Japanese Students' Perceptions of Peer Corrective Feedback in an EFL Classroom

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to examine the perceptions Japanese university students in a low-level English reading and writing class had giving and receiving peer corrective feedback (CF), and the potential of peer CF to improve their writing skills. The study was designed to address a lack of mixed-methods research that investigates the potential long-term learning opportunities which EFL learners can benefit from when undergoing the CF process. The study took place over the course of a 15-week reading and writing class at Kyoto Sangyo University. The 21 students involved were all trained in CF techniques and this training incorporated activities aimed at raising their language awareness. The course culminated in a five-week essay writing process that involved peer and teacher corrective feedback. The students then reflected on their perceptions of receiving peer and teacher feedback, and on the process of giving peer corrective feedback to other students. Their answers were analyzed using a 14-question quantitative survey measured on a five-point Likert scale and in four open-ended questions, two of which were relevant to this study, for qualitative analysis. The qualitative answers were then coded and categorized. The results indicate that students may find more benefit in giving than receiving corrective feedback. Qualitative analysis also showed a largely positive perception of peer corrective feedback, particularly in regards to the "noticing" that occurs when editing other students' papers.

Keywords: peer corrective feedback, Japan, EFL, CF, writing

The benefits of peer corrective feedback (CF) in EFL writing have been demonstrated in a range of cross-cultural and cross-contextual studies (Rummel & Bitchner, 2015; Sato & Ballinger, 2012; Sato & Lyster, 2012). The plurality of CF types, methods and processes demonstrates the complexity of this learning method, but also the opportunities it might offer if carefully analyzed and leveraged to produce the most powerful impact on learners. Ellis (2009) stated that CF can range in terms of its directness, use of coding, degree of focus, use of reformulations and in the necessity of revisions. Generally speaking, CF from both teachers and peers can result in a heightened focus on the mechanics of language, which has been argued to lead to a greater awareness of language (Swain, 2006). Sato and Ballinger (2012) note that through the process of engaging in peer CF "learners 'notice the gap' between the observed input and their production" (p. 158), thus learning occurs in the process of comparing their own incorrect grammar or language use with the correct usage of a peer.

Perhaps chief among the benefits for the teacher of employing peer corrective feedback is the issue of time. Allowing students to engage in peer editing of one another's work is surely not as accurate as having the teacher do so, but it does reduce workloads for time-constrained educators. Through the process of correcting each other's work, students partake in what Swain (2006) defined as "languaging". Simply put, "When engaged in writing, learners *language* about language; that is, they deliberate about how to best express their intended meaning" (Storch, 2011). The deeper cognitive processing that occurs as a result of interacting with language and examining language analytically has been argued to result in greater and more long-term retention (Swain, 2005). Rouhi and Azizian (2013) cited a substantial number of studies that demonstrated other benefits of peer corrective feedback. Among their findings were that learners acquire a greater understanding of their own writing ability and that they gain a greater ownership of their written texts. They also noted peer CF persuades learners to critically revise and review their own writing (p. 1350).

Peer corrective feedback is not without its limitations. Educators should be careful to examine the different perceptions students hold regarding teacher and peer CF. It is to be expected that learners perceive language teachers, who are native speakers or expert local speakers of the target language, as being able to offer more accurate CF than other students. Moreover, this is especially poignant in East Asian countries, such as Japan, where instructors are viewed not only as teachers, but also as behavioral role models (Phong-Mai, Terlouw & Pilot, 2005). In a society where language is still viewed as being knowledge-based (Yashima, 2002) and education as a whole is still modeled on the premise that learning involves students as passive recipients and teachers as lecturers, having students critically examine one another's work can be challenging. The relationship between *kohai* (junior) and *senpai* (senior) places social norms on relationships as determined by age and seniority, and may dissuade students from correcting one another, as has been argued in previous studies (Ishikawa, 2012; Takeuchi, 2015). This challenge is compounded by issues that emerge in peer work associated with the relationship between two learners of conflicting personality types or of differing language abilities (Storch, 2002; Yoshida, 2008).

Despite the aforementioned challenges, several studies have already looked at the benefits of peer corrective feedback in the context of Japanese EFL classes. In a cross-contextual study of two groups of students, one of which was Japanese university students, Sato and Ballinger (2012) discovered that students who engaged in peer CF performed higher than the control group on measurements of fluency. Of particular relevance to the study here is that these researchers found that training students in CF techniques resulted in improved language awareness. Thus, CF has been proven to be most effective when it is undertaken by students who have been instructed in giving CF. Sato and Lyster (2012) used a quasi-experimental study to examine peer CF in speaking

with four groups of Japanese university students. They found that all of the groups that participated in peer interaction performed better in measures of fluency than the control group, but only the two groups given explicit instruction in CF improved both their overall accuracy and fluency.

The Present Study

Though some studies have examined the role teacher's perceptions and beliefs have in affecting their corrective feedback use (Ferris, 2004; Mori, 2002), fewer have examined how students perceive the learning that occurs during the process of giving and receiving peer feedback. This study was designed with the aim of examining any potential advantages to having students engage in this process that have yet to be uncovered, by eliciting students' own opinions.

The argument has been made that Japanese students without an adequate level of English competency cannot benefit from peer CF (Yoshida, 2008). However, the studies that make this assertion are short in length and are limited in their ability to measure the potential long-term benefits of the deeper cognitive processing that occurs during the process of giving and receiving peer CF.

The present study was conducted in a basic English reading and writing course at Kyoto Sangyo University that spanned one, 15-week semester. The students were in their third year of the General Education Department's mandatory English credit program for non-English majors. All of the students had been placed into this class based on TOEIC scores that fell between 350–399 points. This was the first semester in which the course was taught by native-English speaking instructors. Due to the mandatory nature of the course, many of the students were seemingly more motivated by a desire to attain credit and continue with their other studies, than to attain a high level of English proficiency.

During the first five weeks, students were trained in giving corrective feedback to one another through a variety of tasks that acquainted them with the coded CF framework used in their class and that aimed to enhance their overall English language awareness. A major part of the CF they engaged in centered around short (150 words or less), in-class compositions related to the theme for that week's lesson. The error-coding guide was used in order to allow students to provide one another with metacognitive CF. Ellis (2009) describes metacognitive CF as that which includes codes indicating the location and type of mistake identified, but that does not expressly state what the problem is. This was left up to the individual student to decipher.

Low English proficiency had been cited several times in previous literature related to peer CF as a possible barrier to learning. In order to address this potential problem, students were first tasked with making corrections in groups in order to pool their linguistics resources, in what is referred to

as collective scaffolding (Donato, 1994). They were gradually given more autonomy, editing in pairs and finally in editing one on one with a partner for their final 300-word essay. The students' compositions (and the subsequent peer CF) were initially scrutinized closely by the instructor to ensure accuracy and to force the students to think critically about the corrections they were making.

The final essay the students were tasked with could be on any topic of their choosing. The students submitted a first draft of their essay in week 8 of the course, which was then edited by a peer. In order to encourage students to engage in a detailed examination of their partner's work, the quality and efficacy of their corrections was weighted into the rubric for the final essay, as was their ability to accurately correct the coded mistakes identified by their peers and instructor. In week 10, students submitted a second draft and received corrective feedback from their teacher. Finally, in week 12 students shared their essays via the online course delivery platform Moodle, and were graded on their reading of and responses to other students' essays.

The present study examines students' perceptions of receiving corrective feedback from their classmates and instructor, and their opinion regarding the process of engaging in peer CF. The study looks to address the following questions:

1. What benefits do students perceive they obtain by engaging in collaborative peer feedback in an English writing class?
2. What previously unidentified potential benefits might be discovered through combined analysis of students, regardless of their language ability, engaging in peer CF and of their elicited opinions of peer CF?

Methods, Participants, Materials & Procedure

This study was conducted at Kyoto Sangyo University (KSU) in a basic reading and writing course with 21 students (16 males/5 females) between the ages of 20 and 21 (mean=20.3) in the spring of 2015. In their final class, students were given a survey (Appendix A) that included both quantitative and qualitative instruments. Using a five-point Likert scale, students were asked six questions regarding their perceptions of teacher CF and an additional eight questions regarding their perceptions of peer CF. The final question was included so as to examine how they perceived the role of correcting others' work in improving their own English writing and was thus measured on its own. As two students incorrectly filled out the Likert-scale question portion of the surveys, their results were discarded. Thus the final sample size for quantitative analysis is displayed as (n=19).

The survey also included an additional four, open-ended questions for qualitative analysis, the first

two of which are relevant to this study. This was done so as to elicit a deeper understanding of the reasoning that informed the students' survey choices. In this portion, another two students chose not to provide any feedback, thus their answers were not included in the coding. The final sample size for this analysis was also ($n=19$).

There was concern that the students' relationship with the teacher and each other may affect their responses. To negate this potential problem, surveys were filled out anonymously. Students also received only the Japanese version of the survey and were asked to respond in Japanese. The survey was translated into Japanese by a professional translator and was then back translated to ensure accuracy. This same translator also translated the students' answers into English to ensure the nuance was as consistent as possible with what the original writer had intended.

Results

Quantitative Analysis

The results of the Likert-scale portion of the questionnaire were used to form three groups of data for comparison: student perceptions of teacher corrective feedback, student perceptions of peer corrective feedback and student perceptions of giving peer corrective feedback. The results are displayed below (Table 1). The higher the number the greater benefit students found from each form of CF in regards to the growth of their own English ability in terms of grammar, spelling, writing, structure, clarity and overall ability.

Table 1. Student Perceptions of Receiving Teacher Feedback, and Giving and Receiving Peer Corrective Feedback

	Mean	Standard Dev.
Perception of Receiving Teacher CF ($n=19$)	3.94	0.13
Perception of Receiving Peer CF ($n=19$)	3.32	0.12
Perception of Giving Peer CF ($n=19$)	3.63	N/A

Due to the small sampling size, statistical significance was not examined. The final question item, while a stand-alone question, does provide insight into this process and as such, was included in the final data set.

The results predictably show a considerable preference for teacher CF. Of equal note though, is that students perceive a notably greater value in giving than in receiving peer CF. How students rated giving CF was exactly 0.31 points less than receiving teacher CF and exactly 0.31 points more than receiving peer CF.

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis was drawn from two questions that elicited students' overall perception of the benefits of receiving peer CF and giving peer CF. Students were asked:

1. Why did or didn't you find receiving feedback from other students helpful in improving your writing?
2. Why did or didn't you find giving feedback from other students helpful in improving your writing?

The students' answers were then coded into three categories: positive (positive responses to both questions), mixed (one positive/one negative response) and negative (negative responses to both questions). This coded qualitative data is displayed below in Table 2:

**Table 2. Coded Student Responses to Questions Regarding Overall Perception
of Giving and Receiving Peer CF**

	Positive	Mixed	Negative	(Discarded)
Number of Respondents ($n=19$)	11	6	2	(2)

As demonstrated above, more than half of the respondents, 11 students (57.8%) gave positive responses to the questions. Another six (31.2%) gave mixed (one positive and one negative) responses, while only two students (10.5%) gave two negative responses to the qualitative questions.

The most common answer among positive responses was that both giving and receiving CF from other students helped with the act of "noticing" and the act of "discovery". One student responded that, "Receiving corrections from people at the same level as me made the mistakes easy to understand and correct". Another common point made in receiving feedback was that it simply helped students identify areas in need of correction. One student commented, "I reexamined some points I was unsure of", thanks to the corrective feedback he had received from his partner.

Among negative responses, the most common answer was that students felt they did not have enough English ability themselves to accurately give or receive CF to or from others. This, in their eyes, made it pointless to try to edit others' work. As only two students were categorized as negative, though, respondents who gave one negative answer generally found some benefit in the process of giving or receiving CF. A comment from one student, which seemed to reflect the overall attitude of the students who responded negatively, stated, "(my partner and I are) both poor at English so we don't know whether my edits or my partner's edits are correct. So, I didn't think (the

process) was helpful". This is consistent with findings in previous studies (Yoshida, 2008) that similarly suggested students not understanding their partner's CF may negatively impact this process.

Discussion

The results are consistent with previous research in that they reflect a greater confidence in teacher feedback. This was predicted prior to conducting the study. As mentioned prior, statistical significance was omitted due to the small sample size, however, the question eliciting students' perception of giving peer corrective feedback (3.6) did score notably higher than students' overall perception of receiving peer corrective feedback (3.3). It is also relevant that when tasked with answering open-ended questions concerning their perceptions of the process of giving and receiving feedback, a majority of students (57.8%) responded positively to both giving and receiving feedback, while an additional 31.2% responded positively to either giving or receiving feedback. Of the students measured then, a total of 89% perceived some benefit in the peer review process. This means the remaining 11% (two students) found nothing beneficial in the process of giving and receiving peer CF, however they were clearly in the minority.

These results may indicate that while the students lack the linguistic and grammatical abilities to always correct one another's work with confidence, they still felt a sense of personal growth in terms of their own English writing ability occurring during the process of giving and receiving peer CF. It may be that engaging in this kind of activity results in the activation of deeper cognitive processing. One student noted that, "By reading my partner's essay, I could notice common mistakes I had made myself". These results reflect the findings of previous research related to the analytical engagement with language that Swain (2006) defined as languaging. The existing literature is limited in scope in terms of measuring whether peer CF results in the systematic deconstruction of language described by Swain.

Of particular importance, was that many students reported that the process helped them "notice" their own mistakes. This sounds remarkably similar to the *noticing function* identified in previous research (Swain, 2005; Swain & Lapkin, 1995), which Swain argued pushes students to move beyond semantic and onto grammatical processing through the course of output. Of course, in this case, pure output that results from students writing their own work was supplemented by the process of comparing their knowledge to that of their classmates as it was reflected in writing.

Another prominent theme that emerged in the qualitative analysis, which was not specifically being examined through the study's instruments, was the potential for peer editing to create a sense of cohesion among the students in a class. One student expressed that "There were parts that were

difficult to understand, but I appreciated by classmates doing their best to edit (my work)". This appears to indicate this student (who was categorized as 'positive' through the qualitative analysis) did have some hesitations about the process but ultimately saw its benefits. Another comment reflective of the general mood of the class came from a different student who stated, "I thought (the peer corrective feedback process) was helpful. By having my classmate diligently edit my paper, I was able to work through it on my own." Again, there appears to be a feeling of appreciation expressed here. As many of the negative responses revolved around students' faith in their class-mates' English competency, a longer study of the same nature might look to examine whether the feeling of mistrust students have of others' linguistic competency can be reduced over time through continued participation in peer CF.

Limitations of Present Study

Given the small sample size used in this study, it was difficult to calculate statistical significance. A more comprehensive study involving a greater number of students would likely provide quantita-tive and qualitative answers with a higher degree of validity and reliability.

The study could have also benefited from a more detailed analysis of the number of occurrences of CF that emerged over the course of the class. This would provide stronger, empirical evidence for the conclusions arrived at in this study. Such research could be accomplished by comparing the fre-quency of CF over one semester, and the uptake demonstrated by the students receiving peer CF in subsequent revisions of their essays. As the study focused on student perceptions, it may not neces-sarily reflect their actual academic growth in regards to their reading and writing ability.

Instead of providing a conclusive answer on peer corrective feedback in low-level EFL writing classes, this study should be viewed as a catalyst for further research into the impact of peer CF on student learning. As demonstrated by the perspectives provided by the students, there certainly appears to be some benefit in having students conduct peer CF.

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Appendix A

Basic English III Class Survey

This semester you have learned how to give and receive corrective feedback to and from your classmates. In order to help me improve this class in the future, please answer the questions below in as much detail as possible. Your answers will be used to inform my own research.

Age: _____   Gender（ M / F ）   Academic Year: _____

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5

Teacher Corrective Feedback

1. I think receiving feedback from my teacher helped me improve my English writing grammar. ☐

2. I think receiving feedback from my teacher helped me improve my English writing spelling. ☐

3. I think receiving feedback from my teacher helped me improve the style of my English writing. ☐

4. I think receiving feedback from my teacher helped me improve the structure of my English writing. ☐

5. I think receiving feedback from my teacher helped me to improve the clarity of my English writing. ☐

6. On the whole, I think receiving feedback from my teacher helped me improve my English writing. ☐

Student Corrective Feedback

1. I think receiving feedback from other students helped me improve my English writing grammar. ☐

2. I think receiving feedback from other students helped me improve my English writing spelling. ☐

3. I think receiving feedback from other students helped me improve the style of my English writing. ☐

4. I think giving feedback to other students helped me improve my English writing grammar. ☐

5. I think giving feedback to other students helped me improve my English writing spelling.

6. I think giving feedback to other students helped me improve the style of my English writing.

7. On the whole, I think receiving feedback from other students helped me improve my English writing.

8. On the whole, I think giving feedback to other students helped me improve my English writing

Class Reflection

9. Why did or didn't you find receiving feedback from other students helpful in improving your writing?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. Why did or didn't you find giving other students feedback helpful in improving your own writing?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

11. Why did or didn't you enjoy posting your essay on a Moodle forum?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

12. Why did or didn't you enjoy reading other students' essays on a Moodle forum?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

基礎英語（総合）**III** アンケート

　今学期は，クラスメイトとお互いにどのように補正フィードバックをし合うかを勉強しましたね。授業内容を改善し，これからのこのクラスをもっと良いものにするため，下記の質問にしっかり答えて下さい。また，この回答用紙は，今後の私自身の研究に使われる可能性があります。

年齢 _____　　　　性別（ 男性 ／ 女性 ）　　　学年 _____

またくそう思わない	そう思わない	どちらも思わない	そう思う	とてもそう思う
1	2	3	4	5

<u>先生からのフィードバックについて</u>

1.　先生からフィードバックをもらうことは英語の文法力を上げることに繋がった。☐

2.　先生からフィードバックをもらうことは英語のスペルを覚えることに繋がった。☐

3.　先生からフィードバックをもらうことはライティングを上達させることに繋がった。☐

4.　先生からフィードバックをもらうことは英文の組み立てを上達させることに繋がった。☐

5.　先生からフィードバックをもらうことは英文を正確に書くことに繋がった。☐

6.　全体的に，先生からフィードバックをもらうことは，自分の英語の上達になった。☐

<u>生徒からのフィードバックについて</u>

1.　クラスメイトからフィードバックをもらうことは自分の英語の文法力を上げることに繋がった。☐

2.　クラスメイトからフィードバックをもらうことは英語のスペルを覚えることに繋がった。☐

3.　クラスメイトからフィードバックをもらうことはライティングを上達させることに繋がった。☐

4.　クラスメイトにフィードバックをしてあげることは自分自身の英語の文法力を上げることにも繋がった。☐

5.　クラスメイトにフィードバックをしてあげることは自分が英語のスペルを覚えることにも繋がった。☐

6.　クラスメイトにフィードバックをしてあげることは自分のライティングを上達させることにも繋がった。☐

7.　全体的に，クラスメイトからフィードバックをもらうことは，自分の英語の上達
　　になった。

8.　全体的に，クラスメイトにフィードバックをしてあげるのは，自分の英語力の上
　　達にもなった。

クラスの反応

9.　クラスメイトからもらった フィードバック「編集」は自分のライティング力の上達に役立
　　つと思いましたか？ なぜそうでしたか？ あるいはなぜそうではありませんでしたか？

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

10.　他の生徒にしてあげたフィードバック「編集」は自分自身のライティング力の上達に役
　　立つと思いましたか？ なぜそうでしたか？ あるいはなぜそうではありませんでしたか？

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

11.　自分のエッセーをムードルに載せるのを楽しみましたか？ なぜそうでしたか？ あるいは
　　なぜそうではありませんでしたか？

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

12.　他の生徒のエッセーを読むのが好きでしたか？ なぜそうでしたか？ あるいはなぜそうで
　　はありませんでしたか？

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

EFL での学生同士のピア・フィードバックに対する
日本人学生の意識について

コ ル ピ ッ ツ　ブ ラ ッ ド リ ー D. F.

要　旨

　本研究では，習熟度が低い日本人大学生のリーディング・ライティングクラスにおいて，教師から学生，及び学生間で行われる訂正のピアフィードバック（CF）が，彼らの英語力改善に及ぼす効果について，学生の意識を調査した。これは，EFL 学習者に対するピアフィードバックの質的量的研究が不足しているからである。ピア・フィードバックは学生数 21 名のリーディング・ライティングクラスにおいて，11 週間にわたり行われた。学生は，授業で学んだ文法項目に着目する活動なども含め，言語への気づきを高めることをめざしたピア・フィードバックの方法を学び，最終の 5 週間は，教師から学生，及び学生間でピア・フィードバックを繰り返し，エッセイを完成させた。最終回の授業で実施したアンケートの結果，学生はピア・フィードバックを与えられるより，与える方が，文法力やライティング力の改善に効果があると感じており，他の学生のエッセイを訂正することが，自分の英語の間違いへの「気づき」を促していたことが明らかになった。

キーワード：ピア・フィードバック，日本，EFL，CF，ライティング