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Interactive Editing: A strategy for supporting academic writing at a German technical university

The English Coaching Program at the Technical University of Munich has been running since 2010. The initial brief was to support academic staff with their English for Academic Purposes (EAP) needs. It soon became apparent that around half of all requests were for support with written academic/scientific English. At our institution, 30 of 90 Masters' Programs are currently delivered in English, and the university has committed itself to increasing this amount significantly by 2020. This commits faculty – from professors to doctoral candidates with teaching responsibilities – to instructing students in English despite not feeling confident in their command of the language. In addition, most academic staff are under pressure to publish and most wish to publish in English. We have packaged our writing support as an 'interactive editing' with a focus on text production, but where the writer is central. Clients are encouraged to accept interactive editing as part of the overarching goal of making them more autonomous writers, rather than depending on editing support. This presentation will outline types of intervention involved in our approach to interactive editing, along with some of the typical issues arising in delivery and uptake of the service. In our experience, interactive editing, as well as offering corrective feedback to writers and encouraging them to develop their writing skills, may require a cultural shift on the part of the writer. Clients are often resistant to the notion that their areas of need are frequently rhetorical rather than grammatical, and this may conflict with their existing expectations regarding academic conventions. I will suggest ways in which our service could be further developed to highlight the issues in contrastive rhetoric that this raises and the model exported to other institutions of higher education where academic staff have similar needs.

Keywords: contrastive rhetoric; corrective feedback; EAP; interactive editing; language coaching; writer autonomy