AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF CONDUCTING PEER REVIEW AMONG CHINESE COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Abstract
Peer review enjoys a solid theoretical foundation and has been widely used in L1 and L2 writing instructions, but remains rare in the EFL environment of mainland China. This study attempts to evaluate its use among Chinese students. It finds: (1) Conducting peer review to substitute for part of teacher feedback is as effective as relying completely on the teacher for feedback; (2) Most Chinese students like to get feedback from their peers and think it is useful to them; (3) Chinese students are already capable of effective peer revision, which can also stimulate self-revision.

Key words
writing instruction; teacher feedback; peer review

1. Peer review
Peer review is a writing activity in which students form pairs or groups to read each other's composition and make suggestions for revision (Mangelsdorf 1992). It is also termed peer feedback, peer response, peer revision, peer critiquing, peer evaluation, peer editing, etc.

Peer review has been widely used in L1 and L2 writing instructions. Nelson and Murphy (1993) attribute its emergence in writing to collaborative learning theory and the shift from product approach to process approach. Many claims have been made about its benefits. For example,

Mittan (1989) has written that peer reviews achieve the following: provide students with an authentic audience; increase student motivation for writing; enable students to receive different views on their writing; help students learn to read critically their own writing; and assist students in gaining confidence in their writing. He also points out that peer review discussions allow students to use oral language skills. (Mangelsdorf 1992:275)

Although peer review enjoys strong theoretical support and has become a regular feature of writing instructions abroad, it remains a rare scene in the teaching of English writing in China. This is because peer review is a common activity of the process approach (Mangelsdorf 1992), whereas writing instruction in China is dominated by the product approach (Han 2001; Wu & Zhang 2000), in which only teachers respond to student writing. In recent years, however, more and more Chinese teachers have become interested in the process approach (Chen & Li 1999; Deng et al. 2003; Han 2001; Li 2000; Wu & Zhang 2000; Zhang & Zhou 2002). As peer review is highly recommended by process proponents (Ferris et al. 1997), it's very likely that Chinese teachers will try this activity when they adopt the process approach. Therefore, research is needed to inform possible classroom practice.

2. Previous studies involving Chinese students
Although studies of peer review abound in the L1 and L2 literatures (Dipardo & Freedman 1988;
An Exploratory Study of Conducting Peer Review among Chinese College Students

Mo Junhua


Carson and Nelson find that when Chinese students form peer response groups, their primary goal is to maintain group harmony. They are reluctant to criticize others' compositions, to disagree with others, or to claim authority. These traits reduce the effectiveness of peer review. Jacobs et al. find that the vast majority of Chinese students prefer to receive peer feedback as one type of feedback on their writing, despite the fact that they consider teacher feedback more important than peer feedback. Jacobs et al.'s opinion is echoed by Lochhart and Ng. However, Sengupta reports opposite findings that in a teacher-centered, examination-driven, and accuracy-focused environment, students are indifferent to peer feedback and cannot perceive any value in it.

Studies of peer review in mainland China are scarce, too. A survey of China National Knowledge Infrastructure, or CNKI, reveals that from 1996 to 2003, there are only two published papers that are exclusively devoted to this topic (Xu 2000; Zhou 2003). Xu finds that Chinese college students like to receive peer feedback, which can enhance their motivation for writing. But her finding is based on only one review. Further investigation is required to examine the long-term impact of peer feedback. Zhou discusses the advantages of peer feedback and the reasons why it is rarely used in China, but she doesn't provide any empirical evidence.

This study intends to investigate three questions: (1) How do college students of mainland China react to peer review? (2) What effect does peer review have on student revision? (3) Is it feasible to organize this activity in an EFL context like mainland China? An experimental study and a survey study were carried out to examine these questions.

3. Methods

The subjects are second-year English majors from the School of Adult Education, Zhejiang University. They are 20-to-21-year-old full-time students.

The control group and the experimental group come from two parallel classes, the total population of which is 78. However, 29 students were excluded for either missing the pretest or failing to finish all the writing tasks as required. Therefore, only 49 were included in the final tally, with 26 in the control group and the other 23 in the experimental group.

The treatment is using peer feedback to substitute for part of teacher feedback, in contrast to completely relying on the teacher for feedback. The teaching procedures of both groups are shown in the following two flow charts.

![Figure 1. Teaching procedure in the control group](image1)

![Figure 2. Teaching procedure in the experimental group](image2)

Writing tasks were argumentative essays assigned by the teacher. Students had to write two drafts about every topic. Both drafts were written outside class. Teacher feedback consisted of error corrections and comments. Error corrections included direct and indirect corrections. Comments covered content, structure, and grammar.

Peer feedback was conducted in class after students wrote the first drafts. They formed pairs or groups to read and revise. They were asked to provide feedback for each other like the teacher did. The entire activity lasted for about 20 minutes, during which the teacher mainly acted as the classroom...
manager to ensure that students did as required.

In the control group, the teacher spent the corresponding time commenting on the problem areas he noted down when marking compositions of the control group.

Shortly after the experiment ended, a questionnaire was administered to the students in the experimental group. The pre- and post-test were selected from a collection of mock test papers for Test of English Majors Band 4 or TEM-4. Both were argumentative essays on a given topic. All the essays were marked in accordance with a holistic scoring scale used in TEM-4. Two experienced teachers were asked to do the job. The inter-rater reliability was .820, as measured by Pearson product-moment correlation.

4. Results and discussions

4.1 Results of the teaching experiment

Table 1. Statistics of the pre- and post-test results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Pre-test</th>
<th></th>
<th>Post-test</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Std.</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>7.788</td>
<td>2.569</td>
<td>.920</td>
<td>9.288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>7.717</td>
<td>2.315</td>
<td>.920</td>
<td>9.130</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 1, we can see that the control group and the experimental group were of the same writing proficiency before the experiment. After the experiment, both groups made real progress. However, there is still no significant difference between them. They are still at the same level of writing proficiency. Therefore, feedback used in the experimental group is as effective as that in the control group. That is to say, combining teacher feedback with peer feedback is as effective as relying completely on teacher feedback.

Peer feedback in writing instruction can substitute for part of teacher feedback. In the experimental group, the first drafts were reviewed by students themselves and the teacher only marked the second drafts (see Figure 2), whereas in the control group, both drafts were done by the teacher (see Figure 1). However, this didn't lead the experimental group to lag behind the control group. Instead, the experimental group made equivalent progress. That is to say, peer feedback in our study is as useful as teacher feedback, but only in the context of teacher-led instruction.

4.2 Student revisions

To evaluate the impact of peer feedback on student revisions, we identified all the revisions students of the experimental group made when they wrote the second drafts after the last peer review session. Then we categorized them according to the taxonomy of revisions designed by Faigley and Witte (1981).

Revisions are divided into two general types: surface changes and meaning changes. Surface changes do not affect the meaning, nor do they bring new information to the text. They are further divided into formal changes (editing) and meaning-preserving changes. Meaning changes affect the concepts and meaning by bringing new information to the text. They include microstructure changes and macrostructure changes.

The source of each revision was determined by comparing the revisions students made with the written peer feedback they got. Each revision was coded as either resulting from the peer review (peer), or from the writer's own ideas (self). A revision was considered to be the result of the peer review session, if the change was traceable to either the comments or the corrections made directly on the essay by the peer reviewer. Otherwise, it was viewed as self-revision.
Table 2. Taxonomy of student revisions to the second drafts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of revisions</th>
<th>Source of revisions</th>
<th>Peer-initiated</th>
<th>Self-initiated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surface changes</td>
<td>Formal changes (editing)</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meaning-preserving changes</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning changes</td>
<td>Micro-structure changes</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Macro-structure changes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>135</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent (%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>72.58</td>
<td>27.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To assess the effectiveness of peer revision, we distinguished between the correct and the incorrect. We also calculated the proportions of the two major types of revisions.

Table 3. Correctness of peer revisions and percentages of the two major revisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of peer revisions</th>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Wrong</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surface changes</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>85.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning changes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>70.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>120</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>88.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from Table 2, 23 students made 186 revisions after they received peer feedback, with each student making an average number of 8.09 revisions. Among the 186 revisions, 135 are peer revisions, accounting for 72.58% of the total. More importantly, 88.89% of peer revisions are correct, as is shown by Table 3. Therefore, it’s safe to say that students are capable of effective peer revisions.

4.3 Student reactions

As we all know, teaching in China is traditionally teacher-centered and students are accustomed to getting feedback from the teacher. Therefore, we were afraid that students would be unwilling to do peer review, which is student-centered. However, the questionnaire data shows that most Chinese students reacted to this new type of feedback very positively.

87% of the students surveyed indicated that they were willing or very willing to review their partner’s composition. 96% of them rated peer feedback as useful or very useful. 91% indicated that they would incorporate peer suggestions into their revisions. 70% agreed that peer review should continue to be used in future writing classes. That so many students demonstrated such positive reactions to peer feedback is because this new type of feedback can help them in different ways. They reported that peer review can offer them an opportunity to learn from others, increase their reader awareness, and help them be more careful in writing and more willing to write and revise, just to name their main reasons.

Therefore, we conclude that Chinese students like to get feedback from their peers, although they may think teacher feedback is more important. Peer feedback and teacher feedback are complementary rather than contradictory.

4.4 Feasibility of conducting peer review among Chinese college students

Villamil and De Guerrero (1998) point out that teachers have a lingering fear that L2 students are not knowledgeable enough to detect and correct errors in the target language. It must be admitted that we had similar worries before we undertook this study. However, analysis of student revisions shows that Chinese students are already capable of detecting and correcting errors in their peers' writing (see Table 2 and 3).
Findings of this study also support Mittan's (1989 in Mangelsdorf 1992) claim that peer revision can increase students' motivation for revision. After peer revisions, students made 51 self-revisions, which amount to 27.42% of the total revisions (see Table 2). The survey results also show that Chinese students are very positive about it. Most of them like to get feedback from peers and consider it useful to their writing.

Therefore, it is feasible to use peer feedback among Chinese students as an important complement to teacher feedback.

4.5 Problems and suggestions

A common problem of the peer review activity is that students tend to concentrate on the surface-level problems and ignore the meaning-level concerns (Mendonca & Johnson 1994). This problem can be found not only in L2 students, but also in L1 students (Villamil & Guerrero 1998), not to mention Chinese students who are EFL learners. Although we find that 85.93% of peer revisions are categorized as surface changes (see Table 3), we don't think it is as bad as some people think.

The process approach views writing as a process of discovering meaning. Therefore, the writer's intention or purpose becomes paramount, while language accuracy is often neglected. However, we argue that unlike face-to-face speaking, which is facilitated by many non-verbal means, writing must be linguistically accurate so as to be clear for the reader. Although we are fully aware that language is not the sole criterion to judge a composition, we do believe that it is a very important one. This is especially true in the Chinese writing classroom where the writing tasks are often directly related to students' daily life and study and are limited in 200 words. Now that Chinese students' compositions do not involve complex issues or sophisticated specialty knowledge, the correct and appropriate use of the target language becomes a crucial standard. Therefore, we contend that it's a good rather than a bad thing that students are inclined to focus on surface-level problems. At this point, we agree with Beason (1993) that L2 students' preoccupation with surface concerns is actually a cognitive and linguistic effort. "The overall quality of a text might not be significantly enhanced by Surface-level Revisions, but even a mended comma splice contributes in its own way to the readability of a text and the writer's linguistic development" (p. 416).

Another problem we detect is that a few students failed to do as the teacher asked, although most students did well. Instead of reading and discussing each others' compositions, they took the time to talk about irrelevant things. Therefore, teachers should carefully monitor the peer review process in case "discussions become chit-chat" (Graner 1987: 41).

Therefore, peer review must be handled with care. To make peer response group work, teachers must carefully design every session to guide students throughout the review process, to move beyond low-level concerns to high-level concerns (Mangelsdorf 1992). They should also train students for peer review so that they can do it effectively (Zhu 1995). In short, teachers cannot interpret peer review simply as a way to relieve their workload. It's true that the use of peer review can do part of the marking job for teachers, but it also creates new demands and new tasks for them.

References


菲律宾语言障碍少年元理解与阅读理解
菲律宾大学教育学院 珀施亚·帕迪拉

在采用了量、质、结果和过程的测量手段基础上，本研究调查了菲律宾 11 至 13 岁的诵读障碍少年的理解力、监控与规律，以及这种元理解策略对他们理解母语文本的影响。结果表明：孩子的阅
读理解与表现在与元理解策略使用之间没有一定的联系。最常用的元理解策略是预习，最不常用的是自我提问；字面理解比推导式理解处理的好；预
习与复述有较大的正态的相关性；修复策略的运用与语用流畅度和复述有关，有较大的正态的相关性。根据这些结果，论文提出了一些教学研究建议。
关键词：元理解；阅读理解；诵读障碍

语料库对同义词研究的贡献
首都师范大学英语系卢 鹿

同义词，由于意义的相似或重合，极易引起理解与运用的困惑，是语言学习的一个难点。学习者
经常在语言使用过程中对同义词不加细致区分，因手拾来，随意使用，因而极易造成语言使用的不正
确或不地道。这种情况的主要原因是在词义理解和认知框架的认知方面不够充分。本文试图
从词汇知识深度的三个层面——类接、搭配和意义角度对同义词的同义词 gain 和 obtain
在本族语料库和学习者语料库中的使用进行分析，探讨利用语料库辨析同义词的方法，并研究学
习者在同义词使用中存在的问题。
关键词：语料库；同义词；类接；搭配；语义韵

在线交流与语法水平的提高
首都师范大学英语教育系 赵 婷 陈 洪
菲律宾大学语言学院 珀斯亚·帕迪拉

在英语作为外语的情况下，通过网络进行的实时在线交流活动对提高学习者的语法水平是否有效
尚无定论。我们对一所大学和一所日本大学学生的网络实时交流活动进行了跟踪研究，发
现网络在线交流活动与口语交流活动在若干方面具有相似性，因而能够有效提高学习者的语法水平。
关键词：在线交流；语料库

对认知语言学框架下的词句策略的再认
首都师范大学英语教育系 曲春红

词句策略是 EFL 学生在阅读过程中经常使用的阅读技巧。它的有效性已被很多理论所证明，而语
言学中的相关理论的发展可以将这一策略放在更广泛的背景下重新加以考虑。示意图表明上下文
并不是词句策略的唯一资源和基础，背景知识和词汇本身同样是在这一策略中非常有效的因素；通常理论
可以辅助读者猜测句意的词句的新词性或句意的词性出现时所代表的为词性所熟悉的含义。此外，这
一策略的适用型同样需要重新加以考虑。
关键词：词句策略；上下文；文化差异；词句义

给非英语专业本科生开设报刊英语选读课的一次尝试
上海理工大学外语学院 郭静平

报刊英语选读一直是中国大学英语专业本科生高年级的一门重要课程。但是，随着中国英语教
学水平的不断提高，越来越多的非英语专业的本科生已经不满足于持续、广泛、快速阅读、听力等大学
英语的传统文化，他们要求有更多更新、更接近时代的特点课来满足他们的需求。另一方面，《大学英语教学大
纲》也要求学生在大学四年保持不间断的英语学习。正是在这样背景下，作者以《大纲》为指导，大胆尝试，
给非英语专业本科生开设了报刊英语选读课，取得了令人鼓舞的结果。而且，作者还就报刊
英语课的教学目的、课时安排、教学方法等提出了自己的看法。
关键词：报刊英语；非英语专业学生；实验班；五级班

概念流利在外语教学中的作用
复旦大学 董玉才

江南大学 撒志忠

Danesi 提出，外语教学应该以培养学生的概念流利为目标。本文首先剖析这一概念的理论根据，
认为它在理论上是以现代语言学和认知语言学为依据，也与功能语言学的主要思想相吻合。文章同
时指出：Danesi 理论的不足之处，认为概念流利不应当仅仅局限于词汇层面，也反映在语法层面上。
最后举例证明如何在教学实践中成功这一理念。
关键词：概念流利；概念流利；认知语言学；功能语言学

在中国大学生中开展同伴互评的探索性研究
南京大学外国语学院 莫俊华

同伴互评有坚实的语言理论，并在国内外的写作教
学中得到了广泛的运用。但在中国的英语写作教
学中却用得不多。我们尝试着在中国大学生中开
展同伴互评，发现：（1）用同伴互评代替部分的教
师批评和完全依赖教师同样有效；（2）绝大多数学
生喜欢获得同伴反馈，认为对自己是有帮助的；（3）
同伴修改是有效的，而且能够激发学生的自我修改。
关键词：写作教学；教师批评；同伴互评

试论教师反馈信息对学生自我改正外语写作错误的可行性——对广州大学十位
学生的个案研究
广州大学外国语学院 徐俊仪

在强调提高学生自主学习能力的今天，许多学
者认为在某些情况下，学生自我改正错误要比老
师的纠正更有益于学生的外语学习。本文作者采取
个案研究的方法探讨非英语专业的学生能否通过
老师给出的提示符号有效地自我改正写作中的错