructor. In the data set, there were multiple cases where participants and users discussed cultural phenomenon. In the crawfish episode, for instance, the participant

was engaged in the conversation with a *Zhihu* user who appeared to be impressed on the participant's narration on eating crawfish. In the same feedback item, he/she corrected linguistic forms, and elaborated on this authentic cultural practice. He/she added on to the participant's original experience by further explaining the detailed cultural nuances of how "fashionable" it is to eat crawfish in summer. The participant then specified the flavor of crawfish in her reply to the feedback. Evidently, the participant reciprocated the user's interest in talking about the "crawfish" episode by further offering her elaboration of the experience. This type of social interaction and personal interaction could not be afforded in the mode of teacher feedback due to the restriction of class time. This discussion example also provides evidence to Elola & Oskoz's (2017) argument that CMC offers multimodal feedback to L2 writing. Therefore, the broadening of cultural understanding is another affordance found in this study. The feedback is not solely on linguistic features, but also on cultural nuances.

It is also worth mentioning that in all the CF1 items, none of them were about the organization of the essay, given that all CF1 tokens were on lexicon, character or grammar. This result resonates with the Elola & Oskoz's (2016) study, in which the researchers compared two models of CMC feedback, written and oral, and the result indicated that written feedback is much less likely to comment on essay organization compared to oral feedback. Thus, it could be inferred that online written feedback might be more effective for learners to improve the accuracy of linguistic forms, such as lexical items and character correctness, but not so much on a more global aspect, such as organization and coherence. Future research direction could include the effect of social Q&A websites on a global level (i.e., structure, coherence) of L2 writing.

Apart from the errors mentioned in the feedback, revisions were accomplished in places where no feedback was offered. Therefore, revising offers learners another opportunity to reevaluate their original essays. This highlights the necessity for learners to act upon the feedback they receive, because the revision engages learners to reflect on their writing, and the reflection leads to the noticing of errors previously overlooked. Revising thus potentiates writer autonomy, and it should be treated with primacy in the design of L2 writing activities.

In this study, NS users provided feedback by employing Chinese, English, and a mix of both, which was an unexpected finding. The original hypothesis was that Chinese users would purely use Chinese to give feedback to Chinese learners since it was a Chinese website. In addition, no English appeared in the original posts. However, almost a third of the feedback was initiated in English. Based on Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, 2007), people modify/tweak their language or speech styles in order to align themselves to their addressees in order to build relationships. This is the evidence that Chinese users accommodated learners' native language (English), and it could be assumed that *Zhihu* users intentionally did so to ensure their feedback was comprehensible to the English-speaking participants. More investigation is needed to understand NS users' perception on their language choice when providing feedback. Future discussions could include the accommodation of the communication language on *Zhihu*.

Several shortcomings should be addressed in this paper, such as the lack of participants, since this is an exploratory study which was conducted in a small-scale classroom. Future studies could include more participants so that presumably more essay tasks and feedback tokens could be analyzed. Additionally, the counts of "likes" were not included in this study, and most of the data analysis was based on content. It would be interesting to incorporate "likes" and "dislikes" as a component of data analysis for PF. Last, there was little information of *Zhihu* users, so the generalization of the conclusion was limited. The attitude on posting and responding to feedback

on *Zhihu* remains to be explored, and possible testing measurements such as an attitude survey could be another research direction.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, this current paper is significant, not only due to the scarcity of L2 Chinese writing research on a social Q&A platform, but also because the novelty of writing instruction with a social Q&A tool. Instructors oftentimes hesitate to expose learners to a website like *Zhihu*, since this tool might be seen as too uncontrolled and unpredictable as a pedagogical means in that instructors could not be the exclusive supervisors monitoring learners' performance. This study, however, provides empirical evidence that *Zhihu* facilitates collaboration between learners and Chinese NS, and the writing tasks initiates dialogues on linguistic forms as well as cultural nuances. Learners develop writing and cultural understanding by applying their knowledge and receiving feedback from Chinese NS. With regard to pedagogical implication, the result clearly demonstrates the exciting potential of incorporating online Q&A website in Chinese language writing curriculum. Websites with a large population of NS like *Zhihu* could be utilized as an effective platform for advanced foreign language writing.

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## Appendix A

### Zhihu Writing Task Guideline for Task 1

1. Write a 300-500-character answer to the questions assigned on Zhihu. Please use as much new vocabulary as possible. For the first writing task, you could talk about the food culture you have learned as well as your experience in China. You are encouraged to add pictures to attract more viewers and comments. Here is the link for task 1: <https://www.zhihu.com/question/57809454>
2. Posting Deadline: by midnight on Mar. 4<sup>th</sup> (Sunday)
3. During the two weeks between 3/5-3/18, you are required to read and reply to comments you receive from others on Zhihu. You may ask questions, reply to comments, etc. You are encouraged to check the feedback from time to time, and you need to spend at least one hour a week on reading and responding to the feedback
4. By 3/20 (Tuesday), revise your first essay based on your communication with Chinese users (such as the corrective feedback you receive) and submit your final essay on Blackboard.
5. You should compose an answer with a beginning like this:

I am a Chinese major in a US college and we recently learned this topic. I might have written something wrong, so please leave a comment and point out the errors to help me learn better. Thank you for helping me!

### 知乎写作任务 1

1. 根据知乎的问题，请你写一篇 300-500 字的回答。请你尽量多用课文的生词，可以谈谈你学到的关于中国饮食文化的内容，也可以结合你在中国的经历（也可以放一些相关的照片）来吸引读者。问题的链接：<https://www.zhihu.com/question/57809454>
2. 发在知乎上的截止时间：3/4 (星期天) 晚上 00:00 以前。
3. 3/5-3/18 这两个星期看你的知乎评论，可以问问题，也可以发表你对评论的额看法。你应该常常去看评论，每个星期要花一个小时看网友们的评论并回复。
4. 3/20 (星期二) 上课以前，请你根据你这两个星期跟中国网友的交流（比如说他们改了你的错误），修改你的作文，把你的作文改好以后，发到黑板上。
5. 请你这样写你的第一段：

你们好，我是美国大学的中文系学生，我们最近学了这个话题。我可能有很多写错的地方，欢迎中国网友帮助我，指出我的错误或者留下评论。谢谢！



## Appendix B

### Zhihu Writing Task Guideline for Task 2

1. Write a 300-500-character answer to the questions assigned on Zhihu. Please use as much new vocabulary as possible. For the first writing task, you could talk about one saying that is the most relatable to you in Confucius' *the Analects*. Combine with your school or daily life. You may choose one of the sayings covered in class and use newly learned vocabulary to answer this question. Here is the link for task 2: <https://www.zhihu.com/question/22338646>
2. Posting Deadline: by midnight on Mar. 25<sup>th</sup> (Sunday)
3. During the two weeks between 3/26-4/8, you are required to read and reply to comments you receive from others on Zhihu. You may ask questions, reply to comments, etc. You are encouraged to check the feedback from time to time, and you need to spend at least one hour a week on reading and responding to the feedback.
4. By 4/10 (Tuesday), revise your first essay based on your communication with Chinese users (such as the corrective feedback you receive) and submit your final essay on Blackboard.
5. You should compose an answer with a beginning like this:

I am a Chinese major in a US college and we recently learned this topic. I might have written something wrong, so please leave a comment and point out the errors to help me learn better. Thank you for helping me!

### 知乎写作任务 2

1. 根据知乎的问题，请你写一篇 300-500 字的回答。请你尽量多用课文的生词，可以谈谈你学到的一句你有切身体会的论语名言，结合你自己的生活、学习经历。问题的链接：<https://www.zhihu.com/question/22338646>
2. 发在知乎上的截止时间：3/25 (星期天) 晚上 00:00 以前。
3. 3/26-4/8 这两个星期看你的知乎评论，可以问问题，也可以发表你对评论的额看法。你应该常常去看评论，每个星期要花一个小时看网友们的评论并回复。
4. 3/20 (星期二) 上课以前，请你根据你这两个星期跟中国网友的交流（比如说他们改了你的错误），修改你的作文，把你的作文改好以后，发到黑板上。
5. 请你这样写你的第一段：

你们好，我是美国大学的中文系学生，我们最近学了这个话题。我可能有很多写错的地方，欢迎中国网友帮助我，指出我的错误或者留下评论。谢谢！