Reexamining the Affective Advantage of Peer Feedback in the ESL Writing Class

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Various arguments have been made on affective grounds to justify peer feedback in teaching composition in English as a first language (L1). Those arguments have had considerable influence on the teaching of English as a second language (ESL) writing. Based upon current assumptions about the affective values of teacher-, peer-, and self-directed feedback, hypotheses were formulated concerning the relative appeal of the three types of feedback in the ESL writing process. Eighty-one academically oriented ESL learners who had experienced the three types of feedback responded to a questionnaire, and their preferences were statistically analyzed. The results show that claims made about the affective advantage of peer feedback in L1 writing do not apply to ESL writing. ESL students overwhelmingly prefer teacher feedback. The findings are discussed in conjunction with the larger issue of the appropriateness of L1 writing theories as guidelines for ESL writing research and instruction.

The process approach to English as a second language (ESL) writing is generally characterized by a recursive procedure of prewriting, drafting, evaluating, and revising. Instead of treating ESL writing as a mere transcription of preformulated ideas, the process approach involves the discovery and transformation of the author's ideas and the reader's reactions, as well as the linguistic means necessary to accomplish the writing task at hand (Raines, 1985; Susser, 1994; White & Arndt, 1991; Zamel, 1976, 1982). The process approach to ESL writing has come largely as an extension of an earlier "paradigm shift" (Hairston, 1982) in teaching composition in English as a first language (L1) (Diederich, 1974; Elbow, 1973, 1981; Emig, 1967, 1971; Flower, 1979; Murray, 1968, 1972).

As a recursive model, the process approach focuses on how to revise in response to feedback from the reader, whether the reader is the instructor, an ESL peer, or the author him- or herself. That raises a question of great pedagogical import: Which of the three types of feedback produces the best effects.
on ESL writing? While much of the research on the topic has been focused on various features of the text (e.g., Berger, 1989, 1990; Chaudron, 1983, 1984; Jacobs & Zhang, 1989; Partridge, 1981; Zhang, 1985), of particular interest in this article is the assumption concerning the not-so-tangible affective advantage of peer feedback as claimed in the extensive literature on L1 writing. This article represents an attempt to determine whether the highly promoted affective advantage of peer feedback in L1 writing is applicable to ESL writing as well.

Advocates of peer evaluation in L1 writing maintain that while teachers are perceived as “nit pickers” by students (Moffett, 1968, p. 195), peers form an “immediate, socially appropriate audience” providing “more compelling impetus” for the student author to revise (Clifford, 1981, p. 50). Students give priority to peer comments over teacher judgment (Pierson, 1967). They see more social support in peer responses than in teacher feedback (Elbow, 1973). Writing teachers tend to be careless, exhausted or insensitive; their comments are unhelpful and confusing (Purves, 1986). Teachers force students to accommodate the teachers’ intentions, thereby usurping the students’ rights to their writings (Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982, p. 157). Writing teachers “appropriate” the student’s writings by “confusing the student’s purpose in writing and the instructor’s purpose in commenting” (Sommers, 1982, p. 149). Some critics even view the choice of feedback in a writing class as a political struggle for power and status in an educational setting (Berlin, 1988; Fox, 1990; Perdue, 1984, cited in Santos, 1992). As can be seen from the previous sample, arguments in support of peer feedback have been made on very diverse pedagogical, psychological, or even ideological grounds, but they converge on at least one theme: Teacher controlled feedback is inherently lacking in affective appeal to L1 students when compared with peer feedback or self-feedback. It should be pointed out that research findings in L1 writing have not been consistently in support of this widely adopted view (e.g., Danis, 1982; Flynn, 1982; Freedman, 1985; Newkirk, 1984).

Such criticisms of teacher feedback have been well received by ESL teachers who believe that L1 writing and English as a second language (L2) writing are practically identical or at least very similar. Traditionally, L2 writing theories are little more than transplants from L1 writing theories (Santos, 1992; Silva, 1993). For example, Arapoff (1969) argued that “just as native speakers learn their language via a discovery and transformation process . . . so too foreign students can learn to write via the same process” (p. 300). Jacobs (1982) claimed that the problem of how to meet the requirement of a particular writing task transcends language factors and is shared by native speakers (NSs) and nonnative speakers (NNSs) alike. Edelsky (1982, p. 227) also maintained that L1 writing and L2 writing share “general process universals” that operate regardless of the language. In view of the general belief in the parallelism between L1 and L2 writing processes, it is not surprising that the affective advantage of peer feedback found in L1 writing has been widely acknowledged
in ESL writing as well, without having been subjected to much empirical verification. The affective advantage of peer feedback over teacher feedback in ESL writing is typically rationalized as follows (Chaudron, 1984, pp. 2-3):

- Peer feedback is more at the learner's level of development or interest, thus perceived as more informative than the superior or older teacher's feedback, despite the assumption that the teacher "knows more."
- Since multiple peers may be used, learners gain a sense of a wider audience than simply the one teacher.
- Learners' attitude toward writing can be enhanced by the more socially supportive peers.
- Learners also learn more about writing and revision by having to read each other's drafts critically.

The arguments are practically identical to those in support of peer feedback in L1 writing, with little, if any, concern about their applicability in the L2 environment.

A literature review revealed that despite the extensive discussion on the affective advantage of peer feedback, or the affective disadvantage of teacher feedback, empirical research on their relative appeal is surprisingly scant in the past 2 decades. The need to verify the affective advantage of peer feedback in ESL was acknowledged as early as 1976, when peer feedback was just beginning to be accepted by ESL writing teachers. Witbeck (1976, p. 322), an early advocate of peer feedback, warned that the claimed affective advantages of peer feedback in L2 writing were "assumed advantages" without "formal support." Partridge (1981) conducted probably the first experimental study to investigate the relative appeal of peer and teacher feedback in ESL writing classes. She asked 12 ESL students who had used peer and teacher feedback how they felt about peer feedback. The responses, although generally positive, showed considerable doubts about the credibility and accuracy of peer feedback. Because the participants had not been specifically asked for a preference, the study provided no clear answer as to whether peer feedback was preferred to teacher feedback. Chaudron (1983, 1984) solicited 23 ESL students' feelings about evaluations by ESL peers and by NSs. Although appreciative of assistance from their peers, the participants clearly preferred evaluations by NSs. Similar conclusions were reported by Semke (1984) and Cohen (1987). Berger (1989) asked 54 ESL students familiar with peer- and self-directed feedback to pick the method they felt would help them the most. No matter whether they had been exposed primarily to peer- or self-directed feedback, both groups greatly favored teacher feedback. Leki (1990) asked 20 ESL students how useful it was to read other students' papers and how useful it was to receive peer feedback. The students' reactions were positive, yet not without misgivings concerning the quality of peer suggestions, the overly critical tone of some peer evaluators, and the questionable sincerity of peer responses. Her study did not
directly address the issue of whether or not peer feedback was preferred over teacher feedback, but the findings agreed with Partridge’s and Chaudron’s conclusions. In a more recent survey, Leki (1991) specifically asked ESL students what they considered to be “the best source of help with their written work” (p. 216). The instructor was judged to be the most helpful source and fellow ESL students the least helpful, trailing far behind an NS friend or a grammar book. George (1991) asked 17 ESL students to indicate what they would like to be done with their drafts. Peer feedback turned out to be the least popular option, as unpopular as an unexplained grade, whereas error identification or explicit correction by the instructor was the most enthusiastically welcomed option.

Mendonça and Johnson (1994) asked 12 advanced ESL students whether they would rather receive feedback from both their peers and the instructor or from only the instructor. The conclusion that “the students thought both their peers’ and teacher’s feedback were important” (p. 765) is ambivalent. The authors acknowledged that student responses indicated a need for teacher feedback and that some students who were apparently capable of and effective in peer evaluation expressed displeasure with the process. Connor and Asenavage (1994) checked the number of revisions made in a recursive writing process that at one stage involved only peer feedback and at another stage both peer and teacher feedback. Instead of asking ESL students to state their preferences, they tried to determine whether ESL student writers were more receptive to peer or teacher feedback by comparing the changes made and the actual feedback provided. Their data, collected from eight ESL students, showed that teacher feedback was much more readily incorporated into the revised texts than peer feedback, suggesting greater resistance to peer feedback than to teacher feedback and challenging the belief that peer comments “provide more compelling impetus” for revision (Clifford, 1981, p. 50). Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1994) asked 247 L2 students to comment on their teachers’ feedback and found that students’ preferred priorities in writing closely corresponded to what they perceived to be their teachers’ priorities. No evidence was found in support of the widely accepted view that L2 learners are frustrated by what they perceive to be their instructors’ expectations (Cumming, 1989; Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992). Such evidence conflicts with the belief that peer feedback tends to be more relevant, writer friendly, and conducive to revision in the ESL context.

One can see a pattern in those findings. When not asked to make a choice, learners show reserved but generally positive attitudes toward peer feedback (Leki, 1990; Partridge, 1981). When asked to state a preference, it is the teacher feedback, not the peer feedback, that is their first choice (Berger, 1989; Chaudron, 1984; Cohen, 1987; George, 1991; Leki, 1991; Semke, 1984). No particular preference for peer feedback is evident when ESL learners have a choice between teacher feedback alone and teacher feedback plus peer feedback (Mendonça & Johnson, 1994). Recent inquiries that indirectly examined peer- or teacher-suggested revisions and perceptions of writing priorities preferred by
ESL students and teachers provided no support for the claimed affective advantage of peer feedback in ESL writing (Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Hedgecock & Lefkowitz, 1994). In short, on one hand, peer feedback, as claimed by its advocates, is perceived as beneficial; on the other, teacher feedback is generally seen as far more credible and appealing than peer feedback to ESL writings.

Obviously, the cumulative ESL evidence of the past decade does not quite fit the assumption borrowed from L1 writing that peer feedback has an inherent affective advantage over teacher feedback. This raises questions about the appropriateness of building an ESL writing pedagogy on that dubious assumption transplanted from L1 writing. The assumed affective advantage needs to be carefully investigated for a better understanding of the “distinct nature of L2 writing” (Silva, 1993, p. 657).

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

In line with the arguments against teacher feedback listed earlier, three research hypotheses were formulated:

1. If peer feedback is inherently more meaningful or relevant and gives more social support than teacher feedback, ESL learners who have experienced both will show a significantly stronger preference for peer feedback.
2. Peer feedback, with its attending sense of a wider audience and stronger social support, will be preferred over self-feedback, which engages no audience and generates no social support.
3. Given the assumption that teacher feedback threatens the ESL writer’s natural inclination toward self-determination, ownership, or empowerment, whereas self-feedback protects the author’s rights to his or her own texts, self-directed feedback will be preferred over teacher feedback.

These arguments place the three types of feedback in a decreasing order in terms of affective appeal, with peer feedback being the most preferable and teacher feedback the least. It should be mentioned that so many reasons have been suggested to justify the affective advantage of peer feedback in L1 and L2 writing that it is simply impractical to check each and every speculation or all the possible combinations of the speculations known on the topic. (Many of them have not been empirically verified even in L1 research.) However, by aggregating those speculative rationalizations, a general hypothesis can be formulated for a preliminary verification.

METHOD

Participants

The participants were 81 ESL students enrolled in one private college and one state university in a western state of the United States. Both schools had siz-
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able ESL programs for academically oriented ESL students. The students enrolled in the programs practically defined the population of academically oriented ESL students in the state.

Among the 81 participants, 31 were females (38.3%) and 50 were males (61.7%). Seventy of them (86.4%) had originated from East or Southeast Asia, 8 (9.9%) from Pacific islands, and 3 (3.7%) from other regions. The participants differed widely in length of residence in an English-speaking country, varying from 2 weeks to 14 years. Thirty-nine of them (48.1%) had had less than 1 year’s exposure to naturalistic use of English, 42 (51.9%) had experienced over 1 year’s exposure to naturalistic use of English. The participants were available in three ESL proficiency groups: 40 in a high proficiency group, 23 in an upper intermediate group, and 18 in a lower intermediate group. They had been classified into the three levels through an ESL test required by the state university.

Procedure

The researcher first sought the cooperation of four ESL instructors. Through them, ESL students in six classes were contacted during their regular class hours for voluntary participation in the study. They were assured by the researcher that their personal preferences for any particular type of feedback would not affect their grades. The information was solicited strictly for the research project and would not be made available to their instructors. They were encouraged to reflect on their own ESL writing experience and to give honest opinions, regardless of what the instructors had said about feedback.

After receiving confirmations from the instructors that their classes had experienced all the three types of feedback under study, the researcher interviewed the instructors about the actual methods used for providing feedback. Generally speaking, teacher feedback came in the form of error identification, selective error correction, prompts for idea development or reorganization, and encouraging remarks. After-class individual conferences were extremely rare. Error identification and written prompts seemed to be the most commonly adopted procedures. Peer feedback involved primarily in-class group discussion on drafts or written comments by peers. Peer responding was often guided by checklists. Self-feedback was mostly unmonitored after-class revising following a rough draft or quick write in class, without explicit input from either peers or instructors. The three types of feedback were usually integrated in one writing task that spanned several days, but distinct feedback types were identifiable within the process. No instructors reported using any extraordinarily innovative or unusual methods of responding to students' writings. Their accounts of intervention in the writing process were surprisingly similar, probably due to the proximity of the two ESL programs, the similarities in the training received by the instructors, or both. Judging from those accounts of teaching practices, the participants were unlikely to have unusual conceptualizations of peer-, teacher, or self-directed feedback.
Each participant was asked to indicate his or her gender, ethnicity, ESL class, and length of stay in an English-speaking country. He or she then answered two simple questions:

1. Given a choice between teacher feedback and nonteacher feedback—that is, feedback by peers or yourself—before you write your final version, which will you choose?
2. Given a choice between peer feedback and self-directed feedback before you write your final version, which will you choose?

In consideration of the limited ESL proficiency of the participants, the researcher explained the two questions in simpler English and emphatically pointed out that those questions were not limited to writing assignments to be graded by their instructors. The researcher expected their honest preferences with respect to L2 writing in general, assuming that a teacher or fellow ESL learners were available for feedback. Under each question, the student checked off a box marked teacher, nonteacher, peers, or myself, as the case might be.

Analysis

Answers to each question were converted into a rank order of preferences by each individual. For example, if a person chose nonteacher feedback in the first question and peer feedback in the second, the person had actually assigned ranks of 3, 1, and 2 to teacher-, peer-, and self-directed feedback, respectively. The lower the rank, the stronger the preference. If a student stated equal preferences, the mean of the two consecutive ranks was given. For example, if a student preferred teacher feedback over nonteacher feedback, and then showed no preference between peer feedback and self-feedback, the ranks were 1, 2.5, and 2.5 for teacher-, peer-, and self-directed feedback, respectively.

Chi-square tests were conducted to determine whether the pattern of preferences was related to gender, ethnicity, ESL proficiency, or length of stay in an English-speaking country. These preliminary analyses were intended to exclude potential alternative explanations for the pattern of preferences observed.

Since the general hypothesis was directional, the nonparametric Page test of monotonic ordered treatment effects was conducted (Marascuilo & McSweeney, 1977, pp. 374–376; Siegel & Castellan, 1988, pp. 184–187).

If the general hypothesis was rejected, the Friedman two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) by ranks, which is a standard procedure for multiple rankings by the same participants (Ferguson, 1981, pp. 410–412; Siegel & Castellan, 1988, pp. 174–183), could be used to further determine the significance of pairwise (two-tail) contrasts. Compared to a parametric repeated-measures ANOVA, the Friedman test has a relative efficiency of 0.72 (Ferguson, 1981, p. 412). As a conservative test, it includes a quite stringent procedure for multiple-range comparisons in case the null hypothesis is rejected.
RESULTS

In response to Question 1, 76 (93.8%) of the 81 participants chose the traditional teacher feedback over nonteacher feedback. Three (3.7%) preferred nonteacher feedback, and the remaining 2 (2.5%) stated no preference. In responding to Question 2, 49 (60.5%) chose peer feedback, 28 (34.6%) chose self-feedback, and 4 (4.9%) indicated no preference.

One point is immediately obvious from those figures. The preferences are so distinct that little room was left for ambivalent feelings. Only 2.5% and 4.9% of the participants showed ambivalence on Questions 1 and 2, respectively. One-way chi-square tests established that the lopsided distributions of preferences could not be attributed to random chance, $\chi^2(2, N = 81) = 76.04, p < .001$, for Question 1; $\chi^2(2, N = 81) = 41.63, p < .001$, for Question 2.

For either question, preference is independent of gender, ethnicity, ESL proficiency, or length of stay in an English-speaking country. None of the chi-square tests came close to the .05 significance level, meaning that the academically oriented ESL population represented by the sample is homogeneous in terms of feedback preference.

The rank sums for the teacher-, peer-, and self-directed feedback were 87, 189, and 210, respectively, which resulted in rejection of the hypothesized order of relative affective advantage, $z = -8.01, p < .001$, one-tailed.

The result of the Friedman test, adjusted for tied ranks, was highly significant, $\chi^2(2, N = 81) = 100.14, p < .001$. Multiple-range comparisons revealed that ESL students find teacher feedback significantly more preferable than either peer feedback, $z = 8.01, p < .001$, two-tailed, or self-feedback, $z = 9.66, p < .001$, two-tailed. However, the difference in rank sums between peer- and self-directed feedback (21 in favor of peer feedback) failed to reach the critical difference (32.79), $z = 1.65, p > .05$, two-tailed (Siegel & Castellan, 1988, pp. 180–181).

DISCUSSION

It is clear from the results of the Page test that the speculative model of relative, affective advantage based upon the theoretical claims pertaining to L1 writing failed to hold up in the ESL environment. The finding cannot pinpoint which specific argument is faulty, but it poses a serious challenge to the aggregate validity of the affective arguments for giving a preeminent role to peer feedback in the ESL writing process. The logic of those arguments simply does not fit the ESL reality.

More specifically, the first research hypothesis that peer feedback is more appealing to ESL learners than teacher feedback has to be rejected. On the contrary, ESL learners unequivocally prefer teacher feedback over peer feedback. This finding is in sharp contrast with the theoretical stance borrowed from L1 writing. The voluminous descriptions and explanations of student apathy toward
teacher feedback does not seem to have credible psychological reality to it in the context of L2 writing. It should be noted that the finding is consistent with the conclusions of Berger (1989), Chaudron (1983, 1984), Cohen (1987), Connor and Asenavage (1994), Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1994), George (1991), Leki (1991) and Semke (1984). A prudent piece of advice to be derived from the finding would be that ESL writing teachers need to ask their students before borrowing from the experience of their counterparts in L1 writing, and rethink their assumptions and strategies accordingly. ESL students’ willingness to listen to the instructor and their genuine desire for teacher input deserve better treatment than a summary dismissal. As Leki (1991) pointed out, for the teacher to simply insist that ESL learners trust his or her preference in the writing process would be “at best counter-productive, at worst, high-handed and disrespectful of our students” (p. 210). The students’ willingness and desire can very well be turned into highly effective emotional assets in the instructional process, if only the ESL instructor recognizes, respects, and knows how to take advantage of those learner characteristics.

No definitive conclusion can be drawn about the second hypothesis that peer feedback is preferable to self-feedback, even though a secondary preference did appear to be in the hypothesized direction. Peer feedback is probably deemed the second best thing when teacher feedback is denied, but its lead in affective value does not seem as clear and definitive as its advocates would like to believe. The failure to reject the null in this case may be partly due to the limited size of the sample and partly due to the rather stringent control of the Type I error rate over the multiple-range comparisons. At the least, it shows that the assumed affective advantage of peer feedback is not yet a proven case. Peer feedback may or may not have enough affective value attached to it to be a clear winner in the ESL writing class.

The third hypothesis, that student-centered self-feedback is preferred to teacher feedback, is also rejected. There is definitely a stronger desire for teacher intervention than for self-feedback. The measure of preference for self-feedback revealed in the study could have been motivated by concerns for ownership or empowerment, to use just two recurrent terms in discussions on L1 writing. However, no empirical evidence was found in this study to lend any validity to the claim that ESL students actually choose self-control over teacher input. If power differential were a valid argument for students’ perceiving teacher-directed feedback as oppressive or threatening, they would have avoided teacher feedback as much as they could. But the reality is that they welcome teacher feedback more than anything else. ESL researchers and instructors perhaps can benefit by entertaining a different hypothesis in this regard: ESL learners look forward to NS standards and expectations and regard them as challenging rather than threatening. They want to be made aware of the challenge so that they may strive to rise to the challenge. That hypothesis is also logical, but most importantly, it fits the ESL evidence. The finding does not necessarily mean that ownership or empowerment is a nonissue. It means only
that if it is an issue after all, the issue is not perceived in the overall scheme of ESL writing to be what some experts in L1 writing have proclaimed.

**IMPLICATIONS**

The findings have implications beyond the narrow topic of feedback. Since the mid-1970s, theories of ESL writing have been increasingly entangled in the pedagogical, psychological, or ideological discussions on L1 writing. The mode of inquiry for the past 2 decades is aptly captured in the words of Zamel's (1976) article "Teaching Composition in the ESL Classroom: What We Can Learn From Research in the Teaching of *English* [italics added]." My study instead calls attention to those psychological aspects that are distinct from, or even conflict with, what is learned from research in the teaching of English. This is not to say that L1 research has no relevance to ESL writing. But 20 years of growth has probably qualified the discipline of ESL writing to move on to a more pertinent question: Is it true that what is good for L1 writing is necessarily good for L2 writing and what is bad for L1 writing is necessarily bad for L2 writing? If so, what is unique about ESL writing?

It is encouraging to see a recent interest in the "distinct nature of L2 writing" (Silva, 1993, p. 657) or critical reexaminations of L1-based theoretical stances or pedagogical emphases (e.g., Harris & Silva, 1993; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Leki, 1990, 1991; Reid, 1994; Santos, 1992; Silva, in press, cited in Harris & Silva, 1993). The perspectives of these researchers are important in emphasizing aspects of L2 writing—affectionate, cognitive, or social—that have the most immediate relevance to the L2, not the L1, learner or instructor. The L2 student and the L1 student may enter the writing process with distinctly different conceptualizations and priorities about input or intervention at the revision stage. In this study, L2 writers' prioritization of responses from the NS instructor, other ESL students, and him or herself is found to deviate dramatically from what theorists in L1 writing claim it is. ESL learners' emotional investment in the three types of input, and subsequently their motivational commitment, are distributed in a pattern drastically different from the borrowed opinions pertaining to L1 writing. Zamel (1987) observed that "individual students' perceptions about and attitude toward instruction are crucial determinants in their performance as writers . . . and these perceptions and attitudes, I believe, need to be taken into account in our attempts to teach" (p. 699). If so, research focus needs to be shifted away from the L1 writer. It stands to reason that the appropriateness of "what we can learn from research in the teaching of English" needs to be assessed in view of ESL learners' "perceptions and attitudes" beyond the potential or demonstrated benefits in L1 writing.

As members of a maturing discipline in its own right, ESL writing theorists, researchers, and instructors need to modify their past habit of falling on a borrowed paradigm to legitimize their practices. It is quite conceivable that other unique aspects of ESL writing (e.g., differential allocation of attention to idea
development and verbalization, juxtaposition of L1 and L2 intuitions, selective recourse to translation and composing, perceived benefits and liabilities of linguistic risk taking, and ultimate orientation of ESL-writing products toward competent NSs or incompetent NNSs of English) may also have a psychological reality of their own not even remotely familiar to experts in L1 writing. Affective advantages cannot be accurately assessed without considering those unique aspects of ESL writing. It is precisely in those areas that expert opinions in L1 writing become questionable. The ESL profession needs to seriously consider in what aspects and to what extent theories of L1 writing are applicable to the research and practice of ESL writing instruction.

This study was set up to assess the relative appeal of the three types of feedback. Therefore, it should not be misinterpreted to mean that peer feedback is detrimental to ESL writing or resented among ESL learners. It may well be that all three types of feedback are beneficial, although with varying degrees of appeal. I am inclined to agree with Leki (1990) that peer responding, in and of itself, has "undeniable benefits" to ESL writing in spite of its potential problems (p. 5). However, it would be reasonable to expect those undeniable benefits to be weighed against the attending relative disadvantage in the affective domain. I am not aware of any study that shows how the anticipated benefits are adequate to compensate for the attending affective disadvantage.

It may seem that cultural background served as a confounding variable in this study because 86.4% of the participants were from Asia. However, virtually identical findings have emerged in Leki’s (1991) study. In her study, 43% of the 100 participants had originated from Asia, and only 1 person thought peer feedback was the best source of help in writing. That seems to suggest that the pattern of preferences found in my study is not peculiar to Asian cultures.

However, this resistance to peer feedback may have resulted from different concerns in different cultures. Allaei and Connor (1990) attributed ESL students’ suspicion of the validity of their peer responses partly to cultural differences. Carson and Nelson (1994) specifically discussed how the in-group and out-group behaviors typical of the Japanese or Chinese culture may cause resistance to group-based ESL writing activities. Carson and Nelson’s cultural explanation of how Japanese and Chinese ESL learners construct the meaning of ESL writing group activities is relatively new and needs further critical examination. Future research is needed to investigate whether resistance to peer feedback is a culture-specific response, a more general second-language-acquisition issue, or a combination of both.

It may also be in order here to note that the high percentage of Asians in this study is not totally incompatible with the demographic characteristics of the academically oriented ESL population in America. Out of the 10 leading countries in terms of number of students in the United States, 9 are in Asia. The only exception is the 6th-ranked Canada. Asia alone accounts for 58.7% of all the foreign students in the United States. At present, 21.8% of the foreign students enrolled in American institutions of higher learning are Chinese from the
People's Republic of China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong (Zikopoulos, 1992). This figure does not include those Chinese who are recently naturalized citizens, immigrants, refugees, students in secondary and elementary schools, or ethnic Chinese from other countries. Approximately 38% of the current foreign students in American colleges and universities are either Chinese, Japanese, or Korean. In that sense, including a relatively large percentage of Asian students in ESL writing research may have practical as well as academic significance, particularly in those colleges and universities where Asian students maintain a prominent presence.

It would be premature to make any definitive pedagogical recommendation to substitute one type of feedback for another solely on the basis of what has been reported in this article. Future studies are needed to determine what reasons, real or perceived, are behind the preferences observed, to what extent the preferences are amenable to teacher manipulation, and most importantly, whether promotion of one preference over another is a necessary or sufficient condition for better ESL writing. A follow-up study is currently underway to assess the differential effects of the three types of feedback in relation to the affective characteristics described in this study.

Notes
1. When Berger's (1989) study was published in a shortened form in 1990, she stated, without any explanation or evidence, that "more students prefer peer feedback" (1990, p. 21). This is not exactly the original conclusion in her thesis that "students greatly favor teacher feedback" (1989, p. 119). Her published conclusion has to be interpreted with caution.

2. The multiple comparisons follow the Bonferroni approach to controlling the experiment-wise Type 1 error rate. In this study, three two-tailed subsequent comparisons were made. The significance level was actually controlled at 0.05/3 = 0.017 (Siegel & Castellan, 1988, pp. 180-181).

REFERENCES


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