

A Study to Develop Peer Feedback Classification Scheme*

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate peer feedback in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context in Japan. For that purpose, a classification scheme was developed through process which confirmed the strong validity and reliability of the outcome. The participants were 14 female Japanese college students enrolled in a junior seminar course on Applied Linguistics. Their comments were collected weekly throughout the semester and were categorized into 11 functions based on the classification scheme. Based on the results of the study, it was found that coherence, academic elaboration and praise were frequently employed in peer feedback and that critique, question, and world elaboration were not frequently employed. As a result, it can be said that the peer feedback classification scheme is reliable to elicit the content of peer feedback.

1. Introduction

In the middle of the 1970s when I started to teach English at high school, the grammar translation method was the mainstream in a teacher-fronted classroom. After a while, the communicative language teaching (CLT) attracted English teachers' attention. Meanwhile, in the late 1980s, assistant language teachers (ALTs), native speakers of English, were invited to participate in English class in order to promote CLT. I helped ALTs inspire our students to enjoy studying English. The authentic

communication has been considered important since the 1990s. Thus, I experienced a shift of a teacher's role from a transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator for active English use in the classroom.

While teaching English at high school, I employed various activities to cultivate students' positive attitudes toward English. It was interesting that they enjoyed greatly in small group activities such as pair or group work. I observed that the cooperative learning style was a valuable L2 pedagogical approach.

When I got an opportunity to learn at college again, I came across a stimulating activity in the junior seminar—peer feedback in L2 writing. At first, I got perplexed by the peer feedback session in which a seminar member read my draft and gave me some comments, but soon I found it deeply interesting. For example, peers' comments made me aware of something unexpected. In spite of a generation gap, I felt pleased with their praise comments so that they enhanced my motivation to write better. As the sessions progressed, other seminar members also looked forward to reading peers' drafts, making comments on them, and reading peers' comments. At that time, I realized that peer feedback played a different role from teacher feedback. One of the members said to me, "I have noticed that peers not only corrected grammatical errors but also showed me their agreement or gave me encouragements. Peers' comments always encourage me and reading peers' drafts always inspires me to write better drafts. I receive valuable feedback from peers every time." According to Andrade, Buff, Terry, Erano, and Paolino (2009), an effective classroom assessment is formative—ongoing, frequent feedback about student task. The seminar members seemed satisfied with the ongoing activity of receiving comments from peers as athletes expect

comments from coaches about their performance (White, 1994).

A teacher's role is important in peer feedback. A good teacher does not just give directions to students, but provides a context in which each student can figure out a good way to develop his/her full potential. Teachers should change their understanding of teaching English in an EFL classroom. Thus, although peer feedback is yet prevalent in a Japanese classroom, it can be a worthwhile activity. It is significant to examine the impact of peer feedback on Japanese EFL learners in L2 writing. The aim of this paper is to clarify the peer feedback classification scheme I developed.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Peer Feedback

Peer feedback is defined as "the use of learners as sources of information and interactants for each other in such a way that learners assume roles and responsibilities normally taken on by a formally trained teacher, tutor, or editor in commenting on and critiquing each other's drafts in both written and oral formats in the process of writing" (Liu & Hansen, 2002, p. 1). In this study, peer feedback is used as an umbrella term to designate peer response, peer review, peer editing, and peer evaluation.

Over the last few decades, considerable number of studies have been conducted on peer feedback and teacher feedback in L2 writing. Some researchers have considered peer feedback an effective component in the process approach to writing (Caulk, 1994 ; Min, 2006). On the other hand, it has been claimed that teachers regard peer feedback as a time consuming activity within course or examination constraints (Rollinson, 2005), and that peer comments are sometimes questionable and difficult to be incorporated

into revision (Liu & Hansen, 2002).

2.2 The Benefits of Peer Feedback

The beneficial effects of peer feedback have been presented by a number of researchers. First of all, peer feedback increases learners' perspectives. Peer feedback is helpful in developing ideas and the content by viewing things from different perspectives.

In Mangelsdorf's (1992) study, 40 advanced English writing students found peer feedback beneficial because peer feedback helped them see from various perspectives about their topics and generate, make clear and arrange their ideas.

Kashiwagi (2001) explored the general effect of peer feedback on Japanese college students in L2 writing class. Most of the participants favored peer feedback because they gained new perspectives on the writing process through feedback sessions.

Hirvela (1999) found that learners could broaden their knowledge of writing by comparing alternative ways they were not aware of. They made their meaning clear by means of discussing their ideas with peers. The outsider (reviewer) is clear while writers have their own blind spot (Min, 2005).

Next, peer feedback enhances critical thinking. Commenting on essays helps writers to be more critical of their own writing because they learn how to persuade reviewers (Mangelsdorf, 1992; Rollinson, 2005; Ting & Qian, 2010).

Ferris (1995) indicates that students found editing their own writing tedious and unimportant. Checking a peer's draft fueled a student's interest and enhanced motivation (*ibid.*). Thus, interacting with peers

provides students with objective criticism that leads to fostering critical writing.

Kooy and Kanevsky (1996) advocate the method of the triple-entry notebook. They combined student journals with in-class activity. First, students prepared their entries for the assigned reading materials before class. Then, they exchanged, read, and commented writing on their entries in a small group. A final in-class activity was reading. The researchers state that collecting and reading the entries two or three times during the course offered insight into students' understanding and an ability to think critically.

Besides, peer feedback promotes L2 writers' autonomy. Tsui and Ng (2000) looked at the impact of peer and teacher feedback on the writing of secondary school EFL students in Hong Kong. According to them, students came to bear the responsibility of commenting on peers' drafts. In addition, autonomy over their own drafts developed because the writers recognized the authentic reader. In sum, they fostered ownership of drafts.

Rollinson (2005) explains that peer feedback helped learners develop the skills to self-edit and review their own writing. Furthermore, learner autonomy was fostered in the process (Miao, Badger & Zhen, 2006; Ting & Qian, 2010).

Miao et al. (2006) were interested in constraints of feedback resulting from examination-focused programs and the students in writing class at a Chinese university. Although students incorporated more teacher feedback into their drafts than peer feedback, the students recognized peer feedback important and helpful. Thus, peer interaction helped students enhance mutual understanding and encouraged their autonomy.

Peer feedback is also a supportive strategy. According to Chundron (1984), learners' attitudes toward writing can be enhanced by more socially supportive peers. Peer feedback is made on a more informal level than teacher response. Therefore, peer feedback provides writers with motivation and a change from the more one-way interaction between the teacher and the student (Rollinson, 2005).

Furthermore, peer feedback gives learners a wide sense of audience (Lockhart & Ng, 1995; Mendonça & Johnson, 1994; Tsui & Ng, 2000). The sense of audience increased students' responsibility for making comments on peers' drafts. Thanks to the sense of audience, peers can add the perspectives that the writers are not aware of (Neslon & Murphy, 1993; Villamil & De Guerrero, 1998).

In addition, peer feedback promotes noticing in L2 writing. It is argued that noticing plays a key role in second language acquisition (Batstone, 1996). Swain and Lapkin (1998) examined the collaborative dialogue during the reformulation of a story written in French. They found that the collaborative dialogue was a beneficial technique for stimulating noticing on language. In addition, the participants noticed lots of differences between their story and the reformulation.

Moreover, peer feedback contributes to improvement in writing skills. Min (2006) examined the impact of trained responders' feedback on college students' revisions in Taiwan. He claims that trained peer feedback could have a positive impact on EFL students' revision types and quality.

Berg (1999) suggests that training resulted in more effective peer response in regard to revision types and writing quality. Learners helped each other and took responsibility for correcting their own language errors, which contributed to developing their English writing skills. He

states that it was easier and less stressful for learners to find others' errors than their own ones.

Villamil and De Guerrero (1998), in their study of 14 Spanish-speaking ESL college students' reaction to peer comments, found that 74 per cent of peer revisions made in peer sessions were incorporated and the students improved their L2 writing although peer feedback was not a substitute for teacher feedback.

To sum up, peer feedback can provide students with various perspectives, broaden their knowledge, enhance critical thinking, promote their autonomy, give a wide sense of audience, increase noticing, and contribute to improving writing skills.

2.3 The Problematic Aspects of Peer Feedback

Several problems with peer feedback are posed. One criticism has been aimed at students' ability to provide useful feedback. A number of researchers argue that students' feedback was not accurate, trustworthy or concrete due to their lack of knowledge (Leki, 1990; Mendonça & Johnson, 1994; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Zhang, 1995). Min (2005) states that EFL peer reviewers misunderstood the writer's intentions and offered vague comments. Nelson and Murphy (1993) revealed that L2 students did not incorporate peer feedback into their writing because they did not trust their peers' knowledge. Leki (1990) identifies that students tended to react to surface errors instead of semantic ones; some had no idea how to give advice; and others tended to take a skeptical view of peers' comments. In the educational context where the traditional roles of the teacher and learner are deep-rooted, providing students with the evaluation sheets was effective (Sengupta, 1998). In order to make peer feedback successful,

Sawaya and Yokoyama (2013) imply that peer feedback training and guidance with peer review worksheets are helpful to elicit comments on global issues. Berg (1999) and Nagasaka (2005) also claim that training is essential for peer feedback.

Besides, cultural background has an effect on negative feedback. It is noted that the students with totally negative views came from cultures that stressed teacher-centered classroom. This suggests that peer feedback may be resisted by students who are not familiar with collaborative and student-centered environments (Mangelsdorf, 1992; Zhang, 1995). For example, in China, the teacher was traditionally considered as “the one who knows” (Nelson and Murphy, 1993, p.136). Therefore, students tended to depend on teacher feedback instead of peer feedback.

2.4 Teacher Feedback

Several studies have shown the importance of teacher feedback and a teacher’s role in peer feedback sessions. First of all, teacher feedback is credible and more respectful (Tsui & Ng, 2000; Zhang, 1995). Comparing teacher feedback and student feedback, Caulk (1994) describes that a teacher tends to give general types of suggestions while students tend to give specific types of feedback. It can be said that teacher feedback and student feedback were not similar, but complementary.

The teacher plays an important role in the process learning approach such as peer feedback. Rollinson (2005) regards the teacher as an elaborator, not a corrector. Hyland and Hyland (2001) suggest that teachers have to fulfill several conflicting roles in giving feedback. For example, they not only evaluate students’ writing but also use the

opportunity to teach writing. Thus, teachers have to achieve a balance between a facilitator and an evaluator.

Miao et al. (2006) assert in what phase teacher feedback should be made in a Chinese EFL writing class. They argue that peer feedback followed by teacher feedback was useful. This is because the students trusted the teacher so they felt the pressure and wrote nothing on the draft the teacher had already made comments on.

Nagasaka (2005) states that it is important for teachers to establish a collaborative atmosphere in class in order to make peer feedback successful. In her study, students came to feel that exchanging ideas was fun through peer feedback sessions. As the students got to know each other within a group rapport, they came to express themselves more effectively. It is indeed significant that the students considered peers as partners, not competitors. It can be said that a teacher's role is a conductor in peer feedback sessions.

However, some deficiencies of teacher feedback are pointed out. Zamel (1985), for example, warns that teachers tend to judge student writing as a finished product rather than respond to it as work in progress. Rollinson (2005) describes that the red ink used by teacher feedback is so disheartening for learners that he views teacher feedback as the tyranny of the red pen. Hyland (1990) states that teachers find marking students' drafts a tedious and unrewarding chore and that simply correcting errors will not offer learners much stimulus to future improvements.

Thus, a role of teacher feedback is different from that of peer feedback. Above all, teacher feedback is trustworthy. It seems appropriate to combine peer feedback with teacher feedback in the domain of EFL L2 writing. The key to making peer feedback successful lies in teacher

planning and student training (Hansen and Liu, 2005).

The use of peer feedback is still controversial. Therefore, It is significant to investigate the comments students make in their writing. Thus, my research question addresses the following: Is the peer feedback classification scheme reliable to elicit peer feedback? For that purpose, this study starts to describe the development of peer feedback.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

The participants were 14 female college students who were enrolled in the junior seminar of the 2013 academic year on applied linguistics, age range from 20-21. My supervisor was in charge of the seminar. The participants were assured that confidentiality about personal information would be strictly guaranteed. All the participants honestly and seriously cooperated with this research.

3.2 Context and Procedures

The junior seminar class met once a week for 90 minutes over the semester. The participants were required to bring their entries (First entry) almost each class. The entry was a critical summary written in English, the length of which was around 500 words. The participants had to summarize the passage of the text and to add their own ideas or personal experiences in writing an entry. The participants in pairs exchanged their entries and made comments for each other (Second entry). The first 7 minutes of class were allocated to peer feedback: 5 minutes for reading the entry and 2 minutes for making comments. After the peer feedback session, they submitted their entries for the teacher's review.

The course instructor read the entries, made comments, checked peer comments, corrected local and global errors, evaluated them and turned them back (Third entry). Writing an entry was useful in the participants preparing class. The course instructor regarded writing an entry as a pre-step for a graduation thesis. Figure 1 shows the flow of the multiple entry system.

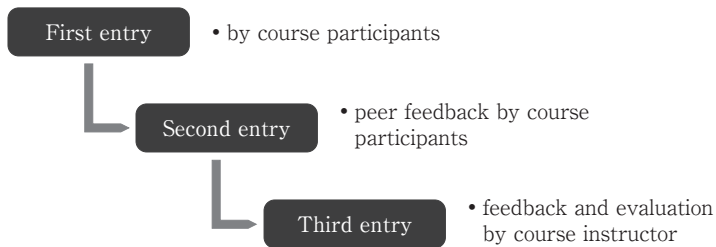


Figure 1. Multiple (Triple) Entry System

The topics of the entries were concerned with L1/L2 acquisition (Table 1).

Table 1. The Topics of the Entries

	Date	Topics	n
Entry 1	May 21	Behaviourism (L1)	12
Entry 2	May 28	Behaviourism (L2)	13
Entry 3	June 4	Innatism (L1)	14
Entry 4	June 11	Innatism (L2)	10
Entry 5	June 18	Interactionist (L1)	12
Entry 6	July 2	Interactionist (L2)	12

Note: The sessions were conducted in 2013.

After each session, the entries were collected with permission of the participants to analyze written feedback the participants made. The entries were photocopied with the supervisor's permission and read by me. Figure 2 shows the procedure of the study.

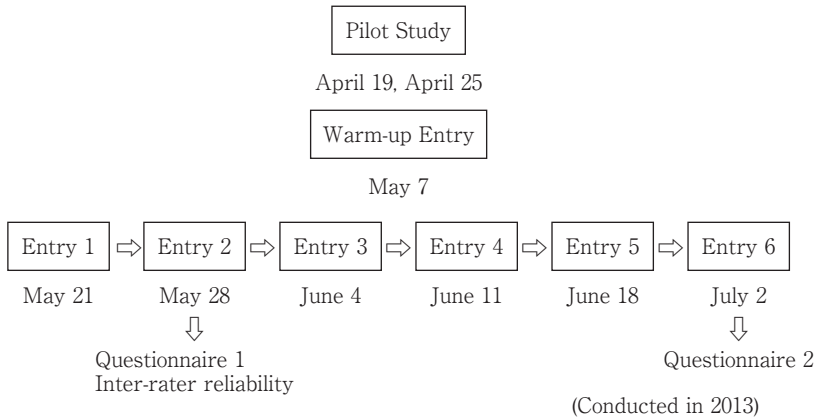


Figure 2. Procedure of This Study

3.3 Feedback Classification Scheme

As the first step of the survey, the preliminary study was conducted twice in the Fall semester of the 2012 academic year. The aim of the preliminary study was to develop a feedback classification scheme and to survey the impact of peer feedback on the students. The participants were the total of 32 female college students (15 participants at the first session; 17 at the second session), all of whom were enrolled in the junior seminar on applied linguistics. The students in pairs exchanged their entries and made written comments for each other. Feedback comments included symbols and marks in the margins, underlining of the sentences they were impressed with, corrections, and comments in the margin. The comments were written in both English and Japanese. A total of 100 feedback comments were collected.

As the second step, the feedback classification scheme was elaborated, based on Hyland and Hyland's (2001) classification scheme. First, all the comments mentioned above were categorized into mechanics or content.

Table 2. The Feedback Classification Scheme**Mechanics**

1. Error correction	Correcting grammar and spelling errors	the amount language→the amount of language there is the→there is a Krasge→Krashen, word choice, 大文字、小文字
2. Coherence	Checking consistency	transition (So, Firstなど) が適切に使われている わかりやすい、読みやすい、段落わけがよい
3. Style	Checking the academic style	日付、No. の訂正、punctuation, indent, double space, space, font size, reference の記入、don't→do not, that 省略しない

Content

4. Academic elaboration	Using knowledge gained in academic situations	Culture and language is very close relationship. If we really and deeply understand English, we have to know culture. i+1 がベスト 友達との勉強はフォローし合えるのでよい 言語学習 = 文化学習 という意見は賛成
5. World elaboration	Using knowledge gained from experiences in daily life	異文化の紹介 It is important to know other culture. To understand other culture means to know the people who live there.
6. Personal elaboration	Referring to personal experiences	I think having a fun is important whenever I had bad situation. 自分の異文化での体験と照らし合わせ、同意する いろいろ考えさせられた
7. Agreement	Showing sympathy and agreement with no reasons	I have the same idea. Me, too. ~だよ 大切だと思う 頑張ろう 違いを楽しめたらいいね 文化って深いね
8. Praise	Expressing approval or admiration	Your entry is wonderful. Interesting. Nice entry. Good. 楽しかった 面白い よかった ◎♡
9. Question	Asking questions to clarify	わかりにくいので説明して下さい
10. Critique (suggestion)	Giving opinion	理解するのが難しかった 例を挙げてほしい ~した方がいい
11. Unclassified		理解不足で全部読めなかった、ごめんね

(Based on Hyland and Hyland, 2001; Lee, 2010; Vandergrift, 1997)

Mechanics consisted of error correction, coherence, and style. Content comprised of praise, critique, and question or suggestion according to Lee (2010). While coding was conducted following this classification, some comments were not categorized. Therefore, the coding scheme of agreement was created in the part of content. Then, academic elaboration, world elaboration, and personal elaboration were added. Agreement was defined to show the state of sharing the same opinion or feelings. Academic elaboration was regarded as the feedback by using knowledge gained in academic situations (Vandergrift, 1997). World elaboration was regarded as the feedback by using knowledge gained from experience in daily life (*ibid.*). Personal elaboration was defined to refer to personal experiences (*ibid.*). Thus, the comments were classified into 10 categories.

The current study was implemented with the participants of the 2013 academic year. Starting to analyze the comments according to the classification scheme, I found that some comments were not classified into any categories. Therefore, discussing with the supervisor, the category 'unclassified' was created. Finally, the comments were classified into 11 categories. Table 2 shows the definitions and examples.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Reliability of Peer Feedback Classification Scheme

In order to examine the reliability of the classification scheme in categorizing the comments, I asked a fellow researcher, who holds a Master's degree from a university in Canada and was teaching at college level, to analyze the data of Entry 2 according to the classification scheme. The data sample was also analyzed by me. As a result, inter-rater reliability was 96.7 per cent, and the differences were resolved through

discussion.

4.2 Analyses of Peer Feedback

Table 3 shows the overview of peer feedback analyzed on the basis of the classification scheme.

Table 3. Overview of Peer Feedback

	Error	Coherence	Style	Academic	World	Personal	Agreement	Praise	Question	Critique	Unclassified	Total	Participants
Entry 1	9	23	8	22	3	18	1	22	1	5	1	113	12
Entry 2	15	21	6	23	0	14	5	16	0	4	0	104	13
Entry 3	11	34	12	26	3	8	5	22	0	3	1	125	14
Entry 4	9	18	7	18	1	13	2	15	0	2	0	85	10
Entry 5	5	15	7	29	3	14	6	18	0	2	0	99	12
Entry 6	8	28	6	29	2	17	3	13	0	7	0	113	12
Total	57	139	46	147	12	84	22	106	1	23	2	639	73
(%)	8.8	21.8	7.2	23.0	1.9	13.2	3.4	16.6	0.2	3.6	0.3		

The total number of peer feedback 73 participants made was 639. That is, each participant made 8.75 comments on average. Academic elaboration, coherence, and praise were frequently employed in peer feedback. On the other hand, error correction, critique, world elaboration, and question were not frequently employed.

Table 4 indicates what kind of phrases the participants used in making feedback. I focused on two areas of coherence and praise, which were top-two peer feedback.

As to coherence, “easy to understand” and “easy to read” were frequently used. These results tell that the participants placed high value on writing a critical draft in English. In addition, the words such as opinion, example, and conclusion were concerned with critical writing. As

Table 4. Type and Token of Coherence and Praise

Rank	Coherence		Praise	
	Type	Token	Type	Token
1	Easy to understand [wakariyasui]	23	Nice [yokatta]	24 (2)
2	Easy to read [yomiyasui]	16 (3)	Interesting [omoshiroi]	13 (2)
3	You clearly expressed your opinion. [jibun no iken wo nobeteiru]	15	Good	6
4	Examples helped me understand. [rei]	10	Very well [jouzu]	3
5	Coherent [matome]	8	Awesome [subarasii]	2

Note : Numbers in parenthesis indicate that comments were made in Japanese.

for praise, “nice” and “interesting” were frequently employed both in Japanese and in English. The participants tended to use these words in praise of coherence and the content of entries. Next, as to praise, “good,” “nice,” “interesting,” and “well” were frequently used. These words were used mainly together with coherence, academic elaboration, and personal elaboration. The following are praise comments made by the participants.

- Your own experience is interesting (Entry 1).
- It is very nice to raise examples in Japanese and English (Entry 1).
- I did not hit upon an idea of comparing French with English. Great! (Entry 2)
- Your conclusion is wonderful. I have much to learn from you (Entry 3).
- Your opinion about immersion program is very clear and good! (Entry 6)

The examples of critic, error correction and question comments are mentioned as follows.

- Can you explain the part I do not make out? (Entry 1)

- Be careful not to make a mistake in the use of 'imitate' and 'imitation' (Entry 2).
- Why don't you write the date and references? (Entry 3)

Overall, badly negative comments were none. Rather, they generally mitigated the critique comments, using "it would be . . .," "Why not?" or "I wonder" Students tend to use hedged expressions in their critique comments (Lee, 2010). It is obvious that the participants used mitigation strategies in order to soften the impact of critique.

4.3 Responding to the Research Question

My research question is the following: Is the peer feedback classification scheme reliable? It can be said that the peer feedback classification scheme is reliable to classify peer feedback comments. According to the classification scheme, academic elaboration, coherence, and praise were frequently employed in peer feedback. Error correction, critique, world elaboration, and question were not frequently employed.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Conclusions

The following were the main findings: (1) The classification scheme was highly reliable in eliciting peer feedback comments the students made; (2) The classification scheme proves that academic elaboration, coherence, and praise were frequently employed in peer feedback; and (3) it demonstrates that error correction, critique, world elaboration, and question were not frequently employed.

5.2 Limitations and Implications

The results of the study indicate the following limitations:

- (1) All the participants were female college students and all belonged to the English department. This factor very likely affected the results of the study. Including coeducational university students and no English majors is desirable in a further study.
- (2) Only 14 university-level EFL students were analyzed for this study, which limited the generalizability of the results.
- (3) The focus of this study was only on quantitative data and on analyses of the participants' comments. It is desirable that retrospective interviews should be organized to observe the mental process of the students engaged in peer feedback.

Despite the limitations, several suggestions may shed light on EFL writing instructions. Although students only receive comments from a teacher in the case of teacher feedback, peer feedback provides them with an opportunity to act as a teacher. They can make good use of this opportunity to grow up to be an autonomous learner. A further study can be done to examine how peers' and teachers' comments will be incorporated to revise entries. In addition, the peer feedback training should be implemented in order to promote peer feedback more smoothly.

This study aimed to develop the classification scheme. The impacts of peer feedback on learners will be discussed in a further study.

**Note:* This paper is based on my master's thesis entitled *Fostering Virtuous Triangles: A Study of Peer Feedback for Scaffolding EFL Writing*, which was submitted to the graduate school of Doshisha Women's College of Liberal Arts in January 2015.

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