
Chinese Students' Perceptions of the Practice of Peer Review in an Integrated Class at the University Level

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In the past few decades, teaching writing has witnessed a great change from product-driven to process-driven approaches (Elbow, 1973; Paulus, 1999; Raimes, 1993; Zhang, 1995). The traditional practice in which only a teacher provides feedback on students' writing has shifted to include students' comments during the stages of draft revision (Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992; Nelson & Carson, 1998; Paulus, 1999). Thus, asking students to work in pairs or with a small group of class peers to review and provide comments on one another's writing, also known as peer feedback, has been used widely in writing class. Peer review has become a popular pedagogical technique, particularly in English second language (ESL) writing classrooms. Numerous studies have discussed this writing practice, including its pros and cons from different perspectives (Guénette, 2007; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1992; McGroarty & Zhu, 1997; Nelson & Murphy, 1993; Rollinson, 2005; Villamil & De Guerrero, 1996). The overall opinion toward the peer review activity seems positive because of its advantages and effectiveness compared with teacher- and self-feedback.

However, in recent years, it is common to see that native English-speaking students and international students, particularly graduate level students, take the same courses and sit in the same mainstream classrooms. In addition to writing courses, professors of other courses also apply peer review practices when giving their students written assignments. Thus, peer review activity has been employed in mixed classes. Unfortunately, few studies have discussed whether this writing practice is equally effective in an integrated group with both native and nonnative English speaking students.

It is urgent for professionals and researchers to investigate this writing practice in an integrated class and to find out whether in such a class the problems that have been addressed in homogenous classes remain. It is also necessary to anticipate whether this practice can produce some new problems or raise some new concerns. Therefore, this study attempts to examine the plausibility of peer review in an integrated class and share the findings with teachers and researchers who are interested in this research issue.

Literature Review

Quite a number of studies have found that peer review in L2 writing classes is useful because it encourages students to implement peers' comments in revision and results in overall improvements in writing quality (Berg, 1999; Mendonça & Johnson, 1994; Rollinson, 2005; Yang, Badgar, & Yu, 2006; Zamel, 1985). For example, in the study by Nelson and Murphy (1993), they examined the influences of peer feedback in ESL students' revision and found that 50% of the students made significant changes in their content after revision. Mendonça and Johnson (1994) also investigated the influence of peer feedback on ESL writing and they reported that about 53% of revisions made in students' drafts resulted from peer feedback.

In order to explore whether less mature English as a foreign language (EFL) writers benefited from peer feedback, Tsui and Ng (2000) examined 27 secondary school students in Hong Kong. The results of the survey and interviews indicated that the learners incorporated high percentages (78%) of their peers' comments into revision. These studies prove that peer review plays an important role in writing. Moreover, the research also suggested that peer feedback helped contribute to the development of learner autonomy.

In addition, studies also indicate that student writers improve and gain writing skills from their peers. In the meantime, student writers build critical, rhetorical, and linguistic awareness by reading peers' written texts (Arndt, 1993; Berg, 1999; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1992; Lockhart & Ng, 1995). Lockhart and Ng (1995) found that peer review could enable students to gain an awareness of audience and improve their own writing skills. Berg (1999) also noted that peer feedback offered chance for critical reasoning. In other words, reading peers' written texts, to some extent, helps student writers to learn writing skills from each other; it enables them to compare their own writing with peers' so that they can avoid making similar mistakes.

Furthermore, some studies have explored the aspects in which peer review was helpful. Carson and Nelson's (1996) case study of a group of Chinese students indicated that the students were reluctant to initiate comments on their peers' essays because Chinese culture valued harmony in a group. In this sense, Chinese students apparently tried to avoid providing direct criticism or negative feedback and carefully monitored their comments in order to prevent the embarrassment of their peers. Likewise, in their study, Villamil and Guerrero (1996) also pointed out that due to different cultural norms, some students might be reluctant to provide direct negative feedback. Rather, they prefer to offer mitigated or positive comments for their peers.

In their follow-up microethnographic study, Nelson and Carson (1998) examined the same subjects in order to investigate their expectations from their peers. The researchers found that in addition to teacher's comments, the students valued peer feedback, particularly the negative comments, which could help them identify their problems. The

researchers also noted that these ESL students viewed grammar and sentence-level comments to be ineffective. Obviously, the results of their studies indicate that students think the feedback in regards to identifying each other's problems is helpful. However, they do not perceive error correction on the sentence-level to be that important.

On the other hand, Mangelsdorf and Schlumberger (1992) studied how ESL students actually responded to each others' papers and noticed that most of the ESL students overweighed grammar correction. Mangelsdorf and Schlumberger's study shows that ESL students think that providing grammar correction is a main task of peer review. It seems that Mangelsdorf and Schlumberger's findings differ from Nelson and Carson's (1996) results. Yet, Paulus (1999) argued that "the inexperienced writers tended to make surface level changes, while experienced writers could make meaningful-level revisions to improve the essay quality" (p. 265). Paulus's explanation helps us, to some extent, to understand the inconsistent results between Nelson and Carson's (1992) study and Mangelsdorf and Schlumberger's study (1992).

Although the above discussed studies indicate that peer review benefits L2 writing, some researchers doubt the effectiveness of peer feedback compared to teacher feedback, especially its influence in L2 writing classes (Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Linden-Martin, 1997; Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992; Yang, Bager, & Yu, 2006). For example, Zhang (1995, 1999) claimed that L2 learners mistrusted their peers' feedback in terms of language proficiency and concluded that peer feedback is not effective for nonnative speakers and students would overwhelmingly prefer teacher feedback to peer feedback. According to Saito and Fujita (2004), students may not be capable of rating peers' writing due to their own ineffective linguistic competence. Some studies (e.g., Sengupta, 1998) even found that because the traditional role of a teacher has been deeply rooted in students' minds, students do not trust peers' comments and think peer review is "a waste of time" (p. 22).

In responding to these claims, Jacobs, Curtis, Brain, and Huang (1998) argued that although teacher feedback was important, peer feedback was significant too because of its unique scaffolding function. In their study, Jacobs and his colleagues elaborated that even though the students thought teacher feedback was important, 93% of the participants held that peer feedback was helpful in the revision process; the students wanted to receive feedback from peers. Thus, the researchers proposed a "middle path," which was to combine teacher, self, and peer feedback together in the process of writing. Likewise, from a different angle, Saito and Fujita (2004) in their study found that in a Japanese university, an EFL setting, teachers and peers rated students' writing in similar ways. This result indicates that peer feedback is as valuable as teacher feedback.

Moreover, some researchers even hold the opinion that teacher feedback has little impact on students' writing. Studies indicate that students themselves can make improvements in the content of revision without teacher feedback. The evidence shows

that some students prefer to receive peer feedback only and treat teacher feedback as less valuable (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Leki, 1990; Polio, Fleck, & Leder, 1998). Peer review can even be equal to teacher feedback in terms of revision quality (Caulk, 1994). Also, peer feedback has been found to be more effective than self revision (Berger, 1990). These studies demonstrate that peer feedback is beneficial and students think it is helpful with writing improvement.

When discussing peer review, the major concern is the quality of peer review. The problem is that some of the untrained students are not able to provide appropriate feedback; they cannot decide what types of feedback to provide. Therefore, they may focus only on lower level concerns, which are grammar errors, word choice, or punctuation. Others may pay too much attention to higher order concerns, such as the topic, the content, or the organization of the whole piece of writing. Moreover, some of these students only provide positive feedback or surface level comments; others seem too straightforward and prefer to provide only criticism to peers. Consequently, vague, unrelated, overly critical, or complementary comments are found in peer feedback (Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998; Liu & Hansen, 2002; Villamil & Gurrerro, 1996). Thus, researchers have begun to explore possible solutions to overcome the problem of ineffective peer feedback and started attaching the importance to peer review training in order to help students become effective evaluators (Berg, 1999; Hansen & Liu, 2005; Min, 2006; Stanley, 1992).

Although peer review has revealed some problems, overall, its advantages outweigh the disadvantages. It helps develop and reinforce students' writing skills and critical thinking abilities, it enhances language learning, and it provides opportunities for students to practice their abilities of social interaction. In addition, peer review also offers students the chance to read authentic texts written by their peers. Receiving feedback from multiple sources, students can improve and examine their own writing, reducing their own apprehension and gaining confidence as well. Owing to all these advantages, peer review has become a popular practice in L2 writing classes both in ESL and EFL settings.

Research Gap

In recent years, with an increasing number of international students coming to study in the United States, native English-speaking students and international students can be seen sitting together in the same writing or other mainstream classrooms (Zhu, 2001). Even though peer review has been employed either in these classes including writing classes and other classes for writing assignments, very few studies discuss this practice in such integrated classes with both native and international students. Among the few studies regarding a mixed group of students, the major concerns they addressed are the issues of cross-cultural interaction and awareness (e.g., Ibrahim & Penfield, 2005; Reichelt & Silva, 1996).

Little research has been done to examine the plausibility of peer review in this mixed setting. Hence, it is necessary to investigate whether peer review performs equally well in an integrated class as it does in a L2 homogenous class. It may also help instructors decide whether or not to implement this practice in their integrated classes. Given these needs, this study attempts to determine how peer review is performed in an integrated group and examine nonnative speakers' perceptions of peer review. The following questions are to be addressed:

1. What are nonnative students' perceptions of peer review in an integrated class?
2. Do students have the same attitudes toward the feedback given by their native and nonnative English-speaking class peers?
3. In what aspects do students benefit from peer feedback provided by native and nonnative class peers respectively?
4. What are the major similarities and differences between the feedback given by native and nonnative speaking peers?

Methodology

Participants

To recruit participants, I used purposeful selection of the sample of convenience. I began by focusing on some Chinese students who I knew or heard that they had had peer review experience in an integrated class respectively. By means of telephone call or email contact, I explained the purpose of the study and asked if they had ever received peer feedback given from both native and nonnative English-speaking class peers in a writing class or on their writing assignments. Among them, eight respondents had these experiences and expressed an interest in my study. In order to get a thorough impression, I carefully chose five of them based on the following reasons. First, these five subjects came from different age groups with divergent academic backgrounds. Second, they expressed a strong will to share their personal feelings and stories of peer review. Lastly, the participants were from two different universities rather than one.

Five Chinese students, including two males and three females in different programs from a Northeast university and a Midwest university in the United States, participated in this study (see Table 1). Among them, three graduate students from either the Northeast university or the Midwest university had taken integrated writing courses such as College Writing, Research Writing, or Technical Writing as required by their program. In their classes, they had peer review activities with both native and nonnative English speakers. The other two had offered and received peer feedback on their writing assignments in their previous classes.

The participants' ages ranged from 20 to 50 years old. The length of residency in the United States varied from two years to four years and eight months. Their averaged paper-

Table 1
Identification of Participants

Participants	Gender	Age	Length of Residency	Major	Degree Program
Yan	female	50	4 years 8 months	English Literature	PhD
Wili	female	29	3 years	TESOL	PhD
Lin	male	38	2 years 3 months	Technical Writing	MA
Chuya	female	26	3 years	Accounting	MA
Tian	male	20	3 years	Finance	BS

based TOEFL scores were about 600 out of the total of 677. Their TOEFL scores indicate that the five participants are at the advanced English proficiency level. All of them had peer review activity experience in a mixed writing class and received both native and non-native class peer feedback on their writing assignments. Pseudonyms are used for participants' names in this study.

Procedure

The qualitative interviewing method was employed for data collection because of the small number of participants. A set number of questions including six demographic items, five close-ended questions, and four open-ended questions were prepared (see Appendix). The general interview guide approach was used (McKay, 2006; Patton, 2000). To be specific, I asked each participant the same questions, though the order of the questions and the phrasing of the questions differed in each interview. However, the actual interviews were conducted in a less formal conversational manner, aiming at encouraging the participants to express themselves freely. Since the participants were all native speakers of Chinese, the participants' L1 was used during the interviews to reduce the potential hindrance caused by the English language and to create a comfortable atmosphere so that the participants could express themselves freely.

I then arranged the time and places with each participant respectively for the face-to-face or telephone interviews. Three face-to-face interviews were conducted at comfortable

places without interruptions. The face-to-face interviews allowed each participant to produce more extensive and in-depth responses. Since two participants were from another university, I used a telephone interview with them. These two telephone interviews were conducted at the participants' convenience. During the course of each interview, I took notes of the central facts, key points, stories, and comments provided by each participant. I also asked them to clarify or further elaborate their viewpoints when needed. Each interview lasted approximately thirty to forty minutes.

Moreover, in order to gain more thorough and clear opinions from the participants, I conducted by telephone two follow-up interviews in which I found some significant information was missing or unclear, or the participants raised new ideas or major concerns (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Each of the follow-up interviews lasted approximately twenty minutes.

To do the data analyses, I used the retrospective narrative analysis, which focuses on stories told by participants (Grbich, 2007). I decided first to use the case-analysis approach, which focuses intensively on each participant's case, followed by a cross-case analysis approach, which involves organizing the responses according to the topics raised in the interviews (Patton, 2000). Through carefully examining the notes that I took, I highlighted each individual's case, key events, as well as some issues they discussed.

Next, based on the participants' narratives, when I found the participants shared similar opinions, I grouped them into a category to stress the similarities in order to identify the central ideas as well as the emerging themes. That is, the process of data analyses ranges from description to interpretation and to theory (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). By doing so, I could capture the participants' positive and negative attitudes toward peer review and summarize the pros and cons of this writing practice in integrated classes from the participants' perspectives based on their experiences as well as some concerns they raised.

Results

Individual Cases

Yan's Case

Yan is a doctoral student in the program of English Literature. One of her peer review experiences is with a Korean classmate on a writing assignment. In Yan's case, both classmates were nonnative speakers of English. Because Yan and her peer were English majors, their focus of peer feedback is more on higher order concerns, such as content and organization. Both of them took the peer review activity seriously and treated it as a learning opportunity for themselves. Thus, they reached an agreement of not providing only positive feedback to each other; rather, they must point out problems in each other's papers and provide solutions to them. In order to fulfill their promises, they set aside time

for meaning negotiation when finding confusing points in each other's papers. In this manner, they both perceived that peer feedback was very dynamic and productive.

Based on this experience, Yan stated that "peer review can be an effective way for revision and quality improvement if it is done appropriately." Yan also added that "the effort will be paid off eventually if people really treat each other's writing seriously." Yan further explained that she and her peer both received an "A" with positive comments from their professor in this assignment. Yan intentionally attached importance to meaning negotiation with peers, particularly when the peers do not speak the same language and share the same culture.

However, Yan described a phenomenon that she frequently noticed during the peer review activity. That is, more often than not, her peers, no matter native or nonnative, provided positive feedback only. This did annoy her much because "good words do not help me in revision at all, though I need them because I think I am a kind of good writer." That is why Yan and her Korean classmate decided that apart from providing positive comments, they must provide negative comments to each other as well. Moreover, they had to provide solutions to those writing problems. To Yan, identifying each other's problems is the main purpose of the peer review activity.

Wili's Case

Wili is also a doctoral student but in a TESOL program. Unlike Yan's story, Wili began her unpleasant story with a native English speaking peer. In one of Wili's classes, students were required to read a peer's paper and provide feedback. Wili happened to have a native English speaking peer. So, she wrote her comments on this native speaker's paper. Unexpectedly, this classmate was "mad" about Wili's feedback. She doubted the quality of Wili's feedback because she did not trust the comments provided by a nonnative speaker. She expressed her dissatisfaction directly by erasing all Wili's comments in front of Wili and complaining, "I do not like people marking anything on my paper." This unpleasant experience made Wili give up pointing out native speakers' writing problems or errors. When telling me this story, Wili argued that "in China, I was also an English professor. I know what I put on her paper and I have my reasons to do so!"

Apart from this unpleasant story, other peer review experiences recalled by Wili are more pleasant. Wili believed that she had benefited mainly from reading peers' writing instead of reading peers' feedback. As a nonnative speaker, Wili realized that her weakness was using the target language. So, she read the essays no matter if they were written by native or nonnative speakers in order to learn how her class peers use the language. Wili admitted that reading others' writing helped her to avoid making the same mistakes in her own writing. In addition, she considered native speakers' writing a rich source of authentic language. Thus, she claimed that through "reading native speakers' language, a nonnative speaker can improve his or her own linguistic competence." According to Wili, peer

review is particularly effective for nonnative speakers not only because “it offers opportunities for nonnative speakers to read authentic language” but also because “it helps enrich nonnative speakers’ cultural experiences.” Moreover, Wili also noticed that most of the native English speakers were equipped with the ability to provide their peers with better word choices.

Although Wili admitted that reading peers’ writing was beneficial and native speakers could be helpful in her vocabulary use, she did not think reading peer feedback was helpful, nor did she find much difference between the feedback given by native and nonnative class peers. Her arguments were that “a writer has already had his or her own ideas in mind. So, it is hard to offer something that the writer will likely accept.” What is more, Wili said that “it is even useless when the feedback is just complimentary or at the surface level.” Ironically however, although Wili thought positive and surface level comments provided no help for revision, the unpleasant experience with the native speaking peer warned Wili to learn to be uncritical even though she felt guilty because she could identify some major problems in her peers’ writing. Thus, Wili expressed her puzzlement and began to doubt the value of peer review in an integrated class.

Lin’s Case

Lin, a MA student in a technical writing program, shared with me one of his experiences with peer review. He once got a native speaker’s comments on his word choice. His native speaking peer pointed out the different uses between the word “cold” and the word “chilly” and helped him distinguish the subtle meaning of these two synonyms. Now, Lin is able to use them appropriately. Base on this peer review experience, Lin expressed his favor for native speakers’ feedback, particularly the feedback on lower order issues, such as word choice, grammar, sentence structure, and even documentation style. Lin highlighted that native speakers could think of better sentence structures to replace his awkward ones. In contrast, Lin said that he got used to reexamining the suggestions provided by his nonnative peers on the linguistic issues. His reason was that “English is native speakers’ mother tongue; native speakers have the absolute advantage in vocabulary and sentence structure use compared with nonnative speakers.” Lin’s perception of native speaking peers’ linguistic abilities clearly explained why he favors native peers’ suggestions on linguistic issues.

Further, Lin told me about the change of his attitude from aversion to acceptance toward the issue of content help. Lin explained that although he strongly believed that native peers were good at offering linguistic help, in the beginning he did not believe his class peers, including native and nonnative, could really help him with his content or rhetoric. He thought that “each writer has his or her own strengths and concrete ideas. It will be hard to persuade the writer to make any changes.” However, after reading the feedback provided by his class peers, he found that some of the comments were helpful.

Since then, he began to accept peers' critiques gradually and tried to incorporate them in revision. Lin also reported the benefits of reading peers' papers, "I could learn their strengths through reading their papers." To Lin, peer review benefited him in many ways, particularly the feedback provided by his native peers on a linguistic level.

Chuya's Case

Chuya, as an MA accounting student, held different opinions from Lin's perspective. She believed that nonnative speakers could be equally helpful in the same way as native speakers on linguistic issues. Her arguments were that "nonnative-speaking peers paid special attention to sentence-level issues, such as grammar, punctuation, and format." She further said that nonnative peers were really good at grammar check because they could always catch flaws in her paper and indeed did a better job than native speaking peers. Chuya did not perceive any differences between peer feedback given by her native and nonnative speaking peers.

Yet, her major concern was the quality of feedback. Chuya noticed that sometimes the feedback, no matter from a native or a nonnative speaker, was unclear and even unacceptable. One example was that Chuya "did not know whose ideas to follow when receiving different opinions from my peers" because "[she] received two native speakers' feedback but found their comments were opposite to each other." Chuya further explained that "My strengths that one peer mentioned were exactly the weaknesses that the other peer pointed out." Facing such a dilemma, Chuya chose to ignore the peers' comments. Rather, she took teacher feedback instead when I asked how she solved this situation. This experience made her feel disappointed with peer review even though the feedback was given by native speaking peers.

On the other hand, she expressed satisfaction with one of her nonnative peer's suggestions. According to Chuya, her nonnative class peer could provide not only constructive comments on her content, but also sentence-level help regarding grammar. This good experience with a nonnative class peer reinforced her belief that nonnative speakers could provide high quality feedback in terms of content. Chuya also pointed out the power of culture and claimed that "cultural diversities largely influence people's perceptions." Therefore, "it is hard to provide objective opinions to anyone who is from a different culture." Her argument is that "a paper might be considered an excellent text in a peer's viewpoint but not good or even poor when evaluated by another peer who comes from a different cultural background." Chuya's remark indicates that due to different cultural norms or beliefs, people from different cultures will have different or even opposite attitudes toward the same written text.

Tian's Case

Compared with the other interviewees, Tian, the only undergraduate student among the five Chinese participants, did not favor peer feedback from native English speakers at

all. During the course of the interviews, Tian directly stated that he preferred peer feedback from nonnative speakers simply because “nonnative speakers learned English themselves, thus, they can easily find out my problems.” Moreover, Tian also expressed his need for grammatical correction and said “my nonnative classmates always pay attention to my grammatical errors and offer correction at once.” In addition, Tian doubted some undergraduate native speakers’ linguistic abilities because “[he] could easily detect a lot of grammatical errors in [his] native peers’ writing.” This fact increased Tian’s suspicion of native speakers’ English qualifications and reinforced his belief that nonnative speakers were good at identifying and correcting sentence-level errors, compared with his native speaking peers.

When asked who was more helpful with the higher order concerns in writing, Tian stated that “because students are from different countries and cultural backgrounds, offering feedback to other class peers may cause confusion even potential problems.” What annoyed him the most was that some of his classmates even directly changed his ideas. Accordingly, Tian also said if he had to choose a peer for feedback, he would prefer to have a nonnative speaker of English, and the best choice would be a peer who shares the same cultural background with his. To this end, Tian thought peer critiques, especially from native speakers, were ineffective because these peers had difficulty understanding his ideas even though he tried to explain his ideas to them. Thus, Tian held a negative attitude toward peer feedback activity in a mixed group.

Discussion

In general, the participants did not think peer review activity was effective enough in a mixed group based on their own experiences. Yet, even though they could list the problematic situations caused by peer review based on their own justification, all of them disagreed that this writing practice should be abandoned. Rather, they all expressed their desire to keep it. They admitted that peer review, to some extent, could help improve their writing in different aspects.

Examining peer review practice from each participant’s viewpoint, I could also extract that they had their own preferences for the feedback given by native and nonnative class peers. For example, Wili and Lin shared similar views—they both preferred native speakers’ advice on the linguistic level, particularly the feedback on vocabulary and sentence structure. Moreover, they both mentioned that reading peers’ writing enabled them to learn and reflect on their own writing. In the meantime, it enriched the opportunities for the nonnative English speakers to learn authentic English from their native speaking peers.

Although both Wili and Lin seemed to favor native speaking peers’ feedback on linguistic aspects, their level and concerns remained different. Obviously, Lin welcomed native speakers’ feedback largely, and his attitude even changed from repulse to reception

toward peer review practice. Wili, however, seemed to favor reading peers' writing rather than reading their feedback. In addition, she disliked the practice of offering flattering feedback, but she had to accommodate herself to the situation. The dilemma prompted Wili to reconsider the peer review practice in a mixed class.

Unlike Lin and Wili, Chuya and Tian did not see a major difference in feedback provided by their native and nonnative peers. Rather, their conventional wisdom dictated that they could get linguistic help from nonnative peers. They argued that nonnative speakers learned English step by step and had accumulated solid knowledge of English. Thus, their linguistic abilities should equal those of English native speakers'. Likewise, Yan's rewarding experience with her Korean peer demonstrated that nonnative speakers could offer effective comments like native speakers in terms of content and organization. Thus, Chuya and Tian consider nonnative peers' feedback equal to native peers'. When asked about their preference of choosing between a native or nonnative speaker for peer feedback, the answer, with one accord, was that it depends on the peer's ability, not his or her mother tongue. The quality of the feedback was most important, though reading native speakers' papers for authentic language learning was also valued.

Chuya's hesitation with accepting native peers' comments, her decision to take teacher feedback, and her satisfaction with a nonnative peer's suggestions, left her in a puzzled state. Thus, she expressed her uncertain attitude toward peer review in a mixed group. What is more, Tian's unchanged viewpoint for nonnative peer feedback and his suspicion of native speakers' qualifications in English, together with the early mentioned impolite reaction by a native speaker to Wili's feedback, highlight a trend in the data. To these Chinese students, feedback from a peer who is of the same or a similar cultural background was less problematic; it was hard for them to understand or adapt their native peers' comments. According to Chuya and Tian, culture has a major influence on writers' texts and way of thinking. Their belief seemed to reinforce Yan's opinion that meaning negotiation is significant particularly when the two parties do not share the same language or culture. This situation creates a new concern: the plausibility of review peer in an integrated class.

Another situation that made the participants uncomfortable was reading flattering feedback. They believed that reading positive comments was not as helpful as reading negative comments, which could identify their problems. Therefore, they treated negative comments seriously and quickly went through or even ignored the positive comments. Chuya, Yan and Wili mentioned a similar annoying situation: their native speakers deliberately avoid critical comments in order to not hurt nonnative speaking peers; on the other hand, some of the nonnative speakers only point out unserious flaws in their writing. Thus, peer feedback seemed meaningless in such way. Yet, they also acknowledged that positive comments were indispensable. To them, positive comments

recognized writers' hard work and could deliver confidence to the writers. In this sense, apart from receiving true compliments rather than superficial flattering words, they also welcomed constructive criticism.

When asked about providing feedback to their class peers, they all said they treated their peers' writing seriously and provided feedback carefully. The reasons for doing so were that first, since English was not their native language, they would like to provide feedback on global issues (e.g., main idea, content, rhetoric) not on local issues (e.g., word choice, grammar). Following this vein, Chuya, Yan, Lin, and Wili mentioned that their strategies were maintaining their peers' original language use unless there were serious errors being found. The participants also stated that they were extremely careful with their own language when offering feedback to their peers, especially to native speaking peers. Wili and Lin even said they did not correct native speakers' errors though they could detect them.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that first, nonnative speakers hold a neutral attitude toward peer review in a mixed group. They think it is necessary though it is not as effective as they expected due to some problems and limitations. Second, as far as the helpfulness of peer feedback is concerned, they admit that both native and nonnative speaking peer feedback can be helpful but in different ways. Third, the participants weigh the feedback given by a native and a nonnative speaker equally because they do not perceive any major differences. Fourth, peer review activity is satisfactory in some ways; it is also distractive sometimes in other ways. Fifth, there are some differences between the activities held in an integrated group and a homogenous group. Cultural influences and mutual communication seem to be particularly important in such integrated classes.

Obviously, the participants benefitted from peer review in the following four respects. First, they had opportunities to interact with their class peers, which is different from the interaction with teachers. Second, working collaboratively with class peers from different countries or cultures helped enrich their life experiences and improve their writing skills. Third, by reading peers' feedback, they could gain useful ideas in their revisions at different levels. And fourth, reading authentic language by their class peers enables them to reflect on their own writing, thus helping them identify their own strengths and weaknesses. These major advantages embodied in mixed groups are similar to those found in L2 homogenous groups. These findings are in line with some research on peer review and reinforce the common belief that peer review is a useful tool in writing (Hanson & Liu, 20005; Mendonça & Johnson, 1994; Tsui & Ng, 2000).

However, the study reveals some constraints of peer review in mixed classes. The first concern is the mistrust of peers' language proficiencies, especially of nonnative speakers' linguistic competencies. This finding matches the findings of Linden-Martin's

(1997) and McGroarty and Zhu's (1997) studies of L2 writing classes. Wili's experience with a native speaker and Lin's uncertainty about his nonnative classmates' linguistic competence echo the issue. In this regard, the study also reveals that students may provide weak, unclear, or overly critical feedback (Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998), or even counterproductive feedback which caused discomfort and uneasiness among peers. Wili's unpleasant story, Chuya's experiences of her native peers, and Tian's belief, better reflect this stance. Likewise, this phenomenon is captured in L2 classes as well (Liu & Hansen, 2002). The problems boil down to one concern, the quality of feedback.

In fact, in a mixed group, factors such as students' language competencies, cultural norms, and personal preferences directly affect the quality of feedback. Studies have already found that different cultures organize ideas differently (Connor, 1996; Kaplan, 1966). Other studies, however, put forward that L2 writers' lack of English proficiency, not cultural differences, may cause differences in their written texts (Mohan & Lo, 1985). Therefore, training students to be effective evaluators is more crucial in a mixed group than it is in a homogeneous L1 or L2 classroom, though the issue of evaluation training has been discussed largely in homogeneous L1, ESL, and EFL classrooms (Berg, 1999; Hansen & Liu, 2005; Stanley, 1992). What is more important, according to this study, is that meaning negotiation should be taken into account in training, especially meaning negotiation among students coming from different cultures. My study clearly indicates that in a mixed group, the lack of meaning negotiation may lead to distraction, even interference sometimes.

Next, although the study indicates that native speakers possess high linguistic competence in general, it also shows that nonnative speakers are able to provide moderate help in terms of language use. One of the participants only trusted his nonnative speaking peers regarding grammar use and error correction. This finding reinforces some of the previous claims by some researchers that nonnative speakers are good at providing sentence-level feedback, especially grammar suggestions (Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992; Paulus, 1999). Likewise, their opinions of major similarities between native and nonnative peer feedback reflect that in general, the participants think native and nonnative speaking peers are equally helpful in content critique and rhetorical suggestion. However, they hold different opinions of who are more helpful in lower order concerns: some of them think native speakers are more qualified than nonnative speaker; others think nonnative speakers are more helpful.

In regard to the major differences between native and nonnative speakers, the five participants' opinions vary. One issue is that due to language proficiency, sometimes, nonnative speakers' feedback is ambiguous or surface level. On the other hand, native speakers do not have linguistic barriers, but their opinions may be different from nonnative speakers'. Thus, some of them want to impart their thoughts into nonnative peers' writing

or even change the writers' original opinions completely. In another extreme, however, some students consciously avoid offering criticism but are very generous in providing positive feedback. A typical example is that some nonnative speakers from Asian countries are good at providing feedback without direct criticism.

One possible reason for why nonnative speakers offer positive or moderate feedback on peers' writing is due to the nonnative speakers' limited language ability; they cannot identify the problems, let alone provide a valid critique. Therefore, they prefer to afford affirmative feedback in their peers' papers. Another likely reason is cultural norms. For example, Asian cultures highlight harmony in groups, thus, these nonnative speakers try to avoid conflicts with group members and choose to give only encouraging feedback. Some research on L2 writing has discussed the reasons and claimed that if it is caused by nonnative speakers' limited linguistic proficiency, feedback is ineffective (Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Linden-Martin, 1997, Zhang, 1995).

However, if the reason is because of cultural practices, it is in line with some study results that nonnative speakers monitor themselves carefully in order to not precipitate conflict within the group (Allaei & Connor, 1990; Nelson & Carson, 1998). Moreover, some of the participants (i.e., Chuya and Tian) believe that the source of the problems that occurred in the integrated classes is the dissimilarity of cultures. No doubt, Confucian culture highlights teacher authority. This may be another reason to understand why some Chinese students mistrust peers' feedback (i.e., Chuya, Lin, and Tian). This finding seems to reconcile with some studies, which hold the same viewpoint (Hinkel, 1999; Scollon, 1999).

From another point of view, the study also manifests that language and culture are interwoven together. It is easy to detect from the study that having little basic knowledge of an author's culture, it is often hard for a reader to catch the author's ideas and fully understand the meaning of the written context. The likely condition that "cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other" can be seen (Pratt, 1991, as cited in Harklau, 1999, p.125). Hence, facilitating cross-cultural communication and understanding seems to be the prior step for instructors to conduct before peer review practice in an integrated class. To ESL students, apart from second language acquisition, second culture acquisition proposed by Lantolf (1999) seems equally essential.

Moreover, the participants express their consistent and firm attitude when touching upon the issue of their future expectations of peer review in an integrated class. That is, they would like to keep this activity, but expect their class peers to provide honest comments by pointing out their weaknesses as well as correcting their grammar errors because they believe that corrective feedback leads to accuracy of language use and eventually improves the quality of writing. In this connection, their suggestion echoes Nelson and Carson's (1998) claim that nonnative speakers favor the comments on their

problems. It also replicates the outcome of Mangelsdorf and Schlumberger's (1992) study that grammar correction is the priority of peer feedback from student writers' perspectives as well as Chandler's (2003) study result that corrective feedback can improve written accuracy.

Lastly, it seems apparent that the participants did not perceive too much difference between the peer review practice in a homogenous class and an integrated class. However, they admitted that peer review activities seem more challenging in an integrated class than in a homogenous class. For the former class, peer review requires nonnative speakers to go beyond language. It entails their language proficiency, familiarity with the western writing rhetoric, critical thinking ability, and cross-cultural understanding.

Limitations

Needless to say this study has some limitations. The major restriction is the limited number of participants within a single ethnic group, Chinese. Next, it is easy to determine that the five participants' ages as well as their academic experiences and fields are not identical. The different status of the participants is likely to contribute to their different attitudes. Moreover, the data are simply based on each individual participant's verbal report and my interpretation. The participants' viewpoints may change when they gain more experience with peer review. With these deficiencies, there is no possibility to generalize nonnative speakers' perceptions based on this single study. However, the study, as a source of reference, illustrates a basic picture of how peer review occurs in integrated classrooms.

Pedagogical Implications

On the whole, this study shows that nonnative speakers hold an acceptable attitude toward peer review in an integrated class and perceive it as fundamentally sound. At the same time, these nonnative speakers weigh their native and nonnative speaking peers' feedback equally, though they acknowledge that native and nonnative speaking peers have their own strengths respectively. In general, in integrated classes peer review can be labeled useful though it has some problems. The major potential problem is the quality of feedback, which is closely connected with one's language proficiency and culture. Thus, training students to become effective evaluators and providers of feedback is vital.

This study provides some pedagogical suggestions for those writing instructors who are using or intend to use peer review in their integrated classes. First, instructors must be aware that even though peer feedback is useful, using it in a mixed class is more complicated than using it in a L1 or L2 homogenous class. Factors, such as language proficiency, cultural background, individual needs, ways of thinking, manners of offering feedback, the focus of feedback, and students' self-esteem and emotional feelings will directly affect the quality of feedback. In turn, these factors will influence students'

attitudes toward and perceptions of peer review practice. Regarding these factors, writing instructors should try to investigate the source of the problems respectively and try to provide solutions to them (Liu & Hansen, 2002). In order to do so, writing instructors must pay attention to cognitive, sociocultural, and linguistic dimensions, which are represented in integrated classes.

Since the study shows that the effectiveness of peer review in mixed groups largely depends on students' language proficiencies and mutual understanding, it is important to train students to be open-minded, polite readers so that they are able to offer high quality and a quantity of feedback in an appropriate manner. In addition, guiding students to establish a trustworthy relationship and making students aware of the importance of intercultural communication are equally vital. Therefore, creating a non-threatening and trustworthy learning atmosphere for students is important.

Moreover, the main task for instructors before making a decision on whether to employ the activity of peer review is to think of what ways peer review can benefit students with various levels of language proficiencies and diverse cultural beliefs. For example, teachers should realize that L2 speakers' writing is distinct from L1 writers'; it is also necessary for them to recognize that among the group of L2 writers, each individual's writing also differs from one another. Thus, as Silva (2006) suggests for L2 writing classes, teachers in integrated classes should highlight the point that during peer review all students should be respected and understood equally and their writing must be evaluated fairly.

In addition, teachers should help English native speakers to understand that expecting their nonnative speaking peers to write perfectly in English is far from realistic because second language acquisition is a long and slow process. What is more, teachers should work out a set of approaches or strategies for both L1 and L2 students to make sure that students can gradually understand each other's ideas and expand their knowledge growth in cross-cultural communication. To sum up, teachers need to lay emphasis on improving students' linguistic and cross-cultural awareness in an integrated class. Only when instructors do so can the peer review activity at the university level function effectively.

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Appendix

Perceptions of the Practice of Peer Review in an Integrated Class

Part I. Demographic Information

Put checkmarks or write down your answer at the spaces provided below.

1. Current Degree Program: ___ BA/BS ___ MA/MS ___ PhD ___ Others
2. Gender: ___ Male ___ Female
3. Age: _____
4. Major/Department: _____
5. TOEFL scores: _____
6. How long have you been staying in an English speaking country? _____ year
_____ month

Part II. Statement Section

Please respond for each of the following statements based on your own personal experiences.

1. I like/ dislike having peer review activities in an integrated class.
2. I experienced peer feedback from native and nonnative speakers of English before, and perceived peer review activity is helpful /to some degree helpful/ not helpful with my writing.
3. I feel comfortable/uncomfortable/ no difference in reading feedback from native and /or nonnative class peers?.
4. I prefer to have a native-speaking peer /a nonnative-speaking peer / both a native and a nonnative-speaking peer/ no preference, if I have an option to choose a peer to give feedback on my writing,

5. I find peer feedback, offered by native and/or nonnative speaking peers, is helpful with the lower order concerns (e.g., sentence structure, grammar, word choice, spelling, punctuation, documentation style, etc) or/and the higher order concerns (e.g., content, organization, thesis or main ideas, introduction, body paragraphs, conclusion, etc).

Part III. Open-ended Questions Section

Please answer the following questions with as much detail as possible.

1. What are the similarities and differences between a native- and a nonnative-speaking peer feedback?
2. Is there any difference between a peer review activity held in a homogenous class and an integrated class?
3. In the future, what are your expectations of peer review in an integrated class?
4. Any other comments on peer review in an integrated class?