The Features of Japanese EFL Learners' Peer Feedback in Written Compositions

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Abstract
This study investigated how corrective peer feedback between peers is related to Japanese university learners' noticing in their foreign language acquisition. In this research, 12 students written composition data was collected from the following three stages: (1) essay writing, (2) corrective feedback with peers and (3) self-revision. In the process of the peer feedback, the learners paid attention to the lexical, syntax and organization of their essay writing. The results indicated how the learners revised their errors in two forms: error correction and reformulation, and how they improved their essay writing after receiving peer comments. In addition, the findings showed the tendency of Japanese EFL learners' linguistic views with EFL writing instructions where and which points the learners noticed and revised their English compositions as an output process. The effects of the peer feedback caused the learners to recognize and uptake in their revised writing. On the other hand, the data pointed out that common grammatical, lexical and discourse errors remained, including the influence of Japanese EFL writing classes conducted in Japan. These results raise potential suggestions for further research of the corrective feedback with SLA instructions and writing activities in EFL classes.

Keywords: Corrective Feedback, Noticing, Peer Feedback

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Introduction

Feedback on EFL student writing has been shared in various ways. In Japan's current English education, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has emphasized four skills: speaking, writing, reading, and listening. These are key English communication tools in the 2020 revised Course of Study guidelines for elementary schools, 2021 junior high schools, and 2022 high schools. Traditionally, in English classes in Japan, teachers focused on grammar and vocabulary. Therefore, the Japanese entrance examinations for high school or university were conducted mainly based on reading and listening skills assessments, with multiple-choice tests to measure lexical and syntax knowledge. Although academic writing has become an important issue in Japanese language education, there has been almost no instruction in English writing in secondary schools (Miyata, 2002). Mainstream English writing in the classroom largely consists in writing single sentences; there is almost no paragraph-length writing practice.

Since high school EFL classes in Japan are often grammar-intensive, students have few opportunities to practice free or creative writing exercises and do not learn the process of writing a paragraph. As a result, they lack opportunities to receive writing feedback from classmates or instructors. However, the Ministry's curriculum reform suggested that English education in Japan should become more active, with students using more communication skills to achieve their output abilities, such as speaking and writing in the classroom. This research proposal focuses on how EFL instructors should approach teaching effective writing skills and provide students the chance to improve their writing in the process of interlanguage and error corrections from peer feedback based on the noticing hypothesis of Second Language Acquisition theories.

Previous Studies

1)   Output and Noticing Hypothesis

In the output and noticing hypothesis, second language learners notice their errors and linguistic problems in their output products, they repeat them. Noticing occurs in producing a target language. Schmidt (2001) states "appears necessary for understanding nearly every aspect of second and foreign language learning" (p.6). In his noticing hypothesis, awareness is necessary for noticing which in turn is important for learning. The claim is that "intake is the part of the input that learner notice." (1990, p.139).

2)   The Role of Writing in Second Language Acquisition

Harklau (2002) argues that it is important for students to learn writing in a second language. The paper mentioned the notion of a learner, target language variation, multimodality and language socialization, and interactional approaches. In second language learning classroom settings, learners acquire morphology and syntax through their input, interaction, task structure and negotiation (Long & Robinson, 1998). According to collected empirical data on classroom research (Allwright &Bailey, 1991), students learn through the inter-relation of interaction.

3)   Previous Studies in Peer Feedback in English as a Second Language / English as a Foreign Language Writing

Paulus (1999) investigated the positive effects of peer feedback in writing. He found that ESL students gave surface-level peer feedback for revisions, such as spelling, tense, plural or singular and punctuation. In addition, Suzuki (2008) examined the feedback differences between self-revision and peer-revision in terms of negotiation in writing. These studies founded that learners tended to focus on forms and the, morphological, and lexical levels in self-revision. In peer negotiation, they paid more attention to the content of writing such as a topic or idea. Findings indicated that the learners used more metatalk during peer revisions than during self- revisions. Furthermore, Wang (2014) used a rubric table for assessing writing compositions in peer feedback as a usefulness criteria reference for Chinese students to examine several issues: (1) the students' limited English proficiency with using a rubric criterion, (2) the students' attitudes towards peer feedback practice, and (3) the students' interpersonal relationships. Rollinson (2005) stated that peer feedback in EFL/ESL writing facilitated the students' audience awareness. The learners probably feel that these are less beneficial interactions because their classmates' English proficiency level is nearly same as theirs.

Research Focus

This study addresses the following research questions: 1. How do Japanese EFL learners give peer feedback on their writing essays? - Do the Japanese EFL learners notice the processes of output products when they receive CF (Corrective Feedback) in the form of either reformulation or error correction in peer feedback? 2. How do Japanese EFL learners organize paragraphs: topic, support, and conclusion? - How do they notice and revise their writing after receiving peer feedback?

This research sought to determine the effects of the interaction in peer feedback and to understand at what points Japanese students focus on feedback correction, addressing the question of how learners show their weakness in correcting peer essay writing, and how these corrections affect their revising processes. Their language features and interaction could illustrate learners' metalanguage or interlanguage skills in the process of second language learning. In addition, how should we as language instructors approach peer or group work in the classroom? Assuming that psychological barriers affect peer feedback, language instructors should train learners how to assess peer feedback in the classroom. Learners initially hesitate to mark corrections on other students' papers. On the other hand, written feedback or comments could be evidence of the benefits of oral feedback.

Data Collection

1)   Participants

To gather data on Japanese EFL learners, I collected and analyzed the data from my university class with consent written permission for taking written composition data from the students. The course is a mandatory English course. The students take a placement test in the beginning of the academic year, and are divided into their English proficiency level by a CASEC (Computerized Assessment System for English Communication) test. The CASEC test consist of two parts, listening and writing skills. The score band is from 0 to 1000 points. The score is also approximately converted into a TOEIC (Test of English for International

Communication) score. The students take the test on computers and choose from multiple answers for each question. The university has two compulsory English courses; "speaking and listening" and "reading and writing" for freshman and sophomore students. The courses are divided into four proficiency level classes based on the results of the CASEC test score; beginner (under 299 points on CASEC / under 240 points on TOEIC Listening and Reading test), intermediate (300 -450 points on CASEC / 240 - 355 points on TOEIC), upper-intermediate (451 - 599 points on CASEC / 355 - 545 points on TOEIC) and advanced (over 600 points on CASEC / 545 points on TOEIC).

For this study, we collected the data from an advanced level English course of "reading and writing" freshman students from the politics department. The class consisted of 22 students. From them, 12 writing compositions were collected randomly for a qualitative analysis. The English levels ranged from 451 to 599 points in the CASEC test, which is equivalent to between 355 and 545 points in the TOEIC Listening and Reading test.

2)   Procedures

The research was conducted in the reading and writing class during the semester. The class time setting is 90 minutes. Twelve essays were randomly collected from among the 22 students. The data derived from eight female and four male students.

In this study, students had 25 minutes to write their essays by hand without the aid of a dictionary or the Internet.   The topic of this essay was based on a quote from a study of Japanese student essay writing (Okugiri, Ijuin, & Komori, 2015). Specifically, the students were required to write an essay in response to the statement: *"Currently, people worldwide are able to use the Internet. Some people say that since we can read the news online, there is no need for newspapers or magazines, while others say that newspapers and magazines will still be necessary in the future. Please write your opinion about this issue.* "This statement was used because the topic was universal and familiar to everyone.

Table 1 shows the procedure of this empirical study. The participants engaged in a three-staged process. First, during Stage 1, the instructor explained the process of feedback. In Stage 2, the participants wrote their essay for 30 minutes. They were then they were required to give corrective feedback to their peers. For Stage 3, the corrective peer feedback time was for 20 minutes. During the correction time, the students could ask questions about their English grammar or contexts, or discuss the corrections in both Japanese and English. They checked their peers' writing compositions for "lexical features, spelling and form," "syntax, grammatical order, missing words,", and for "context, in appropriate sentences with the theme", and for organizational parts, such as "topic sentence," supporting sentences," and "conclusion sentences." Finally, in Stage 4, the corrective peer feedback was returned to the original student writers and they rewrote their revisions for 15 minutes. Table 2 presents the instructions of the corrective feedback by the instructor. The students noted each code, line, or words for their corrective peer feedback time.

		Peer feedback group
Stage 1	15 minutes	Instruction by a teacher
Stage 2	30 minutes	Writing an essay
Stage 3	20 minutes	Feedback with peer
Stage 4	15 minutes	Revise the essay

Table 1: Flow of the Writing Class with Peer Feedback

	Checking points	the way of feedback
1.	lexical features; spelling, form	___ + corrections
2.	syntax; grammatical order, missing word(s)	～ + corrections
3.	context; inappropriate sentences with the theme	○ + corrections
4.	topic sentence (s)	T
5.	supporting sentence (s)	S
6.	conclusion sentence (s)	C

Table 2: Instructions by a Teacher for the Peer Feedback

Data Analysis

First, to analyze the peer feedback, Table 3 shows that a T-unit analysis was used for measuring writing compositions in this study. By definition, a T-unit has a main clause with a subject and verb, where subordinate clauses are attached to or embedded within it (Hunt, 1965). Syntactic development can also be seen by analyzing T-units. Using error-free T-units is a more precise way to measure syntactic development for nonnative speakers than standardized tests, teacher evaluations, or placement tests with written data. Table 3 shows the definition of T-units. Based on the definition of a T-unit, each student's sentences were counted. The T-unit analysis all showed the learners' syntactic development to be checked more exactly (Gass, & Selinker, 2008).

1.	I did my homework.	T-unit
2.	I did my homework, although I was sleepy.	T-unit
3.	although I was sleepy.	Non-T-unit

Table 3: Definitions of T-units

Second, in the analysis of the noticing process in corrective feedback, various codes on noticing and uptake referenced (Santos et al., 2010). Table 4 represents the corrective feedback codes in this study, which were categorized into eight items in the students' writing compositions. Five codes were categorized for the corrective peer feedback: CC (completely changes), PC (partially changed), UC (completely unchanged), NA (non-applicable), and ADD (the participants added new words or sentences after the feedback). Each code definition is given in Table 4 below. In addition, Table 5 presents examples of both the original and the revisions.

Code Type	Definition
1. CC: completely changed	All errors had been corrected.
2. PC: partially changed	At least one error had been changed in the direction of the feedback provided.
3. UC: completely unchanged	The T-unit still had all the errors shown in the original version
4. NA: non-applicable	The original T-unit had no errors.
5. ADD	New words or sentences were added after the corrective peer feedback

Table 4: Corrective Feedback Categorized Codes and their Definitions

Student	T-UNIT	Code
Original text S1	First, the news online has swift imformation.	
Revised S1	First, the news online has swift *information*.	CC
Original text S2	I'm going to sugest the reason and point paper devides good points and bad points.	
Revised S2	I'm going to represent the reasons and point paper media's good points.	CC
Original S6	Newspapers will be trush next day, but the Internet is not trush.	
Revised S6	Newspapers will be trush next day, but the Internet will not be trush.	PC
Original S5	They are not good for enviroment.	
Revised S5	They are not good for enviroment.	UC
Original S8	Second, when you read the news and manga online, your eyes are very tired but newspapers and magazines don't have this bad point.	
Revised S8	Second, when you read the news and manga online, your eyes are very tired but newspapers and magazines don't have this bad point.	NA
Original S10	no sentence(s)	
Revised S10	Finally, many people should use Internet.	ADD

Table 5: Examples of Revision and Error Correction with Coding of T-units

Finally, to gain more insight into the details of CC (completely changed) and PC (partially changed) corrective feedback, the results were divided into error corrections and reformulations in their revised essay writing compositions. From the previous study (Santos, & Manchon, 2010), the definitions of error corrections and reformulations are as shown in Table 6.

Error correction
Original text: First, the news online has swift imformation.
Reformulation: First, the news online has swift information.
Reformulation
Original text: I'm going to sugest the reason.
Error Correction: I'm going to represent the reasons.

Table 6: Definitions of Error Corrections and Reformulation

Discussion

To summarize the answer to our first research question, our participants paid more attention to the lexical and forms of second language. Suzuki (2008) categorized language-related changes (LRCs) into three main levels: word-level text changes, sentence-level text changes, and discourse-level changes. Participants gave more error corrections than reformulations in their peer feedback, which showed that the learners paid more attention to morpheme levels, verb usages and lexical forms, such as tense, third person singular-s, singular and plural forms, and spelling. These findings suggest that Japanese English learners have learned more syntax and lexical knowledge in their secondary school EFL courses. It was easy for them to point out these concerns, but they were weaker in paraphrasing words or phrases in English.

In addition, during their revision time, the participants reconsidered the structures of each sentence. Therefore, they revised their original sentences with syntactic knowledge. As a result of the feedback, the number of T-units increased slightly over the original composition, including that the learners improved their syntax knowledge through non-forced feedback (Van Beuningen et al,2012).

Regarding the five categorizations of feedback, the learners remained at 20.2 % UC (Completely Unchanged) which suggests that the learners did not notice how to correct or revise these sentences. In L2 classrooms, instructors should also give feedback where learners did not notice language errors and mistakes.

As for the second research question about skills in organizing essays, the participants gave corrective feedback about the writing compositions in the peer feedback time. Interestingly, only 10.4 % of the feedback was about the conclusions, suggesting that they did not know how to write a "conclusion" or had no time to write it in Stage 2. The participants noticed their missing conclusions during their peer feedback time, only then adding "conclusions" after the peer feedback and in their revisions. These results indicate that L2 learners noticed some features and forms of the language through the corrective feedback, and then revised their compositions to be better than the original versions.

Results

The first question asked how the Japanese EFL learners give feedback on their writing essays and if they notice the processes of output products while receiving CF (Corrective Feedback) or not. For one aspect of this question, we counted the number of words before and after the peer feedback to see how the learners add more words, phrases, or sentences after reading their peer's essay writing and how they were stimulated in revising their writing compositions. Table 7 shows the number of words in their original version and their revisions, before and after the peer feedback. It shows that the number of words slightly increased, 101.6 words to 107 words on average.

Student ID (*n*=12)	Original	Revised
S1	91	93
S2	109	94
S3	101	90
S4	95	141
S5	160	165
S6	113	115
S7	100	107
S8	84	84
S9	99	97
S10	74	85
S11	76	96
S12	117	117
M	101.6	107.0
SD	21.8	23.4
Max.	160	165
Min.	74	84

Table 7: The Number of Words After Peer Feedback

Table 8 shows the number of T-units, original and revised versions, including the syntactic development of learners. Each learner increased T-unit by a small number after peer feedback. The mean score was 8.1 to 9.3 and the standard deviation was 2.6 to 2.7.

Student ID (*n*=12)	Original	Revised
S1	7	10
S2	6	7
S3	7	9
S4	8	11
S5	16	17
S6	9	9
S7	8	9
S8	6	6
S9	7	8
S10	8	10
S11	6	7
S12	9	9
M	8.1	9.3
SD	2.6	2.7

Table 8: The number of T-units

They then answered the second research question about how Japanese EFL learners organized their paragraph writing (i.e., topic, supporting and conclusion parts), and how they noticed and revised after peer feedback. Table 9 shows the number of topic, supporting, and conclusion sentences in the peer feedback, which the participants marked as "T," "S," and "C," reprehensively, during peer feedback. Figure 1 shows that the participants put down "T" 12 (25%), "S" 31 (64.5%), and "C" 5 (10.4%). Everyone wrote topic sentences and supporting sentences, but not everyone wrote conclusion sentences.

	T	S	C
S1	1	3	0
S2	1	3	0
S3	1	2	1
S4	1	2	0
S5	1	3	1
S6	1	2	1
S7	1	3	0
S8	1	3	0
S9	1	3	1
S10	1	2	0
S11	1	2	0
S12	1	3	1
Total	12	31	5
M	1	2.6	0.4
SD	0	0.5	0.5

Table 9: The number of topic, supporting, and conclusion sentences in peer feedback
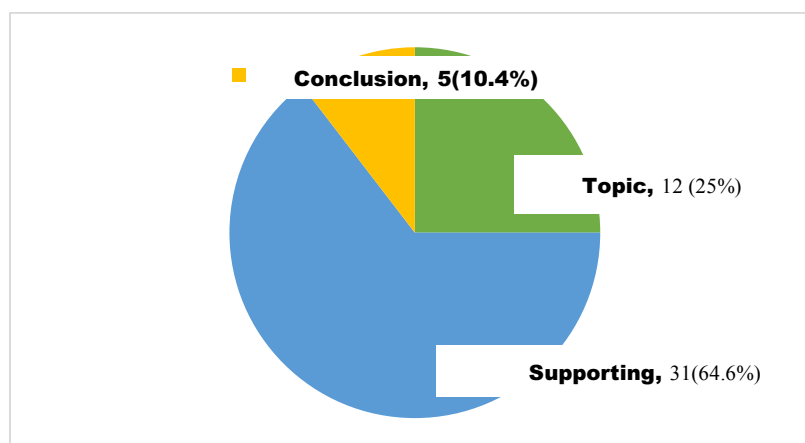

Figure 1: The Number of Topic, Supporting, and Conclusion Sentences in Peer Feedback

Finally, the individual categorizations of peer feedback groups are shown in Table 10. To analyze the participants' revisions, five codes were applied regarding the revisions of their essays after peer feedback, as shown in Table 11 and Figure 2: CC (Completely Changed) 29

(26.6%), PC (Partially Changed) 11 (10.1%), UC (Completely Changed) 22 (20.2%), NA (Non-Applicable) 39 (35.8%), and ADD (additional sentences) 8 (7.3%).

	CC	PC	UC	NA	ADD
S1	3	1	4	1	1
S2	1	1	2	1	2
S3	4	2	0	2	2
S4	2	0	0	6	4
S5	5	0	0	9	0
S6	1	1	4	3	0
S7	2	0	4	2	1
S8	2	2	0	2	1
S9	0	1	4	4	0
S10	1	3	3	1	2
S11	1	1	1	3	1
S12	5	0	1	3	0
Total	29	11	22	39	8
M	2.4	0.9	1.8	3.3	0.7
SD	1.7	0.9	1.4	2.4	1.0

Table 10: Individual Categorization of Peer Feedback Groups

	n		%		Mean		*SD*
CC	29		26.6		2.4		1.7
PC	11		10.1		0.9		0.9
UC	22		20.2		1.8		1.4
NA	39		35.8		3.3		2.4
ADD	8		7.3		0.7		1.0
Total	109		100		9.1		7.4

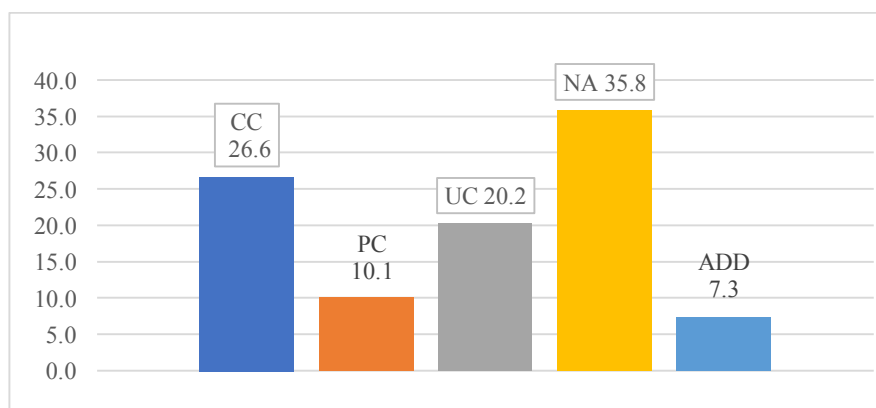Table 11: Categorization of Peer Feedback Groups

Figure 2: The Categorization of Peer Feedback Groups

To analyze the data in greater details, we analyzed the CC (Completely Changed) and PC (Partially Changed) into the categories of error corrections 18 (54.5%) and reformulations 15 (45.5%), as shown in Table 12 and Figure3.

	Error	Reformulation
S1	0	4
S2	1	1
S3	2	3
S4	2	0
S5	3	3
S6	2	0
S7	1	1
S8	1	2
S9	1	0
S10	2	2
S11	0	2
S12	0	0
Total	15	18
M	1.25	1.50
SD	0.92	1.32

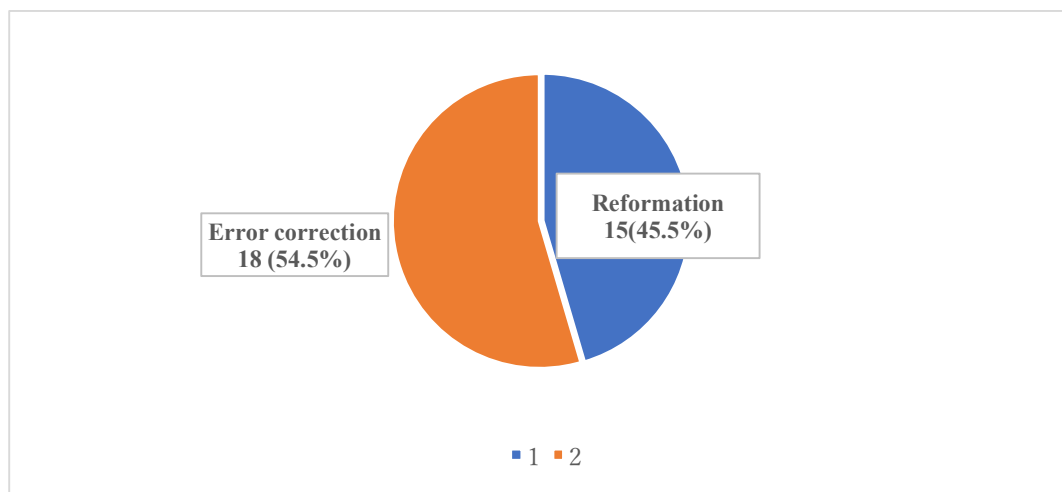Table 12: The Number of Error Corrections and Reformulations

Figure 3: Error Correction vs Reformation

Conclusion, Suggestions for Future Study

In reviewing studies of writing feedback, Storch (2002) discussed equality and mutuality in studies of ESL pair work. To provide effective pair work, the learners should work equal amount and cooperatively. More importantly, the learners will notice their errors and improve their essays by giving other feedback. Peer feedback activities in ESL tend to lead to more learner-centered class. Izumi (2016) also emphasized that "noticing" in the EFL classroom is an essential factor effectively focus on form. In pair work, the learners have audience to raise

"audience awareness" about writing. In the process of sharing feedback, they interact with each other, correct errors, and ask questions about the content of their essays. The process brings collaborative learning and scaffolding to EFL classrooms. In the corrective feedback process, each learner might have a different proficiency level. Learners notice different errors or acquire new language knowledge individually (Hanaoka, 2007). However, it takes time to make Japanese EFL university students feel free to speak and correct errors. They rarely share opinions with one another at the beginning of the term. Wang (2014) found that psychological matters could be seen in peers' rubric evaluation. The learners needed to have an interpersonal relationship to give evaluation rubric points to each other and this affected the usefulness of peer feedback. Therefore, learners need more practice giving feedback in written compositions in EFL classes.

In general, most of the students enter university based on multiple choice type proficiency examinations. During high school, most students learn English more through analytical than experiential learning (Izumi, Shiraku & Okuda, 2011). Therefore, the instructor, who teaches reading and writing courses, should give the learners clear assessment points in the class and train the students to compare sufficient and insufficient essays through reading textbooks or teachers' models as input enhancement (Hanaoka, & Izumi, 2012). It would be difficult or challenging for the learners to give comments to each other without knowing evaluation points established by the teacher. In the curriculum, the teacher is also required to consider the effect of peer or group work. The practice of peer feedback should not only focus on forms of grammar, but also on meaning (Izumi, 2016). The teacher should guide learners how to write their compositions logically, with three main points: topic, supporting paragraphs, and conclusion. Then, the learners would review their writings by themselves and give feedback to others.

In the reading and writing course, giving sufficient input and output activities would be essential. In giving peer feedback, EFL teachers create an interactive environment for students to focus on teaching or stimulating L2 learners' undiscovered knowledge. This approach of "noticing corrective feedback would raise awareness of L2 students' language features. More investigation is needed to see how EFL learners notice their writing through spontaneous attention to the written form. Further empirical research is also needed to see how L2 learners produce their output and what types of feedback could be used in L2 writing. To improve the output products, we can see more L2 learners engaged in IL (Interlanguage), intake, and uptake in the process.

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