Feature Article

Toward Effective EFL Writing Revision: Peer Review

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Abstract

This study examines the attitudes of second-year university Japanese EFL students majoring in English toward peer review as part of the revision process during paragraph writing. Students were asked to complete pre- and post-course surveys to explore their attitudes regarding peer review. To triangulate this research, a case study utilized textual analysis to examine the types of revisions made. Initially, results from the pre-course survey indicated that most students felt that they were unable to provide useful feedback to their peers. Students also believed that they could only give feedback that was superficial, and lacked the knowledge and skill to give comprehensive comments and suggestions that their peers required. The post-course survey reveals that most students altered their attitudes towards the efficacy of peer review, and that most students would be willing to continue using peer review in future writing classes. However, this study suggests that students maintain skepticism towards their peer's comments and prefer their teacher's feedback after one term.

本研究では、パラグラフ・ライティングの授業を履修している英語

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専攻の日本人大学生２年生を対象に、ピア・レビューに対する考え方を調査した。データとして、ピア・レビューに関しての受講前と受講後のアンケートに加え、テキスト分析をしてピア・レビュー後のドラフトの書き直しで実際にどのような修正がされたかを調べた。受講前のアンケートから、学生はクラスメートに有益なフィードバックを与える能力が無い、自分が提供したフィードバックが表面的である、クラスメートに理解してもらえるコメントや提案をする知識や能力が無いと信じていることがわかった。受講後のアンケート結果では、ほとんどの学生がピア・レビューはライティング・スキルの上達に有効であると捉えるようになったことが明らかになった。その一方で、クラスメートのコメントには懐疑的であるが教師のコメントは全面的に取り入れる傾向があることもわかった。

Introduction

This research paper intends to explore Japanese EFL students' perceptions and actual performance during the revision process while implementing a structured process writing approach utilizing peer review as part of the process writing approach. Due to the small-scale nature of this classroom-based study, the data was triangulated using pre- and post-course surveys and the textual analysis of revisions in a case study in an effort to investigate my students' beliefs and attitudes towards peer review during the process of EFL writing revision. This exploratory study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What type of feedback and revision do Japanese university students believe they need?
2. To what peer-review comments are Japanese university students most receptive?

Background

Interest in pedagogical approaches to writing instruction has been a continuing focus of writing research for many years. Some prominent studies include research into the process writing heuristics as proposed by Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) and Hayes (1996), restructuring strategies by Roca de Larios, Murphy, and Manchon (1999), and drafting strategies by Galbraith and Torrance (2004). Flower and Hayes's (1981) cognitive model has additionally contributed to current writing pedagogy.

The writing processes are commonly categorized into the stages of

planning, formulation, and drafting. In the pre-writing planning stages, the writer obtains contextual and rhetorical knowledge and proceeds to construct a working model of the written product (Gabrielatos, 2002; Hyland, 2002; Matsuda, 2003; Torrance, Thomas, & Robinson, 1996; White & Arndt, 1991). With the general format of the written work conceptualized, the writer begins formulation. During formulation, the writer recalls from memory and with guidance from the pre-writing stage, writes the composition and restructures writing (Roca de Larios et al., 1999) according to linguistic, ideational, and textual modifications. Once the first draft has been completed, the process moves on to the revision stage (Faigley & Witte, 1981; Hu, 2005), where the primary concerns are problem identification and problem solving.

Although many researchers such as Hedgcock and Lefkowicz (1994), Paulus (1999), and Zhang (1999) assert that multiple drafts do improve the final paper, it is clear that further empirical evidence is needed (Hyland, 2003). The consensus is that teacher and peer feedback (Chandrasegaran, 2002; Cho, 2003; Hayes, 1996; Hayes & Flower, 1983; Hyland, 1998; Kasanga, 2004; Lee, 2003; Sasaki, 2000; Villamil, & de Guerrero, 1996; Yates, & Kenkel, 2002), and self-revision are valuable to ESL writing pedagogy (Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 1999, 2001; Jacobs, Curtis, Braine, & Huang, 1998) and should be incorporated into the writing curriculum where appropriate. While previous research indicates peer feedback/review is useful, further investigation is necessary to determine how useful it is (Lockhart & Ng, 1993; Tsui & Ng, 2000), and when and how this feedback could be improved (Neff, 2006).

An area of contention is the negotiation of meaning (Long, 1983; Mackey, McDonough, Fuji, & Tatsumi, 2001; Oliver & Mackey, 2003; Shehadeh, 1999; Susser, 1984), selection of input, and subsequent revision. When engaged in peer review and teacher feedback, there is the possibility of miscommunication, lack of confidence, or over-confidence in the value of the information received. However, "studies have reported that students themselves doubt its value, overwhelmingly preferring teacher feedback" (Hyland, 2002, p. 169). While second language (L2) contexts are likely to benefit from peer response, cultural issues such as criticizing peers' work may make students uncomfortable (Min, 2005).

Methodology

Participants

The participants in this study were selected from a class of sixteen second-year university students in Okinawa. Thirteen students completed the pre-course survey on the first day of the semester, while fourteen answered the post-course survey. Volunteers for the case study component of this project were recruited during the second class. Two motivated participants responded to my request, one of which provided sufficient data to be used as a case study for this paper. The case study participant, Miki (a pseudonym), was able to meet with me six times for this project.

Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from pre- and post-course surveys and a case study of Miki's writing process was constructed through an analysis of the revisions she made on her first assignment. The surveys conducted on the first and the last day of class addressed three main areas that will be used in this paper: beliefs about writing in English, teacher feedback, and peer review. The survey consisted of closed-ended questions, yes-no responses, and a variety of Likert scales. This format was chosen to elicit a wide variety of responses as well as fixed replies for the purpose of improving the reliability of the data. Similar questions and statements were used on previous surveys that resulted in refinements in question type and response options (Taferner, 2006). Japanese was used rather then English to ensure that language comprehension would not interfere with the students' responses.

The draft texts in the case study were analyzed using the coding in Roca de Larios et al.'s restructuring framework (1999), that included ideational, textual, linguistic categories. "Ideational" items refer to the concepts or messages the writer abandons, elaborates on, or reconceptualizes. Next, textual data refers to coherence and cohesion, stylistic concerns, and other considerations that are writing task related. And finally, the linguistic category encompass' lexical and syntactic changes. Examples of coding can be seen in the Appendix.

Writing Tasks

The writing assignments used for this study began with pre-writing tasks such as theme and topic selection, brainstorming, and paragraph

organization (topic sentence, introduction, body, and conclusion). Once some of the basics were covered early in the course, editing and proofreading skills were also practiced. Following this training, the first process-writing assignment was given to students to complete. The sequenced writing tasks in this course include narration, description, cause and effect, and two short argumentative essays.

When students reached the drafting stage, bilingual self-revision and peer-review checklists were introduced as tools for the students to utilize on their own during class-time or for homework. During this learner-centered activity, the teacher monitored and helped students when they requested assistance. By the time the drafting process was completed, students will have completed four drafts and then received final suggestions on their composition from the teacher.

Results

Pre- and Post-course Surveys

The pre- and post-course surveys provided information about the students' beliefs and attitudes towards the various aspects of the writing and the revision process.

Students' Writing Difficulties

The students in this study suggested that the use of Japanese still remains an important aspect of their writing, as reflected in questions 1 and 2 (Table 1). Question 3 ("What do you find difficult when writing in English? Circle all that apply") revealed that students believed that style and grammar were the most difficult, followed by vocabulary, format, and topic selection. The emphasis on style might have been due to the students attempt to develop their own writing style, within an unfamiliar learner-centered environment that allows for increased student autonomy. The minor differences in the pre- and post-course survey results may have indicated their continued effort in these areas over the short duration of one writing course.

Table 1
Students' Cognitive Writing Strategies and Beliefs with Regards to their Writing Difficulties

	Q1: When you write in English, do you first think in Japanese then translate into English?				
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
Pre-Result	3 (23%)	6 (46%)	3 (23%)	1 (8%)	0%
Post-Result	0%	3 (21%)	8 (57%)	2 (14%)	1 (7%)

	Q2: When you write in English, do you first write in Japanese then translate into English?				
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
Pre-result	0%	0%	0%	4 (33%)	8 (67%)
Post-result	0%	0%	4 (29%)	2 (14%)	8 (57%)

	Q3: What do you find difficult when writing in English? Circle all that apply.						
	Topic selection	Content	Format	Vocabulary	Grammar	Punctuation	Style
Pre-result	10%	0%	14%	20%	24%	3%	27%
Post-result	13%	4%	8%	25%	21%	0%	29%

Notes: Pre-course Result *N* = 13; Post-course result *N* =14

Table 2
Students' Writing Revision Strategies

Questions	Yes	Sometimes	No
1. When you write, do you think of who will read your writing? [Focus on Audience]	38% **43%**	54% **50%**	8% **7%**
2. When you write, do you think about the purpose of your writing? [Focus on Writing Objective]	46% **64%**	38% **36%**	15% **0%**
3. When you write, do you think of how to make your point clear to your reader(s)? [Focus on Writing Style / Audience]	54% **71%**	38% **29%**	8% **0%**

(Table 2 continued from p. 27)

4. Do you change words to make your writing more comprehensible before handing it in? [*Indicating Substitution, and Consolidation] [Focus on Process]	62%	38%	0%
	43%	**50%**	**7%**
5. Do you delete and/or add some sentences to make your writing more comprehensible before handing it in? [*Indicating Deletion and Addition] [Focus on Process]	69%	23%	8%
	64%	**36%**	**0%**
6. Do you change the organization of sentences to make your writing more comprehensible before handing it in? [*Indicating Movement] [Focus on Process]	38%	46%	15%
	43%	**50%**	**7%**

* This represents Faigley and Witte's (1981) revision criteria
Notes: Pre-course Result *N* = 13; Post-course Result *N* =14; bolded percentages represent post-course responses

Knowledge about and Practice of Writing Strategies

It is apparent that students perceived that they possessed a number of writing and revision strategies as presented in Table 2. The results indicated a general ability to make changes to their work prior to submitting their final paper. However, students did not particularly think of the reader at the pre-submission stage (see questions 1 and 3—pre-course survey results). Students who revised their writing primarily made their sentences more comprehensible to themselves (see questions 4, 5, and 6) using substitution and consolidation (62%), deletion and addition (69%), and movement (38%), as shown by the pre-course survey results. Over the period one term, the post-course survey results pointed to students' increased focus on addressing the audiences' needs, the writing objective, the appropriate writing style, and the revision process.

Attitudes towards Teacher Feedback

The majority of students agreed (see Table 3) that the teacher's comments would help improve assignments if resubmitted. Most students also felt that they would like the teacher to help them improve their drafts. The reason given for this response is that the teacher was

viewed as the one possessing expertise and superior knowledge, and thus able to provide the necessary answers to correct mistakes in their compositions. When asked about how they would feel if the teacher did not provide feedback on their work, students expressed disappointment and regarded such a practice as meaningless. The types of feedback students desire on their compositions ranged from comments on content and logical presentation, to textual and linguistic advice. From these suggestions, it appeared that a variety of feedback from the teacher was very important to these students and that a lack of pertinent comments and suggestions from the teacher would result in motivational issues during the term.

Attitudes towards Peer Review

Pre-course survey responses (Table 4) revealed that 12 out of 13 students ad previously experienced peer-review exercises. Responses to question 4 suggested that students believed their classmates could not help them with their textual revisions through peer review. However, half of the replies were positive and students indicated that it was possible that their ability to give suggestions and comments to their partners could improve. Also, when undertaking this exercise (see question 5), students thought they could take this opportunity to apply what they learnt through this experience to their own writing. For example, new expressions, and the identification of errors in their peer's work would help point out their own problems.

Case Study of Miki's Writing Revisions
Text Analysis-Substitution and Movement

In this case study of Miki's writing revisions on her first writing assignment, the data (Table 5) showed that she relied primarily on substitution strategies to bring about the desired results. Movement came second, but as a cautionary note, the movements made were mostly for stylistic purposes and not necessarily for coherence or for cohesion. Next, minor additions and one consolidation were made, accounting for approximately 24% of the changes. The overall results indicate that very few ideational revisions were necessary, totaling 13.5% of the changes, textual revisions at 35.1%, and linguistic modifications at 51.3%.

Table 3
Teacher Feedback

	SA	A	RA	RD	D	SD
Q1: Do you think your writing will improve if your teacher makes comments on your writing then you resubmit your final paper?	31%	39%	23%	0%	8%	0%
	71%	**29%**	**0%**	**0%**	**0%**	**0%**

	Yes	I don't know
Q2. Would you like your teacher to help improve your drafts?	69%	31%
	93%	**7%**

Table 4
Peer Review

Questions	Yes	No
Q1: Do you have experience reading your classmates written work?	12	1
Q2: Do you have experience making comments and suggesting corrections to your classmates writing?	10	3
Pre Q3: Would you like to try peer review in your writing class?	10	3
Post Q3: Would you like to try peer review in a writing class in the future?	11	3
Q4: Do you think you can help your classmates make corrections to their writing?	6	6
	10	**3**

	SA	A	RA	RD	D	SD
Pre Q5. Do you think your writing may improve if a classmate makes comments on your writing?	0%	42%)	42%	0%	8%	8%
Post Q5. Do you think your writing improved when a classmate made comments on your writing?	43%	43%	0%	7%	7%	0%

Notes: Key: SA=strongly agree; A=agree; RA=relatively agree; RD=relatively disagree; D=disagree; SD=strongly disagree; Pre-course Result *N* = 13; Post-course Result *N* =14; bolded figures represent post-course responses

Table 5
Miki's Draft Revisions

| Item | Ideational | | | | | |
	Draft 1 Peer review 1	Draft 2 Peer review 2	Draft 3 Teacher feedback 1	Draft 4 Teacher feedback 2	Final	Totals
Message abandonment	0	0	0	0	0	0
Message elaboration	1	0	1	2	1	5
Reconceptual-ization	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Textual					
Coherence-cohesion	3	0	0	1	0	4
Stylistic concerns	0	1 (*1)	10 (*4)	5 (*2)	0	16
Task related	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Linguistic					
Lexical changes	0	0	2	0	0	2
Syntactic changes	1	2	16 (*11)	16 (*7)	3 (*3)	38
	Total Revision Comments					
Peer review	5	3 (*1)	-	-	-	8 (*1)
Teacher feedback	-	-	29 (*15)	24 (*9)	4 (*3)	57 (*27)

Note: Roca de Larios et al.'s restructuring framework (1999) and Faigley & Witte's (1981) criteria were adapted for this table.
*Suggested revisions not made

Text Analysis-Syntactic Changes

The results in Table 5 indicate that syntactic changes followed by stylistic revisions were the most prominent, indicating that the teacher mostly addressed surface-level inadequacy. Another interesting finding was that many of the comments and suggestions of the teacher were not addressed by the writer. It is possible that Miki may not have understood the recommendations at first, or may not have had the time to determine a possible solution to the problem. When asked during an interview specifically about the lack of attention to these oversights,

Miki said that she noticed the comments but felt that solving the problem on her own was too difficult. A possible pedagogical repercussion for these findings may be an improvement in specific grammar awareness exercises as part of an intervention protocol.

Discussion and Conclusion

The pre- and post-course surveys and the case study in this research on peer review have helped further understand students' perceptions and actions during process-writing tasks. In the case study, Miki's responses to the revision tasks indicated that a more active role might be necessary to work at the problem areas that were evident in later drafts. Miki appeared to flourish with familiar formulation tasks, but may have been hesitant or unable to fully take advantage of all of the revision opportunities, as 42.4% of the review comments appear not to have been fully utilized (see Table 5 and the Appendix for details). While it appears that Miki's revision skills have been developing, it became apparent that she was not ready to move from her well-established role as a passive recipient of knowledge, and make revisions that required further thought on her part. Once the peer-review and teacher feedback process began, Miki appeared to let the process take over, limiting additional and original input in further drafts. This may not be so surprising as researchers (e.g., Paulus, 1999) found that teacher feedback and peer review often provided meaning-level revision, while self-revision frequently resulted in surface level changes. Also, the textual analysis of Miki's drafts (see Table 8) illustrate that the teacher's suggestions were responsible for initiating 81.1% of the changes made, which is consistent with the pre- and post-course survey data suggesting that students were still skeptical of their peer's comments and preferred their teacher's feedback (see Table 5).

Returning to this study's research questions—What type of feedback and revision do my students believe they need?, and, What peer-review comments are my students most receptive to?,—clearly, in the early stages of the utilization of peer review within the context of a process writing approach, teacher feedback is overwhelmingly favored over peer review. However, over time, students are more to likely accept the comments of their peers to improve the comprehension of their compositions (see Table 4). This limited study suggests the need for further research concerning the kinds of comments that students want, and what peers and teachers can give to improve students' writing

skills. Other factors including ethnographic, sociocognitive (Myles, 2002; Zamel, 1987), and cultural influences (Holliday, 1994), which may have deep-rooted implications in the EFL writing classroom should also be explored longitudinally on a larger scale is to fully understand the nature of peer interaction during writing revision, and its efficacy within the context of Japanese EFL writing pedagogy.

Notes
1. All questionnaire items are available upon request.

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Appendix
Draft #3 (Teacher's comments)

<u>My **m**entor **(1)**</u>– Ayumi Yamashiro

I have some people whom I respect and admire. Some people are familiar for me <u>like **[insert] (2)** Mother </u>and friend. Other people are not, because they are famous and popular. All of them are very important and influential **person (3)** for my life. **I'd [change not made] (4)** like to introduce one of my Mentor **[change to plural] (5)** who made my dream a reality.

[Tab 5 spaces ➔] (6) Ayumi Yamashiro is one of my best friends. I met her through a mutual friend. She is my **M**entor **(7)** and we have a lot in common.

➔ **(8)** She was born in 1971, four years **senior than (9)** me. At age fifteen, she entered **Kaiho- high school (10)** which I also entered four years later. Our high school was new and established for students who wish to go to colleg**es. (11) Most** students wanted to go to **[insert] (12)** University of the Ryu-kyus. But she wanted to leave Okinawa and broaden her view. That was why she went to college in Kyu<u>**syu** [shu]</u> **(13).**

➔ **(14)** She majored in English literature because she liked to study English. She seemed she had a good college life. She was interested in living in Tokyo. So in 1993, she went to work in Tokyo after graduation of college. She worked at **C**omputer **C**ompany **(15)**. She has met so many people. Some of her co-worker was from foreign country and that **made her [delete] (16) motivate in studying [change to: motivated her to study] (17)** English harder.

➔ **(18)** One day, she decided to go back Okinawa and go to college again. She decided to become an English teacher. In 2000, she was **at (19)** age twenty nine, she entered Okinawa **i**nternational **(20) University (21a)**. She says it was the most impressive and interesting time in her life. Not only she studied hard to take a teacher's license, but also she made a lot of friends.

➜ **(22)** Two years later, she graduated from **college (21b)** and got a teacher's license. That same year, she started working at high school as a teacher. It was part-time employee so she started studying to pass the teacher employment exam **with working [?] (23)**. She had her class so there was no difference between the employed teacher and the part-time teacher like her. It was very hard for her to have enough time to study for the exam. She spent the most of her weekend time in the library for almost a year. She failed the exam at first try but she didn't give up. And finally, this year, at age thirty four, she could pass the exam! **She'll** [**she will**] **(24)** be employed from next year.

➜ **(25)** It **was fateful encounter [?] (26)** for me. I met her when she was working **with (27)** studying for the exam. I had been thinking about my **feature. (28)** I was in same situation with her. I wanted to be an English teacher and needed to go to college again. I had some hesitation **because I was worried aboutbut (29)** she gave me lot of advice and she'd encouraged me. She taught me that we can have my own dream and it's very important to make effort for my dream.

Notes: 1 substitution: stylistic; 2 addition: syntactic; 3 substitution: syntactic; 4 substitution: stylistic; 5 substitution: syntactic; 6 movement: stylistic; 7 substitution: syntactic; 8 movement: stylistic; 9 substitution: syntactic; 10 substitution: syntactic; 11 substitution: syntactic; 12 addition: syntactic; 13 substitution: stylistic; 14 movement: stylistic; 15 substitution: syntactic; 16 deletion: syntactic; 17 substitution: syntactic; 18 movement: stylistic; 19 substitution: syntactic; 20 substitution: syntactic; 21ab substitution: lexical; 22 movement: stylistic; 23 substitution: syntactic; 24 substitution: stylistic; 25 movement: stylistic; 26 addition: syntactic; 27 substitution: syntactic; 28 substitution: lexical; 29 substitution: (the writer regarded this as an addition: elaboration)