SHARING THE RESPONSIBILITY OF FEEDBACK IN ACADEMIC WRITING

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ABSTRACT

Recent changes in writing pedagogy and research have transformed feedback practices. Summative feedback, designed to evaluate writing as a product, has been replaced by formative feedback that points to the student's future writing and development of writing processes. Teacher comments are now being supplemented with writing conferences, workshops, and peer feedback. The objective of this paper is to examine both teacher feedback and peer feedback in the context of an academic writing course. More specifically, the aim is to identify the patterns of interaction and regulation in teacher and peer feedback by analyzing examples of student writing. Through this analysis, an attempt will be made to highlight those practices which are most beneficial to L2 writers.

Introduction

Feedback plays an important role in second language writing as it encourages and consolidates learning. In process-based writing classes, formative feedback is favoured as it not only guides students in developing their composition skills but also shapes their future writing (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). In fact, summative feedback which is usually provided at the end of the writing activity for the purpose of grading the finished product has been replaced by formative feedback. In addition, feedback practices have been extended from written teacher feedback to peer feedback and oral feedback in teacher-student as well as peer interactions. Simultaneously, there has also been a shift in emphasis from mechanical accuracy to development of meaning in a text.

According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT), social factors play an important role in language learning and are considered to be a constitutive element of cognition (1978, 1986). This is especially true of L2 acquisition as it is embedded in specific cultural and institutional settings. Therefore, the central notion in SCT is that higher forms of thinking and complex skills can only result through social interaction. More specifically, it is believed that a learner internalizes social interaction with others and the external dialogue with teachers and/or peers becomes internalized, resulting in a "socially constructed dialogic mind" (Villamil & Guerrero, 2006, p. 24). To transform lower forms of thinking into higher forms of thinking such as

voluntary attention, logical reasoning, planning and problem solving, the mind of the learner needs to be socioculturally mediated and the three types of mediation that are possible are mediation by others, mediation by self, and mediation by artifacts (Lantolf, 2000).

Learners have to go through a process of internalization to operate independently at the higher intellectual level. Wertsch (1979) has proposed that there are stages of regulation from other-regulated to self-regulated, that is from performing with the assistance of others such as teachers or peers to becoming completely independent. As for those who are object-regulated, it would mean that these learners are controlled by the environment and find it difficult to engage in constructive dialogue with either teachers or peers. Vygotsky (1978) used the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) to explain the importance of social interaction through language as a means of developing those areas in learners that have the potential to grow. Another term for this process that is commonly used in education is 'scaffolding' which specifically refers to the support provided by experts to novice learners to speed up the process of learning as well as to achieve higher levels of learning (Stone, 1993). In the context of L2 learning, this term has the added connotation of being mutual rather than unidirectional as it is felt that both participants benefit in peer revision, with scaffolding assistance shifting from one peer to another right through the interaction (Lim & Jacobs, 2001).

Using the sociocultural theory of learning as a starting point, the objective of this paper is to examine both teacher feedback and peer feedback in the context of an academic writing course "The Art of Academic Writing" offered to science undergraduates at the Nanyang Technological University. More specifically, the aim is to identify the procedures of feedback, the nature of feedback in teacher and peer revision as well as to highlight those practices which are most beneficial to L2 writers. These aspects of feedback will be illustrated through examples of written feedback given by tutors and peers.

Teacher Feedback
Teacher feedback is a key component in L2 writing instruction irrespective of the approach adopted, be it a process-based or genre-oriented writing course. This section will first identify key issues in recent research on teacher feedback in L2 writing. It will be followed by a discussion of the procedures and nature of feedback as well as practical suggestions for making feedback work, whether in written, oral, or electronic form.

Recognition of the importance of feedback emerged with the development of learner centered approaches to writing instruction in North American L1 composition classes during the 1970s. For instance, in the best known of these approaches, "process-

approach" writing instruction, teachers support writers through multiple drafts by providing feedback and suggesting revisions during the process of writing itself, rather than at the end of it. The focus thus moved from a concern with mechanical accuracy and control of language to a greater emphasis on the development and discovery of meaning through the experience of writing and rewriting.

More recently, feedback has been seen as a key element of students' growing control over writing skills in genre-oriented approaches, where Vgotskyian theories of scaffolded instruction and learning as a social practice are important. In this context, teacher feedback is essential in helping students gain access to new knowledge, practices, and rhetorical choices in a particular discourse community, be it academic or professional. This view of feedback has also given rise to issues of teacher control in terms of social and political dominance. Teacher feedback may be seen as either denying students their own voice and imposing the teachers' own requirements on them, or empowering students to produce texts that appropriately address the expectations needed to succeed in a particular discourse community (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

Teacher Feedback Procedures
Before commenting on student texts, it is important for teachers to articulate specific philosophies or principles for responding to student writing. For instance, they need to decide at the outset whether to comment on every student draft, address every issue/ problem in drafts and give the same amount or type of feedback to every student. Other issues relate to the manner in which feedback should be given so that it is personalized, encouraging and specific (e.g. using the student's name, referring to previous drafts or assignments to show the student that you are aware of his or her progress).

One of the most common questions that teachers struggle with is determining "what to look for" and "where to start" in responding to a student paper. Ferris (2003) offers some useful advice on this issue:

- Use the course/assignment grading criteria as a starting point for assessment and feedback. Generalized course grading criteria can be the starting point for analyzing student writing and identifying possible issues for feedback. In addition, the specifications of the particular assignment or task provide guidance on ways to assess and comment on student writing. A sample feedback checklist designed by the authors for writing an introduction to a report in the academic writing course "The Art of Academic Writing" is provided in Appendix 1. This checklist provided the basic framework for tutor comments in our writing course.

- Get to know the students' abilities as writers early in the course so that you can construct feedback appropriate to their individual needs. One of the very first tasks in a writing course is to obtain a diagnostic writing sample in the first week of class and analyzing it for both rhetorical and grammatical problems. This can be accomplished by an in-class free writing task to help the teacher get to know the students and find out how they feel about writing in general and about being in the course in particular. The following is an example of free writing tasks designed by the authors for the academic writing course:

Choose one of the topics below and write for 10 minutes without stopping.
1. My writing experience as a science student in the last semester.
2. Challenges NTU science students face in writing.

Many writing instructors, including the authors, prefer to use a combination of peer feedback, teacher-student conferences, written commentary and self-evaluation as students move through various drafts or stages of a writing assignment. For the smooth integration of these activities into the course, it is a good practice to share the sequence of these with students at the beginning of the course. Here is the feedback procedure for an assignment on writing the Introduction of a paper in the academic writing course that the authors taught:

Each assignment will progress as follows:

First draft: You will receive in-class peer response with both written and oral comments from your writing group.
Second draft: You will submit this to the tutor. He/She will return it with written comments.
Third draft: You will bring this to the student-teacher conference along with any questions you may have about your writing.
Final draft: This should be carefully edited, proofread, and formatted. This will receive a grade and final comments.

[Extract from handout "Guidelines for Assignments" given to students at the beginning of the academic writing course that the authors taught]

The process of reading a student paper, identifying and selecting key feedback points and writing constructive comments is a time-consuming and cognitively demanding process. Thus writing responses to assignments need to be planned ahead and sufficient time needs to be set aside to do the job well. Suggestions for writing comments that are clear and helpful to students are summarized:

Table 1: Suggestions for Writing Clear Comments

1. Read the paper through once without making any comments.
2. Write end comments (either at the end of the paper itself or as an email) that both provide encouragement and summarize several specific suggestions for improvement (see Appendix 2).
3. Add marginal comments (see Appendix 3) that provide specific examples of the general points you have made in the end comment.
4. Check both your end comments and marginal comments for instances of rhetorical or grammatical jargon or formal terminology (e.g. nominalization, voice, niche, move, etc.) that may be unfamiliar to the student.
5. If comments are written in the form of questions, check them carefully to make sure that the intent of the question is clear, and that the student will know how to incorporate the ideas suggested by the questions into their existing text. (Questions to avoid: *Really? What does this mean? Have you read the instructions?*)
6. Whenever feasible, pair questions and other comments with explicit suggestions for revision (e.g. *Do you mean 'effluence', not 'affluence'? Why not make a spelling checklist of words you often get wrong and use this before handing in your final draft?*).
7. Use words or phrases instead of codes or symbols.
8. Design or adapt a standard feedback form (like the one shown in Appendix 1) that is appropriate to the goals and grading criteria for your course.
9. Do not overwhelm the student writer with an excessive amount of commentary.
10. Be sure that your feedback is written legibly.

(Adapted from Ferris, 2003, p.125)

In the course "The Art of Academic Writing", written feedback was given either on student assignments or by email (See Appendix 2). The level ranged from simple overall qualitative feedback as in the email, to very detailed feedback in the margin of the assignment. An example of the latter is when tutors use the "tracking changes" tool of word-processing packages to comment on student assignments (See Appendix 3).

Nature of Teacher Feedback
In giving feedback, teachers are usually not just evaluating writing, but are often using the opportunity for teaching and reinforcing writing behaviors. In fact, they may be fulfilling several different and possibly conflicting roles as they give feedback: acting as teacher, language expert, proofreader, facilitator, gatekeeper, evaluator, and reader at the same time (Leki, 1990; Reid, 1994). In addition, as they get to know the student writers personally, teachers tend to have more interest in establishing and maintaining a good relationship with them. In other words, teachers often have to weigh their choice of comments to accomplish a range of informational, pedagogic, and interpersonal goals simultaneously (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

According to Hyland and Hyland (2006), the ways teachers choose to express their feedback can affect both students' reactions to it as well as the extent to which the students use this feedback in their revisions. Thus the manner in which feedback is delivered may have a significant impact on students' writing development. Hyland and Hyland (2006) also noted that the effects are likely to be particularly telling for L2 students, whose linguistic proficiencies and cultural expectations may affect either their acceptance or processing of feedback. Thus teachers need to assess their teaching context and their students as much as the texts they comment on.

Hyland and Hyland (2001) consider teacher feedback in terms of its functions as praise (e.g. Y*ou used the information in the diagram well*), criticism (e.g. *There is no statement of intention in the essay – what is the purpose of your essay?)*, and suggestions (e.g. *Try to express your ideas simply as possible and give extra information)*. In their study, praise was found to be the most frequently employed function in teacher feedback. However, praise was often used to soften criticisms and suggestions rather than simply responding to good work (e.g. praise-suggestion pair: *This is a good essay but you have to expand your ideas*). Many of the criticisms and suggestions were also mitigated by the use of hedging devices (e.g. *Some of the material seemed a little long-winded and I wonder if it could have been compressed a little*), question forms (e.g. *The first two paragraphs – do they need joining?*), and personal attribution, that is, signaling a criticism as reflecting a personal opinion (e.g. *I find it hard to know what the main point of each paragraph is*). Hyland and Hyland (2001) point out that while mitigation strategies are important as a means of minimizing the force of criticisms and enhancing teacher-student relationships, they also warn that such indirectness carries the potential for incomprehension and miscommunication.

In our corpus, there were many such examples of Praise-Criticism, Criticism-Suggestion and Praise-Criticism-Suggestion patterns along with mitigating devices such as hedges, questions and personal attribution. Examples of these are given below:

Patterns
Praise-Criticism: Your abstract covers all the main points from the paper but language could be better.

Criticism-Suggestion: You need to rewrite the critique to make your stand clear. You need to begin your critique by stating whether or not you agree with the thesis in the original article. You also need to support your stand by giving concrete reasons. Praise-Criticism-Suggestion: Good except for the use of tense. Use the past tense when referring to trends in the past.
Mitigating Strategies
Hedges: Although you have taken into consideration your peer's feedback, there is still scope for improvement. Well written except for the missing conclusion. Questions: Forecast statement? How is this review going to be developed? What is the main idea of this paragraph? Personal Attribution: I don't think the article is about him (Isaac Asimov). I feel that this part should deal with other pressing problems.

In the L2 context, the most contentious issue has been the effectiveness of feedback that focuses on error correction. Early L2 writing researchers, influenced by process theories, argued that feedback on errors was both discouraging and unhelpful. The most extreme of these is Truscott (1999) who argues strongly against error correction and urged teachers to adopt a "correction-free approach" in their classrooms. Other researchers disagree with Truscott's views, arguing instead that form-focused feedback can be effective, especially when accompanied by classroom instruction (e.g. Ferris, 2003).

An important distinction in error correction made by researchers is between *direct* and *indirect* feedback. Direct feedback as defined by Ferris (2006) means using the correct linguistic form in teacher corrections. *Direct* feedback may take various forms: crossing out of unnecessary words, phrases, or morphemes; inserting a missing word or morpheme; or writing the correct word or form near the erroneous

form (e.g. above it or in the margin). *Indirect* feedback occurs when the teacher indicates in some way that an error has been made – by means of an underline, circle, code, or other mark – but does not provide the correct form, leaving the student to solve the problem that has been called to his or her attention.

Researchers have suggested that indirect error feedback is generally preferable because it forces students to engage in "guided learning and problem-solving" (Lalande, 1982) and helps them build skills as "independent self-editors" (Bates et al., 1993). However, it has been suggested that students at lower levels of L2 proficiency may not have sufficient linguistic knowledge to self-correct errors even when these are pointed out and that a combination of direct and indirect feedback may be more helpful to students (Ferris, 1998). This kind of feedback is evident in the marked assignment in Appendix 3.

Ferris (1998) also suggests that, for pedagogical purposes, some errors could be considered "treatable" because they occur in a patterned, rule-governed way, whereas other errors are "untreatable" meaning that "There is no handbook or set of rules students can consult to avoid or fix those types of errors" (p.6). Errors that could be considered as "treatable" include problems with verb tense or form, subject-verb agreement, run-ons, fragments, noun endings, articles, pronouns, and possibly spelling, whereas lexical categories such as word choice and idioms, and the sentence structure category could be considered "untreatable". The rule of thumb is to vary feedback approaches for treatable and untreatable error types, giving indirect feedback for treatable error types and direct feedback for untreatable error types.

Implementing Teacher Feedback

The following are guidelines and suggestions for developing and refining responding strategies, whether written or oral. Although the focus here is primarily on the teacher - on how to decide *what* to say and *how* to say it, these strategies should be extended to students so they can take responsibility for their own progress and develop self-evaluation skills for independent writing.

To develop sound responding practices, Ferris (2003) suggests that teachers work through the several steps below.

- Identify sound principles for response to student writing. The most important aspect of giving feedback is to ensure that teachers do not impose their views on students to such an extent that the student's voice is lost in the process of revision. In addition, teachers should resist the temptation of focusing on form rather than meaning, especially when responding to first drafts.

- *Examine student texts and identify major feedback points*. As strengths and weaknesses of students vary, each student assignment should be reviewed to identify the positive and negative aspects of their writing. To begin with, teachers should only deal with major problems rather than overwhelming students with commentary on all aspects of the assignment including content, organization and language. Teachers will find that beginning with selective feedback will prove to be more rewarding for students in the initial phase of the revision process.

- *Prioritize issues on various essay drafts*. Although teachers may be tempted to give comprehensive feedback to students on their assignments, it is perhaps more productive to focus on specific aspects of writing in different student drafts, beginning with the writer's development of ideas, proceeding to the rhetorical structure of the text, and finally focusing on the language in a cycle of multiple drafts.

- *Construct feedback that is clear and helpful.* Research has shown that students sometimes find teacher commentary confusing and that even when students do understand a comment, they may not know how to use it in a revision. For instance, students have difficulty with comments that do not directly state that a revision is required, and students may also have difficulty understanding the intent of comments that are hedged in some way. In order to avoid these problems, teachers should use statements and specific suggestions rather than indirect questions, shorthand and technical jargon.

- *Explain your feedback philosophies and strategies to your students and be consistent*. Considering the fact that teachers spend a considerable amount of time on written feedback, they should ensure that their students are familiar with the sequence of the feedback process as well as feedback forms and error codes. The procedures and the rationale should be explained to the students at the beginning of the course, especially if a sequence has been established for specific types of correction (content, organization or language) for various drafts. To make the feedback-revision cycle even more productive, adequate class time should be given to students to review teacher comments and ask for clarifications.

- *Hold students accountable for considering and utilizing feedback*. The whole idea of providing feedback to students is to help them develop as writers and eventually, to be independent writers who are capable of self-editing without mediation from others. Accountability could take the form of teachers comparing the final draft to previous drafts or through student reflections (oral or written) on teacher feedback. In order to evolve into mature writers, students need to review teacher feedback critically not only to decide whether teacher suggestions should be accepted or ignored but also to justify these decisions.

Although the whole process of feedback and revision can be demanding for both teachers and students, it can be a powerful pedagogical tool if managed properly. It requires a considerable amount of time and effort as well as careful planning and scheduling but the outcome is rewarding for teachers and students alike.

Peer Feedback

It is a well known fact that revision is crucial to effective writing but the quality of revision depends on the quality of feedback provided to writers. Peer feedback is a pedagogical technique that originated in L1 writing classrooms and was subsequently adopted by L2 writers (Nelson & Carson, 2006). As L1 writing is not the same as L2 writing, many researchers and teachers have been concerned about the effectiveness of peer feedback in L2 settings. The findings so far have been conflicting but it is generally accepted that revision based on peer reviews can be beneficial in L2 writing if it is "implemented carefully and systematically" (Ferris, 2003, p. 70).

The results of research studies on peer response suggest that it has both positive and negative aspects. The positive aspects of peer review that have been highlighted by writing experts suggest that it is beneficial both to the writer and the student reviewer. The student writer gets feedback from multiple perspectives rather than from the teacher alone and the student reviewer gains confidence, perspective and critical thinking skills by reading peer drafts on similar tasks (Ferris, 2003). The flip side of this is that students do not know what to comment on and are often incapable of providing specific and useful criticism in an appropriate manner. Besides, it is felt that peer feedback takes up too much class time and that the outcome may not justify the time spent on it. Although the results are mixed and there is a certain ambivalence attached to the benefits of this exercise, it is clear from research studies that it can be effective when students are trained in peer response and when the practice sessions are structured properly (Berg, 1999; Stanley, 1992).

Peer Feedback Procedures

Past research on peer feedback indicates that impromptu and unstructured peer review activities that are student-directed rather than teacher-directed may yield unsuccessful results. For peer review activities to be successful, students need to be trained prior to participating in them. Training can take the form of structured discussion using checklists and guided questions or modeling. In the course "The Art of Academic Writing", students were prepared for peer review in the very first tutorial session. The steps followed in this coaching session included explaining the role of peer response, modeling peer response using a sample text, introducing the peer response form and practicing the process in pairs. Practice involved instructing

one student to write a critique of a given text and the other student to respond to the critique using a checklist. Students were specifically guided on what to look for in drafts as well as on how to give useful feedback - they were encouraged to use short and specific comments, cooperative strategies in their interaction and tactful criticisms.

The text given to students in the training session was an essay by Isaac Asimov entitled "The Next Frontiers for Science". In this essay, Asimov makes the controversial claim that the only scientific research that deserves funding is research to save our planet. The students were asked to write a 100-word critique of the article and then exchange their drafts with their partners who were tasked to provide feedback using the following peer-evaluation checklist:

Read the critique carefully and answer the following questions:

- What do you like best about your peer's critique? (Why? How might he or she do more of it?)
- Is it clear what is being critiqued? (Did your peer list the source, and cite it correctly?)
- Has your peer indicated the main point he/she intends to pursue in his/her critique? (Underline the thesis of the critique.)
- Did your peer identify the source author's key assumptions? Do your peer's assumptions match with those of the source author's? (If not, how do they differ?)
- Has your peer merely summarized the arguments of the source writer rather than including his/her opinions? (If so, how and where can he/she include his/her opinions?)
- Did your peer review the arguments of the source author before presenting his/her own position on them? (If not, where can these be included?)
- Do all your peer's points support the central thesis of his/her critique? (If not, which of these should be deleted?)
- Did your peer make arbitrary judgments rather than provide evidence to support his/her position? (If so, how can this be corrected?)

The questions in the checklist are phrased in such a way that students go beyond mechanical and superficial issues into areas of textual meaning. For those questions that generate yes-no responses, an attempt is made to provide further prompts to get students to expand their comments in specific ways. Using these guided questions, the students were able to respond to their peers' writing with concrete suggestions as is evident in the example:

> Example of peer evaluation:
>
> She listed the thesis of the article first, and indicated the main point she intended to pursue. This article is related to the author's key assumptions. In the conclusion of her article, she reviews the arguments of the source author and presents her own position on them. The main points did support her critique but maybe she can provide some evidence to support her position. The writer makes arbitrary judgments rather than providing evidence to support her position.

In terms of effect of peer evaluation on revised drafts, it was found that student writers did make an attempt to incorporate their peer's suggestions in revising their drafts. The changes made involved refining ideas and not merely correcting grammar and word choice errors. This is illustrated in the following example:

> Student-writer's conclusion:
> With advanced technology, like 3G phones and video-conferencing, we seem to lose our communication skills with people face-to-face and this is also an important issue in today's world.
>
> Peer's comment:
> The last statement about the other pressing problems does not support the central thesis. The problems she mentions are not more pressing than the project to save our planet.
>
> Student's revised version:
> Hence his concerns are still valid in today's world as the problems which are destroying our planet seem to be more serious now than a decade ago. Therefore, issues to save our planet are much more important than anything else because it is a place for continuity of life.

What was even more noteworthy was that students did not blindly accept the advice given by their peers but were selective in incorporating feedback. For instance, when asked by the peer reviewer to elaborate on the consequences of an ageing population and terrorism, the student writer proceeded to discuss the economic and social implications of an ageing population on society but refrained from discussing the effect of terrorism on human population as it was irrelevant to the main argument of his critique.

Other procedures that are relevant to peer evaluation include forming student pairs based on their ethnicity, cultural background and disciplines as research has shown

that homogeneous pairing results in more successful peer response interactions when compared to heterogeneous cultural grouping (Nelson & Carson, 2006). This was not an issue in our writing classes as the majority of the students were Singaporeans and the tutorial groupings were according to students' majors in physics, chemistry and mathematics.

Nature of Peer Feedback

Another aspect that can influence the outcome of peer reviews is the nature of interaction between the student writer and student reviewer. Past research has shown that students tend to adopt different personae during the peer review exercise such as the *Prescriptive/Authoritative Stance, Interpretative Stance, Collaborative Stance* and *Probing Stance* (Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992; Lockhart & Ng, 1995). Reviewers with the prescriptive/authoritative stance and interpretative stance react to the writer's text from their own individual perspective. Reviewers with an authoritative stance have preconceived ideas, identify and fix problems and generally impose their own ideas on the text whereas reviewers with an interpretative stance mainly present their own unsupported personal reactions to the writer's text and make evaluations/suggestions based on their personal preferences. As for those with the collaborative and probing stances, the focus is on the author's point of view so they tend to negotiate with the writer, ask for clarifications and elicit explanations to improve writing based on the writer's intentions. These studies on reviewer stances claim that collaborative and probing stances are the most beneficial for student writers and desirable for an engaging and successful peer review exercise. The table below sets out the various stances and their characteristics:

Table 2: Stances of Reviewers

Stances	Characteristics
Authoritative/ Prescriptive Stance	Have preconceived ideas of texts Identify faults and/or fix them Impose their own ideas on the text Function as editors
Interpretive Stance	Distance self from author of prompt text Represent personal reactions to the writer's text Use reactions as criteria for evaluation Give suggestions based on personal preferences Rewrite text for own understanding
Collaborative/Probing Stance	Position self with author of prompt text Try to see text through author's eyes Avoid changing author's focus or argument Ask clarifications and elicit explanations to puzzle out meaning Make suggestions to author

(Adapted from Ferris, 2003, p. 76)

The sample from our science undergraduate students revealed different stances. For ease of analysis, the authoritative and interpretative stances have been categorized as non-collaborative and the collaborative and probing stances as collaborative. Examples of both non-collaborative and collaborative stances are given below:

Non-Collaborative Stance:
"You'd better include more opinions of your own."

Collaborative Stance:
"I think maybe the fact that the author thinks those "big" things like supercolliders, the genome project, and the space station are "at the moment, highly irrelevant" is missing. … so I found the author's thesis cannot be logically derived from the examples provided in the summary."

The non-collaborative peer comments tend to be pedantic and blunt, clearly reflecting the reviewer's superior attitude and this is reinforced by the use of authoritative statements. On the other hand, the reviewer's collaborative stance is reflected in the use of mitigating strategies which include attribution to self by means of the personal pronoun "I" and tentative words/verbs like "think" along with the modal "maybe". In addition, the peer reviewer makes an attempt to support his/her personal claim in an objective manner. This aspect of peer response is relevant especially from the point of view of social dynamics between the writer and the reviewer. In fact, the success or failure of peer response activities may be highly dependent on the nature of social interaction between participants in an L2 classroom.

As mentioned earlier, the interpersonal aspect of feedback in terms of praise and criticism offered to students in evaluating their writing has been extensively researched by Hyland & Hyland (2001, 2006). They are mainly concerned with the potential that teacher feedback has on creating a supportive teaching environment and the role it plays in building students' motivation and self-confidence. In their analysis, they distinguish between praise, criticism and suggestions with the first being defined as an act of attributing credit, the second as finding fault and the third as an explicit recommendation for improvement. The interpersonal aspect of feedback actually has as much implication for peer feedback as it does for teacher feedback in negotiating meaning as well as inculcating the right attitude towards peer response. An analysis of peer commentary revealed that students of the writing course mitigated their criticism by using some of the strategies identified by Hyland and Hyland (2006):

- Paired comments (Combining criticism with praise)
- Hedged comments (Using modal verbs and imprecise quantifiers)
- Personal attribution (Responding as a reader)
- Interrogative form (Expressing doubt and uncertainty)

Although a small percentage of student reviewers in the current study make an attempt to use these mitigation devices, they lack the sophistication that teachers have in their expression of these criticisms. The student examples are as follows:

Paired Comments:
Summary is good, short and somewhat straight to the point. Points were good. However solutions written at the end of the summary were unimportant.
Except for some expression errors and lengthy sentences, the summary gives justice to the article (Followed by a smiley face).

Hedged Comments:
The main points did support her critique, maybe she can provide some evidence to support her position.
A little; she could have defined skew lines (In response to the question: Is there anything ambiguous in the definition my partner has written?)
Yes, the main points in the article are mostly clearly summarized.

Personal Attribution:
This critique is more like a summary. I think his own opinion should be included.
My peer made judgments and provided evidence but I think the evidence is not sufficient.

Interrogative Form:
In the margin – Other pressing problems?
At the end – The last statement about the other pressing problems does not support the central thesis. The problems she mentioned are not more pressing than the project to save our planet.

It is clear that peer feedback has the potential to backfire and undermine a student's writing development rather than facilitating it if it is not considered carefully. It is therefore necessary to train student reviewers to respond in a manner that is helpful to student writers in their revisions and at the same time, conducive to interpersonal relationships between them. In order to mitigate the full force of their criticisms, student reviewers need practice in combining praise-criticism, criticism-suggestion and praise-

criticism-suggestion patterns as well as in the correct use of hedges, personal attribution and question forms. At the same time, it is important to caution reviewers about the real danger of miscommunication when such devices are used to take the sting out of their comments. To avoid misinterpretations of indirect comments, student reviewers should be encouraged to follow-up on written comments through conferencing sessions to give student writers an opportunity to ask for clarifications.

Implementing Peer Feedback

Research has shown that peer feedback is beneficial to students in that student writers not only incorporate this feedback in their revised texts but the quality of their writing also improves with revision (Ferris, 2003). However, there are some practical issues that need to be considered in order to make the most of peer review sessions. These include prior training of students, structuring and monitoring peer review sessions, forming well-matched peer review pairs or groups, and striking a balance between feedback from teachers, peers and self-evaluation. The following are some guidelines suggested by Ferris (2003) for incorporating peer response into a writing course:

- *Utilize peer response consistently*. It is important to mention in the course syllabus and in the introductory session that peer feedback is going to be an integral part of the course so students are prepared for it. In addition, students would need to know how often and when peer feedback sessions will be held in a multi-draft writing cycle. In planning the course, teachers would also have to ensure that enough class time is allocated to feedback activities.

- *Prepare students carefully for peer response*. For peer response to be effective, students would have to be trained in giving feedback that is useful to their peers and is delivered in a manner that is supportive and enhances interpersonal relations between student writers and reviewers. One way to achieve this would be by examining past samples of student writing which are accompanied by peer responses, modeling what aspects to look for in sample texts and providing guided questions or peer feedback forms.

- *Form pairs or groups thoughtfully*. To ensure smooth interaction between peers, it is better to form pairs/groups of students from the same cultural background and specializations as research has shown that students of the same culture and discipline are better able to understand each other's cultural nuances and disciplinary conventions. It may also be worthwhile taking into consideration other variables like writing ability, gender and personality of the students when forming groups.

- *Structure peer review sessions*. Students should also be given enough time to read drafts of peers and to provide written feedback. This will ensure that students think through their comments and phrase them in a manner that is not offensive and hurtful to their peers.

- *Monitor peer review sessions*. One way to keep students on track would be to provide specific guidelines or feedback forms related to the particular writing task. The questions in these forms should be phrased in such a manner that they deal with different aspects of the text and elicit constructive comments that go beyond "Yes" or "No" responses. Another possibility is to ask the student reviewers to base their feedback on the evaluation checklist and grading criteria of the course.

- *Extend peer review beyond the classroom*. In today's computer savvy era, peer review could very easily be extended to online platforms. Many writing courses include the creation of weblogs which enable students to write and publish their writings online, providing an opportunity for others to comment on their work. Students in a writing course could actively be encouraged to post their comments on the writing of their classmates on a regular basis as the sharing not only benefits the writer but also the reviewer in terms of collaborative writing/revising strategies and life-long learning.

For successful integration of peer review, teachers may have to monitor the process at regular intervals during the length of the course, advising both student writers as well as reviewers on effective strategies that they could use to make the exercise meaningful and truly useful in their development as writers.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the role that feedback plays in writing classrooms. Although students may prefer teacher feedback to peer feedback, it is clear that these two types of feedback are not mutually exclusive and that the advantage of multiple types of feedback is that students have the benefit of different perspectives, that of experts and ordinary readers, on their writing. However, an important factor for the success of peer response is prior training of students and proper structuring of peer response sessions. Sharing the responsibility of responding to student drafts not only eases the burden of writing instructors but also adds value to the entire process of revising texts. The text that emerges becomes a product not only of many interwoven voices that surround the writer but also of the writer who ultimately decides which comments to resist or align with. The ultimate aim is to encourage students to become independent writers and revisers, gradually moving from dependency on other-regulated and joint revision to self-regulated revision where even passive student writers are able to initiate revisions and correct errors on their own.

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APPENDIX 1

SAMPLE FEEDBACK CHECKLIST

Checklist for feedback on Assignment "Writing the Introduction to a Research Report"

Assessment Items	Remarks

Content:
(1) Research Background:
   ■ Introduces topic area
   ■ Narrows down to specific research issues
   ■ Synthesizes and evaluates 4 pieces of literature coherently
   ■ Points to a gap or problem in previous research
 	
(2) Research Objectives
   ■ Clearly states the problem under study
   ■ Sets the research objectives
   ■ States the limitations of research (optional)
   ■ Briefly describes the research method and data analysis method (in one or two sentences)
 	
(3) Organization of Report
   ■ Describes the organization of the current report	

Referencing
Use of References:
   ■ Correct and consistent style
   ■ Adequate and appropriate use
   ■ Acknowledged properly
   ■ Included in the reference list
 	
Reference List:
   ■ Correct and consistent style
   ■ Correct order
   ■ Included in the paper
 	
Style of writing:
   ■ Good over-all structure
   ■ Well connected paragraphs
   ■ Smooth flow of sentences
   ■ Appropriate use of transitional devises
   ■ Grammatically correct
   ■ Correct Spelling
   ■ Appropriate for style
 	
Presentation:
   ■ Neatly laid out and formatted	

APPENDIX 2

SAMPLE OF EMAILED COMMENT

Hi xxxx

I've looked through your attached conclusion and abstract. Here are my comments:

Conclusion:
- The main elements of information are included. However, the second last item which appears to be implications of your study seems to repeat information from the results section. "Implications" means the importance of what you found in your study for agencies responsible for public health education about AIDS.
- Please proofread your writing carefully as some sentences do not convey ideas clearly e.g. "The other explanation could be due to open-minded"(Incomplete idea).

Abstract:
- This is well-organized and information elements are logically sequenced.
- State ideas more precisely e.g. what do you mean by "attitudes to casual sex". State the attitudes your respondents have – do they think it's fine to have casual sex or are they against it?
- Again – more careful proofreading needed e.g. confusion of word forms – prevalent (adj.) vs. prevalence (noun); extend (verb) vs. extent (noun).

I hope the above comments are helpful when you write these sections in full.

APPENDIX 3

SAMPLE OF COMMENTARY USING "TRACK CHANGES" IN WORD PROCESSING

Climate Change and Water Resources Management in Beijing

At the beginning of the 21st century, Beijing, the capital of China, is experiencing a new kind of poverty-water poverty. The city has a population of 17 million, but the amount of fresh water that can be used is only 300m^3 per capital, which is 1/8 of the average amount of China, and even less than Israel, one of the driest regions in the world. From 1999 to 2005, the precipitation of Beijing was only 75% of the historical average values. Moreover, the hard surface of the city makes it difficult to recharge the groundwater, while the extraction of groundwater never stops. Since both the surface water and the groundwater of the city are decreasing over the years, Beijing often relies on water transferred from other provinces. The South to North Water Transfer Project is planned to be an important water source for Beijing in the future. Just like all other countries, China is affected by global warming and climate change. And the impact of climate change can be important to a large water transfer project like the South to North Water Transfer Project. Therefore, to assess the water resources management of Beijing and how to update it against the background of climate change is the main objective of this study.

Beijing's climate is typical continental monsoon climate characterized by hot and rainy summers, and 3.8 billion m^3 usable water resources on average come from precipitation every year.[1] There are five important rivers in the area. They are Yongding River, Chaobai River, Juma River, Ru River, and Beiyun River. Miyun Reservoir and Guanting Reservoir supply 6% of the city's surface water demand. Although the quarternary stratum of the plain area is favorable for groundwater storage, serious problems have already been caused by excessive groundwater extaction. In May, 2004, Beijing Water Authority was established to govern the water resources management of the whole city. The city is making an effort to coordinate the use of surface water, groundwater, emergency water supply, and renewed wastewater. Efforts are also made to transfer water resources from other provinces to Beijing. By 2010, part of the South to North Water Transfer Project will be completed and function to transfer 2 billion m^3 water of Yangtze River to the city every year.

The South to North Water Transfer Project will create almost 527 billion Yuan GDP annually and generate about 1.0 million employment opportunities by 2020.[2] It will support the city's rapid economic development, but also requires efficient water resources management methods. The impact of climate change on the hydrological

regimes includes change in water quantity, change in water quality and change in water demand. The impact on the water resources availability will then affect both the natural ecosystem and the policy of human society.[3] Temperature change will directly affect evaporation and precipitation. The availability of water resources in Yangtze River to be transferred to the north will be challenged if the precipitation in wet south China decreases. As a result, additional dams and reservoirs may be needed to balance the water supply and water demand.