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State-of-the-Art Article

Peer feedback in second language writing (2005–2014)

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This article reviews research on peer feedback in second language (L2) writing published in the last decade (i.e. 2005–2014). We analyse first the theoretical underpinnings that have informed both peer feedback research and the pedagogical use of peer feedback in L2 writing instruction. We also provide a critical interpretation of existing peer feedback research and discuss seven important themes emerging from the literature, that is, (1) effectiveness of peer feedback compared with teacher and self-feedback; (2) benefits of peer feedback for feedback-givers; (3) computer-mediated peer feedback; (4) peer feedback training; (5) student stances and motives; (6) peer interaction and group dynamics; and (7) cultural issues in peer feedback. Next, we examine the contextual and methodological issues in peer feedback research and then conclude the article with implications for future research.

1. Introduction

Peer feedback, as a major peer activity for learning in L2 writing classes, has attracted much attention from writing researchers and practitioners in different parts of the world (Min 2005; Rollinson 2005; Villamil & Guerrero 2006; Hyland & Hyland 2006; Lundstrom & Baker 2009; Hu & Lam 2010; Liu 2012; Zhu & Mitchell 2012). Peer feedback, also referred to as 'peer response', 'peer review', 'peer assessment', and 'peer editing', describes the activity during which learners provide and receive feedback on their peers' writing in the written and/or oral mode in pairs or small groups (Zhu 2001; Liu & Hansen 2002). In this paper, we adopt the definition of peer feedback provided by Liu & Hansen (2002: 1): peer feedback refers to 'the use of learners as sources of information and interactants for each other in such a way that learners assume roles and responsibilities normally taken on by a formally trained teacher, tutor, or editor in commenting on and critiquing each other's drafts in both written and oral formats in the process of writing'. The term 'peer feedback' refers to the peer feedback activity as a whole, including both the process and the product of this activity. When we refer to the process of peer feedback, we use terms like 'peer feedback process', 'the process of peer feedback', 'peer interaction', and 'peer collaboration'. Terms like 'peer

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comments' or 'feedback/comments provided by peers' refer to the product of peer feedback, i.e. the actual feedback or comments provided by peers.

Although a growing body of research has investigated various aspects of peer feedback in different writing contexts (Hu & Lam 2010), little research has presented a critical overview of studies on peer feedback in L2 writing. Recent years have seen a surge of interest in feedback in writing in general and written corrective feedback in particular, and as a result a number of significant reviews have been published (Ferris 2003, 2010, 2012; Hyland & Hyland 2006; Bitchener & Ferris 2012). Although peer feedback is reviewed in Hyland and Hyland's (2006) state-of-the-art article on feedback in writing in L2 contexts, the studies referred to were mostly conducted before 2005. Given the centrality of peer feedback in L2 writing and the vibrant research on peer feedback in the past decade (e.g. Min 2005, 2006, 2008; Hu 2006; Jones et al. 2006; Nelson & Carson 2006; Choi 2007; Jin 2007; Hu & Lam 2010; Zhao 2010, 2014; Yang 2011; Yu & Lee 2014, 2015), a systematic and comprehensive review of peer feedback in L2 writing is warranted.

The aim of this article is therefore to provide a critical discussion of the major theories, themes and research methodologies in the existing studies on peer feedback, and to identify the potential research gaps and areas for future research. This article brings together research and development in peer feedback in L2 writing from refereed journal articles, monographs, book chapters, conference proceedings, as well as doctoral dissertations published over the past ten years (i.e. 2005–2014). The corpus was established through a literature search in widely used databases on language education and applied linguistics including ERIC (the Educational Resource Information Center), Scopus, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (PQDT), Education Index/Abstracts, Cambridge Collection Online, Conference Proceedings Citation Index- Social Science & Humanities (CPCI-SSH), Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts (LLBA), Academic Search Premier, and Web of Science. The World Wide Web (like Google academic search) was also used as an additional resource to search for relevant empirical studies on peer feedback in L2 writing. The keywords used for the literature search include peer feedback/peer response/peer review/peer assessment/peer editing/peer interaction + English as a second language (ESL)/English as a foreign language (EFL)/L2 writing. Based on reading and re-reading of the titles, abstracts, research methods sections, as well as conclusions of the studies identified through the initial literature research, we excluded irrelevant or non-empirical studies and retained the empirical studies on peer feedback in L2 writing as the body of research for the synthesis. A content analysis approach was used to analyse the selected studies which were first categorized according to their themes and foci through constant comparison and contrast, and then categorized according to the research methodologies/methods adopted in these studies.

The review of theoretical issues and themes in recent empirical studies on peer feedback in L2 writing can present how the recent research advances knowledge in the field, and show how the multidisciplinary theories and the multifarious contexts have informed the current peer feedback research and contributed new knowledge to the teaching and learning of L2 writing. Given that little research has discussed the methodological issues in the existing literature on peer feedback, this article also briefly examines the research methods and approaches that have been employed in current peer feedback studies, yielding an overall picture of the research paradigms involved in peer feedback research. In particular, the article will illustrate

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how the use of different research methodologies and methods can help generate useful and interesting findings to enrich our knowledge of peer feedback in L2 writing, and it will explore promising alternatives to address the unresolved issues in peer feedback research. Overall, a review of peer feedback in L2 writing is significant since it can synthesize the salient issues that have been explored in the literature, provide insights into research on peer feedback in L2 writing, suggest new directions for future research, and provide implications for practice in the classroom.

We begin the review by summarizing various theoretical perspectives that have informed the use of peer feedback in the L2 writing classroom and research on peer feedback in L2 writing. We then go on to analyse the strands of research that have emerged from our review of the recent literature on peer feedback in L2 writing, synthesize the major findings of the research, and identify convergence, divergence, and omissions in the research. Contextual and methodological issues are then examined, and implications for future research are provided toward the end of the paper.

2. Theoretical/conceptual issues on peer feedback research

The use of peer feedback in L2 writing instruction has drawn support from a number of theories from different disciplines including writing, second language acquisition (SLA), applied linguistics, education, cognitive and psycholinguistic fields (Vygotsky 1987; Swain & Lapkin 1998, 2002; Lantolf 2000; Liu & Hansen 2002; Storch 2002, 2004; Lantolf & Thorne 2006; Swain 2006; Villamil & Guerrero 2006; Zhu & Mitchell 2012). These theories include process writing theory, collaborative learning theory, interactionist theory in SLA and cognitive and psycholinguistic fields, and sociocultural theory (SCT).

Process writing theory has shifted the attention of L1 and L2 writing researchers from the finished text to the process in which writing takes place (Hayes & Flower 1980; Hayes 2012). This perspective focuses on the process of writing, and views writing as a dynamic, nonlinear, and recursive process of meaning-making and knowledge-transformation rather than a product-oriented activity (Flower & Hayes 1981; Chenoweth & Hayes 2001). In the process-oriented writing classroom, peer feedback serves as a major component that facilitates the process of writing 'by providing opportunities for them [students] to discover and negotiate meaning, to explore effective ways of expressing meaning, to practice a wide range of language and writing skills, and to assume a more active role in the learning process' (Hu 2005: 322). The collaborative learning theory implies that feedback from peers has potential to contribute to learning, which is considered a socially and collectively constructed activity. Peer feedback can facilitate peer interaction and collaboration; it creates 'a facilitative socio-interactive environment in which L2 learners receive social support and scaffolding from peers.' (Hu & Lam 2010: 373). It is through collaboration among peers that students acquire knowledge such as linguistic knowledge and writing skills (Bruffee 1984; Liu & Hansen 2002). The interactionist theory in SLA and cognitive and psycholinguistic fields emphasize the important role of various types of explicit and implicit feedback on language development, and also argue for the positive role of peer feedback in L2 writing development by maintaining that L2 writers need to engage in meaning negotiation and discussion to

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facilitate SLA (Long 1983, 1985; Long & Porter 1985; Swain & Lapkin 1998, 2002; Swain 2006). The interactionist theory suggests that peer interaction during peer feedback facilitates learning by providing L2 writers with sufficient comprehensible input and negative feedback so that students can modify their own output, test hypotheses, and notice gaps in their interlanguage system (Hyland & Hyland 2006).

The role of peer feedback in L2 writing development can also be approached from the SCT perspective, which maintains that all higher forms of learning and cognitive development are social in nature (Vygotsky 1978; Lantolf 2000). SCT highlights the social and situated nature of learning – i.e. individual learning and cognitive development cannot be isolated from its social and cultural contexts (Lantolf & Thorne 2006; Villamil & Guerrero 2006; Storch 2007). Research in this paradigm has provided much evidence that peer interaction (learner–learner interaction) and collaborative learning can create L2 learning opportunities and lead to social and cognitive gains (Ohta 2000; Storch 2001; Dobao 2012). It is believed that L2 writing development may be socially and culturally mediated in the zone of proximal development (ZPD), 'the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers' (Vygotsky 1978: 86). Peer feedback provides 'a favourable instructional environment for readers and writers to work within their respective [. . .] ZPD' (Villamil & Guerrero 1998: 495). From this perspective, peer comments are helpful to achieve the transition from interpsychological to intrapsychological functioning and help student writers move from stages of other-regulation (i.e. performing with assistance from others like parents, teachers, and peers) to self-regulation (i.e. the ability to accomplish activities with minimal or no external support and of independent problem solving) (Villamil & Guerrero 2006).

Additionally, a sub-branch and extension of SCT – activity theory (AT) – has been used to inform research on peer feedback in L2 writing (Thorne 2004; Jin & Zhu 2010; Zhu & Mitchell 2012; Yu 2014; Yu & Lee 2014, 2015). AT is broadly defined as 'a philosophical and cross-disciplinary framework for studying different forms of human practices as developmental processes, with both individual and social levels interlinked at the same time' (Kuutti 1996: 25). AT was developed from the construct of mediation, which holds that humans employ physical tools (e.g. paper, machine, clocks, computers) and symbolic artefacts (e.g. language, religion, signs) to mediate their relationships with others and the world (Vygotsky 1978; Lantolf & Thorne 2006). AT maintains that socially-organized and goal-directed mediated activities play a crucial role in human development (Leont'ev 1978, 1981; Engeström 1987, 2001). Informed by AT, peer feedback is conceptualized as a collective and situated activity, during which students as agents of the activity system use a range of (cognitive and sociocultural) strategies (Lei 2008) to facilitate collaborative learning and achieve the goals and object of the activity. Some recent peer feedback research, which will be reviewed in Section 3, has adopted AT to examine student stances and motives (Jin & Zhu 2010; Zhu & Mitchell 2012; Yu & Lee 2015).

In summary, the theories examined in the above can provide theoretical insights into peer feedback research and inform the pedagogical use of peer feedback in the classroom. For example, process writing theory provides theoretical support for peer feedback studies from which pedagogical implications of the use of peer feedback in the classroom can be

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drawn. Collaborative learning theory/interactionist theory can be used to frame research that investigates peer feedback issues like peer interaction and collaboration, student stance, group dynamics, and peer corrective feedback, with clear pedagogical implications for the classroom. SCT and AT offer theoretical frameworks for studies on peer interaction (scaffolding, mediation, language use, patterns of interaction), student motives, and computer-mediated peer feedback, again with direct practical implications for teachers. Besides, our analysis of recent literature suggests that there is a need to distinguish theories informing the pedagogical use of peer feedback in the classroom from theories that inform research on peer feedback. While the above theories pertain to the pedagogical side and inform the actual empirical studies on peer feedback as well, other theories have informed the research side in particular. These include Halliday's functional-semantic view of dialogue (Jones et al. 2006), speech act theory (Nguyen 2008a), the ecological perspective (Vorobel 2013), and cognitive theories (Yang 2010, 2011), which will be reviewed in Section 3. While these theories focus on different aspects of peer feedback, they offer theoretical insights into empirical studies on peer feedback in L2 writing, thus pushing forward the frontiers of knowledge and contributing to both peer feedback research and practice.

3. Critical interpretation of existing peer feedback research

Informed by theories discussed above, seven major strands of research have emerged from our review of the recent literature on peer feedback in L2 writing: (1) effectiveness of peer feedback compared with teacher and self-feedback; (2) benefits of peer feedback for feedback-givers; (3) computer-mediated peer feedback; (4) peer feedback training; (5) student stances and motives; (6) peer interaction and group dynamics; and (7) cultural issues in peer feedback. In this section, we first provide a critical interpretation of research areas about the effectiveness and benefits of peer feedback (including computer-mediated peer feedback) and peer feedback training (Sections 3.1–3.4) in which the focus is on the peer feedback activity as a whole. We then review studies that particularly investigated the process of peer feedback (Sections 3.5–3.6), which provide a better understanding of students' participation in this activity and the learning process involved in peer feedback. Finally, we present a critical review of studies that examine how cultural issues influence the peer feedback process and outcomes (Section 3.7).

3.1 Effectiveness of peer feedback compared with teacher and self-feedback

The theories in different disciplines examined in the above have illustrated the instructional and socio-cognitive benefits of peer feedback, such as enhancing L2 writing development through incorporating peer comments in revision, increasing reader awareness, engaging learners in meaning negotiation, providing scaffolding and social support, as well as other benefits like facilitating the development of learner autonomy, promoting self-regulation in learning, and developing social skills (Liu & Hansen 2002; Hu 2005; Hyland & Hyland 2006). Despite the theoretical support of the positive benefits of peer feedback to L2 writers,

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mixed findings were produced in early studies (before 2005), and firm causal evidence is as yet unavailable (Hyland & Hyland 2006; Hu & Lam 2010). Thus, a number of recent studies have continued to explore the effectiveness of peer feedback in L2 writing development by comparing peer feedback with teacher and self-feedback (Yang, Badger & Yu 2006; Suzuki 2008, 2009; Zhao 2008, 2010; Lin 2009; Chen 2010; Grami 2010; Diab 2011; Séror 2011; Yang 2011; Alhaisoni & Alzuoud 2012; Birjandi & Tamjid 2012; Chang 2012; Johnson 2012; Tian 2012; Lam 2013; Memari Hanjani 2013; Ruegg 2014).

Diab (2010) examined the effectiveness of peer and self-feedback in reducing specific language errors in English as a foreign language (EFL) university students' writing in Lebanon. This study shows that students in the peer feedback group reduced their rule-based errors (subject/verb agreement, pronoun agreement) in revised essays more than those in the self-feedback group. Compared with self-editing, peer feedback provided collaborative dialogue and meaning negotiation that mediated L2 learning and increased students' awareness about the relationship between meaning and form. Diab (2011) found that peer feedback can help EFL university students improve their writing significantly more than self-feedback and attributed these differences to the use of language learning strategies, peer interaction, and engagement with language during peer feedback. Séror (2011) conducted an eight-month longitudinal ethnographic case study of five international Japanese undergraduate students' feedback experiences while working on their L2 writing in their content courses at a large Canadian university. While this study confirmed the value of teacher feedback, the findings highlight language learners' perceived importance of peer feedback for their L2 writing development. Peer feedback was seen as one of the 'valuable sources of advice on writing that could compensate for perceived problems with content instructors' feedback' (Séror 2011: 118).

In EFL contexts, there is a general perception that teacher feedback is more useful than peer feedback. This is borne out in the study by Yang et al. (2006), who compared peer and teacher feedback in the Chinese EFL writing context. Over 90% of the students in the teacher feedback class found teacher feedback 'useful' or 'very useful' while over 60% of the students in the peer feedback class labelled peer feedback as 'useful' or 'very useful'. Regarding the impact of peer and teacher feedback, the EFL learners in the teacher feedback class used 90% of teacher feedback while their counterparts in the peer feedback class incorporated 67% of peer feedback. It is noteworthy that the peer feedback group made more meaning changes than did the teacher feedback group, and hence it can be concluded that both peer and teacher feedback are useful for student learning, though perhaps in different ways. Ruegg (2014) examined changes in L2 writing self-efficacy over one academic year between two groups (teacher feedback group vs. peer feedback group) of Japanese EFL university students and found that the teacher feedback group increased in L2 writing self-efficacy significantly more than the peer feedback group. In Chen's (2010) study about Taiwan EFL master's students' perceptions of comments from their peers and writing consultants on their thesis proposals, it was found that the writing consultants focused on local errors while peer comments were related to higher order issues. Peer feedback, therefore, does have an important role to play in EFL contexts. Xu & Liu (2010) conducted an empirical study of anonymous feedback in a Chinese EFL context and showed that the students incorporated a similar percentage of teacher and peer comments in their revisions. The study also found that

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students tended to provide macro-level (overall comments, organization, etc.) and positive comments while teacher comments focused on form, content, and mechanics. Overall, these studies suggest that both peer and teacher feedback have a role to play in student learning, and that peer comments tend to focus on meaning-related issues.

There is research that suggests that peer feedback may be even more beneficial than teacher feedback. Zhao (2010) examined 18 Chinese EFL learners' use and understanding of peer and teacher feedback. Although the findings of this study indicated that the participants incorporated more teacher feedback (74%) than peer feedback (46%) in their revisions, only 58% of teacher comments, in comparison with 83% of peer comments, were incorporated into revisions with their significance or value being understood by the student writers. Such findings suggest that EFL learners may not fully understand teacher feedback, and that they may benefit more from peer than teacher comments.

Most recent studies, however, indicate that teacher, peer and self-feedback can serve different purposes in students' text revisions and suggest that all these feedback approaches should be integrated into the L2 writing classroom (e.g. Matsuno 2007; Suzuki 2008; Birjandi & Tamjid 2012; Lam 2013). Suzuki (2008) analysed Japanese EFL university students' processes of negotiation in self-feedback and peer feedback. The findings indicate that while more episodes of negotiation appeared during peer feedback, more text changes occurred during self-feedback. This study suggests that peer feedback and self-feedback could serve different purposes: peer feedback can provide opportunities for students to discuss topics, content, and ideas in writing while self-feedback enables students to pay attention to language form like word choice and grammar accuracy. Birjandi & Tamjid's (2012) experimental study found that the Iranian university students in the experimental group who employed self-feedback, peer feedback, together with teacher feedback, made maximum improvements in EFL writing. Lam (2013) examined the extent to which self-, peer, and tutor assessment facilitated or inhibited Hong Kong EFL university students' text revision. The data analysis revealed that each feedback approach had a role to play in text revision and that multiple sources of feedback should be used in the writing classroom.

Overall, recent research has provided generally positive evidence to support the use of peer feedback in L2 writing classes compared with early studies (e.g. Connor & Asenavage 1994; Carson & Nelson 1994; Zhang 1995; Paulus 1999). This strand of research is significant as it provides empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of peer feedback in L2 writing, though the long-term impact of peer feedback on students' L2 writing development and firm causal evidence are still unclear. Apart from investigating the more immediate impacts of peer feedback on text revision and writing quality, (quasi-) experimental and ethnographic research can be conducted to examine the impact of peer feedback on different aspects of students' writing development (e.g. language accuracy, fluency, content, and organization) over a longer term (e.g. one academic year).

3.2 Benefits of peer feedback for feedback-givers

While benefits of peer feedback for student writers have been identified in the literature, relatively less research has investigated the possible benefits for the feedback-givers, who

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review essays and offer feedback to their peers (Topping 2010). Lundstrom & Baker's study (2009) investigated whether receiving or giving feedback was more beneficial to ESL university student writers. While the control group ('receivers') received peer feedback but did not offer feedback to other students' writing, the experimental group ('givers') gave feedback but received no peer feedback over one semester. The analysis of students' writing ability at the beginning and end of the semester revealed that the feedback-givers made more significant gains in their writing than the feedback-receivers, and the givers with lower language proficiency made more gains than those with higher language proficiency. In addition, their study showed that feedback-givers made more gains on global (organization, development, cohesion) than local aspects (vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics) of L2 writing. However, the study was not conducted in real educational contexts since the researchers separated giving feedback from receiving feedback in the experiment, and there was no interaction between feedback-givers and -receivers. Taking a qualitative approach, Berggren (2015) examined how Swedish EFL secondary students improved their writing by giving feedback. This study focused on two classes of Swedish lower secondary students using data from their drafts, feedback criteria list, and feedback forms. The findings suggested that the peer reviewers (i.e. feedback-givers) raised their awareness of audience and genre, and peer review stimulated their further revisions and improved their writing at the global level (content in particular).

While the above studies reveal positive benefits of peer feedback for feedback-givers, some other studies have found contradictory results. For instance, Trautmann (2006) conducted an experimental study to investigate the extent to which university students learned through giving versus receiving feedback from peers. The findings showed that receiving peer feedback was more useful than giving feedback in triggering revision in students' research reports. Moreover, 70% of the participants stated that their revisions were primarily caused by the feedback received rather than by providing feedback on their peers' writing. Rosalia (2010) adopted a mixed-methods approach (including writing proficiency tests, interviews, peer comments, and documents like field notes and writing samples) to investigate the impact of feedback-giving on feedback-givers' writing proficiency. Ten Japanese EFL writers as feedback-givers participated in a 12-week study. It was found that the experience of giving feedback did not improve students' own writing quality on timed persuasive writing tests although essays written by feedback-givers included a greater range of metadiscoursal features.

In brief, the current studies on the benefits of feedback-giving illustrated some positive impacts of peer feedback on feedback-givers' writing performance and text revisions. However, there are inconsistent findings, probably due to the different contexts in which these studies were conducted (e.g. ESL/EFL, university/school setting) and the different research methods employed (quasi-experimental study, qualitative study, and mixed-methods approach). More empirical studies are needed to address how L2 learners might benefit from providing feedback and how such experience might impact on their writing development. More importantly, classroom-based research with multiple sources of data (e.g. drafts of writing, text revisions, stimulated recalls, and interviews with both teachers and students) can be conducted to examine this issue from an ecological perspective.

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3.3 Computer-mediated peer feedback

With the rapid advance of educational technologies and the widespread application of CMC (computer-mediated communication) in language education, peer feedback via CMC modes has become an alternative to face-to-face peer feedback (Hyland & Hyland 2006; Guardado & Shi 2007; Ho & Savignon 2007; Ware & O'Dowd 2008; Ma 2010, 2012; Chen 2012; Goldin, Ashley & Schunn 2012; Chan 2013; Yeh, Lo & Chu 2014). CMC tools like word processors, chat rooms, wikis, blogs, emails, WebCT, Moodle, and Blackboard are widely used in the teaching and learning of L2 writing, allowing students to reflect on and give each other feedback outside the classroom (AbuSeileek 2006; Ciftci & Kocoglu 2012; Wu et al. 2015). In this section, we review studies that are related to computer-mediated peer feedback in L2 writing, focusing specifically on two significant issues: (1) the effects and benefits of CMC peer feedback; and (2) synchronous and asynchronous CMC peer feedback.

The first significant issue relates to how e-feedback compares with traditional feedback in terms of its effects on students' feedback, participation, and text revisions. Breuch (2004) examined three features of CMC peer feedback – time (either real-time or delayed time), space (beyond geographic boundaries), and interaction (mainly text-based) – and argued that these unique features may change the ways in which peer feedback is undertaken and shape the peer feedback process and its outcomes. Research shows that online peer feedback provides a less threatening environment that encourages greater and more equal member participation than face-to-face peer feedback (Savignon & Roithmeier 2004; Ho & Savignon 2007). It can provide students with opportunities for meaning negotiation and interaction (Chang, Chen & Hsu 2011). However, there is inconclusive evidence about the impact of computer-mediated peer feedback on the quality of peer comments and text revisions (Fitze 2006; Guardado & Shi 2007).

The effects and benefits of computer-mediated peer feedback have been explored by examining the types and quality of peer comments generated from online peer feedback (Chang 2012; AbuSeileek 2013). Some studies indicate that the CMC peer feedback enables students to provide feedback that focuses more on macro issues in writing like content and text structure compared with traditional peer feedback (e.g. Jones et al. 2006), while contrary results are found in other studies (e.g. Chang 2012; Wu et al. 2015) showing that students make the most global-revision-oriented comments in the traditional face-to-face mode. Other studies have focused on the impact of online peer feedback on text revisions and students' writing performance. AbuSeileek & Abualsha's (2014) found that students who received computer-mediated corrective feedback achieved better results in their overall test scores than students in the control condition who did not receive feedback. In Ciftci & Kocoglu's (2012) study, the Turkish EFL students in the experimental group (blog-based feedback) showed better writing performance in their revised drafts than those in the control group (face-to-face oral discussions for peer feedback).

Although online peer feedback was found to increase students' learning time outside the classroom, it does not necessarily increase learners' motivation, engagement, and autonomy (Cheng 2009). Student attitudes to online peer feedback are mixed (Choi 2007; Ho & Savignon 2007; Rourke et al. 2008; Cote 2013; Zhang et al. 2014). For example, in Choi's (2007) study, some Hong Kong EFL university student participants were found to have

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reservations about the effectiveness of online peer feedback. Guardado & Shi (2007) reported Canadian ESL university students' mixed feelings toward online peer feedback. In their study, many ESL university students found online textual exchanges more challenging than face-to-face interaction and shied away from writing back to reviewers to clarify and negotiate meaning, making online peer feedback a one-way communication process, and leaving a high percentage of peer comments unaddressed.

Despite the mixed findings regarding students' attitudes to online peer feedback, research has found that online peer feedback can reap a number of other benefits. For instance, online peer feedback can be used for both formative assessment and stimulate students' interest in improving their writing (Liou & Peng 2009). Online peer feedback can mediate the formation and shift of students' motives, enhance students' motivation and awareness of the audience and the importance of revision, reduce their stress, and cultivate positive attitudes toward writing (Choi 2007; Jin & Zhu 2010). Computer-mediated peer feedback allows students to offer remote feedback asynchronously so that it can reduce the psychological pressure on learners who are unwilling to give feedback in face-to-face contexts (Savignon & Roithmeier 2004; Ho & Savignon 2007).

Another significant issue related to CMC peer feedback concerns the two different modes: asynchronous and synchronous CMC (ACMC vs. SCMC) peer feedback. While early studies have shed light on the advantages and disadvantages of asynchronous and synchronous peer feedback (Braine 2001, 2004; Honeycutt 2001; Liu & Sadler 2003; Tuzi 2004), several recent studies have continued to examine the impacts of the two different modes of online peer feedback. Chang (2009) used a case study approach to examine EFL students' engagement in peer review activities, commenting types made by reviewers, and students' perceptions of peer review via SCMC and ACMC modes. The results revealed that while both SCMC and ACMC led to students' high engagement, the different nature of time use and interaction patterns between the two online modes still resulted in some discrepancy among commenting types: comments via SCMC mode focused more on local problems whereas comments from ACMC balanced both global and local problems. Lin (2005) investigated the different mediating effects between synchronous (chat room) and asynchronous (web-based bulletin board) peer feedback in facilitating student revision processes. The data analysis showed that while the media shaped the way students talked in terms of language functions and conversational focuses, the modes of peer feedback did not have direct impact on students' subsequent revisions.

Drawing upon studies on both meaning negotiation and collaborative learning in L2 contexts and in synchronous CMC, Liang (2008) proposed a framework which outlines six major types of synchronous online interaction (meaning negotiation, content discussion, error correction, task management, social talk, and technical action) to explore L2 peer groups' engagement in a summary writing and revision task. The patterns observed across the six groups showed that while the majority of the turns were focused on social talk and content discussion, there were few turns for meaning negotiation, error correction, task management, and technical action. In a later study, Liang (2010) explored synchronous online interaction among three small peer groups in a Taiwanese undergraduate EFL writing class. The analysis of students' online discourse showed that social talk, task management, and content discussion predominated in the online discussion, whereas meaning negotiation, error correction, and

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technical actions seldom occurred. Further analysis suggested that relationships among different types of online interaction and their connections with subsequent writing and revision were complex and depended on group makeup and dynamics.

These examples from the literature show that use of CMC peer feedback is a growing trend that can bring about positive learning effects on L2 writing. Factors such as the mode, the nature of the task, and the relationship between reviewers and writers can influence the efficacy of online peer feedback (Lin 2005; Ciftci & Kocoglu 2012). Before conducting online peer reviews in the writing classroom, teachers should look at why and whether students should use computer technology (Cheng 2009). The key lies in how CMC peer feedback is managed and how effectively it is incorporated into the writing programme (Choi 2007). Teacher training is essential to ensure the efficacy of CMC peer feedback, and writing teachers have a crucial role to play when incorporating internet technologies into writing instruction (Liou & Peng 2009). While training should be provided to students, they also need to alter their traditional learning practices to embrace new, technology-enhanced learning systems (Lin & Yang 2011). Therefore, more contextualized research is needed to explore how online peer feedback training can facilitate the use of CMC peer feedback in L2 writing classrooms. The roles of teachers and students, as well as their beliefs and practices regarding CMC peer feedback also warrant further exploration. No study has so far investigated the long-term effects of CMC peer feedback on students' writing performance. Thus, more empirical research is needed to investigate its long-term impact on students' writing development. Action research, case studies, and quasi-experimental studies can be carried out to explore how the different modes of online peer feedback, and can be best combined in L2 writing instruction and maximize the benefits of peer feedback for students' writing development (Burns 2010; Trotman 2010).

3.4 Peer feedback training

Peer feedback research in recent years has addressed the role of training, i.e. how to make full use of peer feedback and maximize its benefits for students' writing development (Hu 2005; Min 2008; Hu & Lam 2010; Crinon 2012; Rahimi 2013). A few publications offer recommendations and descriptive accounts of classroom activities and assignments aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of peer feedback in L2 writing. Hansen & Liu (2005) provided concrete principles (e.g. discuss students' prior experiences with peer feedback and group work; provide students with linguistic strategies; model the peer feedback process) to guide teachers to develop effective peer feedback tasks before, during, and after peer feedback. Based on a summary of the major arguments in favour of and against peer feedback in the ESL writing class, Rollinson (2005) discussed how L2 writing teachers can develop appropriate implementation procedures and create a positive environment for effective peer feedback activities. For example, the objectives of pre-training should mainly concern three areas: awareness-raising, productive group interaction, and productive response and revision. Ren & Hu (2012) analysed the literature on peer feedback among Chinese ESL/EFL learners and identified effective training approaches (e.g. raising students' awareness of peer review as a beneficial learning activity, developing students' communicative strategies, and teaching them

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appropriate language for effective feedback) and implementation strategies (e.g. providing feedback structure by using peer feedback sheets or guiding questions, and assessing peer feedback) to help L2 writing practitioners to maximize the benefits of peer feedback as a pedagogical activity.

A number of empirical studies have been conducted to explore the effects of peer feedback training on students' revisions and writing quality (Hu 2005, 2006; Min 2005, 2006, 2008; Kamimura 2006; Liou & Peng 2009; Hu & Lam 2010; Lam 2010; Van Steendam et al. 2010; Goldberg 2012; Kong 2013; Rahimi 2013; Yang & Meng 2013). For example, in Min's (2005) study, peer feedback training was provided to her EFL university students in Taiwan. She not only gave an in-class demonstration and modelled the peer feedback procedure but she also conducted two teacher-student conferences with each student outside of class. The findings showed that after the peer feedback training the number of peer comments increased, and there were more significant comments on global issues. Min (2006) also examined the effects of trained peer feedback on EFL students' revision types and writing quality and found that the peer feedback training significantly influenced students' incorporation of peer comments into text revisions and enhanced the writing quality.

Hu (2005) conducted a three-year action research study in which he offered six different kinds of peer feedback training activities to ESL university students in Singapore: awareness-raising (whole class discussion and small group discussion), demonstration (sample peer comments on excerpts), practice (whole class response to a draft written by a previous student), reflection and instruction (instruction in appropriate response behaviour), explanation of procedures (explanation of the use of the guiding questions and error list), and pre-response review (a teacher-led brief review of key aspects of peer review). The training programme developed students' positive attitudes toward peer feedback, improved their academic writing at both local and global levels, and facilitated students' acquisition of academic writing skills.

Liou & Peng (2009) reported the training effects on computer-mediated peer feedback among Taiwanese EFL university students. A training session with two phases was provided in the study. During the first phase, the writing teachers used peer feedback sheets adapted from Min (2005), and guided the students to provide useful peer feedback. During the second phase, the teachers guided the students to analyse two drafts of an article and discuss the differences between the two versions, illustrating examples of good peer feedback. The students in the study made more revision-oriented comments and had more success in revising their writing after receiving the peer feedback training. Their study identified that blog-enhanced peer feedback instruction could stimulate students' interest in improving their writing. Yang & Meng (2013) examined the effects of online peer feedback training on Taiwanese EFL university students and found that online peer feedback training can help students (less proficient students in particular) improve their peer feedback practice and writing skills. The less proficient students could detect and correct both local and global errors in their own and peers' texts after the peer feedback training. However, while student texts improved due to peer feedback, the more proficient students did not make much progress as it was found that they did not trust their peers as the less proficient students did.

A recent study on peer feedback training by Rahimi (2013) investigated the effects of peer feedback training on the quality of feedback, revisions, and writing in the long run. The results suggested that the trained students shifted attention from formal aspects of writing to

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global comments (on content and organization of writing) after training, while the feedback provided by untrained students mainly addressed errors. The results also indicated that the trained group made significant improvement in their writing in the long run and produced writing of a much higher quality than the untrained group.

Overall, research has found that peer feedback training is significant for successful peer feedback in L2 writing. Research suggests that to enhance the effectiveness of peer feedback, L2 writing teachers' scaffolding and intervention are needed. They need to carefully design the peer feedback procedure, provide students with sufficient training, and adjust the training procedure according to their own teaching contexts. However, in most of the empirical studies on peer feedback training, teacher training focused on how to help students identify problems and provide comments. Future research might explore how to train students to collaborate and interact and produce more collaborative dialogues and examine the training effects.

3.5 Student stances and motives

A few studies on peer feedback in L2 writing have focused on student stances and motives (Jin 2007; Min 2008; Jin & Zhu 2010; Zhu & Mitchell 2012; Wakabayashi 2013; Yu & Lee 2015). This strand of research provides 'a holistic perspective on student participation in peer response through examining both what students focus on and how they comment on peer writing during peer response' (Zhu & Mitchell 2012: 363–364).

Student stances are defined as the roles that peer readers and writers adopt toward the written essay, the writers, and the peer feedback activity (Nelson & Murphy 1993; Min 2008; Zhu & Mitchell 2012). Early studies have shown that L2 students take different stances (e.g. interpretive stance, prescriptive stance, collaborative stance, and authoritative stance) toward peer feedback (Mangelsdorf & Schumberger 1992; Lockhart & Ng 1995). Recent studies, however, have focused on the dynamic nature of student stances and related them to student motives, patterns of interaction, and text revisions (Min 2008; Zhu & Mitchell 2012; Yu 2014). For instance, Min (2008) examined the changes of reviewer stances and writer beliefs of these stances prior to and after peer review training in a Taiwanese EFL writing class. The participants were trained to produce revision-oriented commentaries in the programme. The commentary analysis, together with retrospective interviews with the writers, revealed that the student stances changed from a dominant prescriptive stance to a relatively more collaborative stance, which was more beneficial to students' learning during peer feedback.

Research on student motives in peer feedback, on the other hand, has examined why students (dis)engage in peer feedback activities and what goals drive them to participate in peer feedback. Taking an AT perspective, Jin & Zhu (2010) examined two ESL students' motives for attending online peer feedback tasks in an academic writing class. The findings of their study showed that the two students 'were often driven by multiple heterogeneous motives that were triggered and maintained by the use of technology and their previous experience with the technological tool' (2010: 296). The study has provided insights into the formation and shifts of student motives within and across computer-mediated peer feedback tasks. Guided by the constructs of activity and motive in AT, Yu & Lee's (2015) case study investigated two Chinese university students' motives for participating in group peer feedback

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activities in the EFL writing classroom. The analysis of the multiple sources of data including video recordings of peer feedback sessions, semi-structured interviews, stimulated recalls, and student texts indicated that the two students' group peer feedback activities were driven and defined by their motives, and student motives could have great impact on students' participation in group peer feedback and their text revisions.

In order to better understand L2 writers' participation in peer feedback activities, several recent studies have explored the relationship between student stances and motives. From an AT perspective, Zhu & Mitchell (2012) revealed that students' motives play a significant role in guiding students' actions in peer feedback activities. Driven by the motive to improve the learning process, one of the two student participants adopted a reader stance that focused on analysing peer writings and providing comments according to the rhetoric rules, regulations and concepts about L2 writing. However, the other student took a writer stance that gave attention to reader needs and elicited reviewer comments due to her motive of making the writing clear for the reader. Also taking AT as the interpretative framework, Yu (2014) found that student motives can influence student stances for group peer feedback in L2 writing. Specifically, the study showed that EFL university students with motives focusing on feedback-giving or the learning process of peer feedback tend to take a collaborative stance during peer feedback, which is conducive to their learning and text revisions.

Research on student stances and motives is meaningful as it pays attention to L2 writers' agency during peer feedback and can explain why some students benefit from peer feedback while others do not (Zhu & Mitchell 2012; Yu & Lee 2015). However, we still have insufficient knowledge about student stances and motives for different modes of peer feedback (e.g. pair work vs. group work; face-to-face peer feedback vs. computer-mediated peer feedback; written peer feedback vs. oral peer feedback) and how their stances and motives impact on their participation in these different types of peer feedback activities. More evidence is also needed regarding the influences of student stances and motives for peer feedback on students' text revisions and writing quality. To address these issues, both case studies and (quasi-) experimental research can be conducted in different educational settings. Such studies can also provide insights into how student stances and motives are shaped by the L2 writers' sociocultural contexts and their belief systems, contributing to research on both peer feedback and collaborative learning in L2 writing.

3.6 Peer interaction and group dynamics

Another related strand of research has dealt with peer interaction (e.g. patterns of interaction, and language use in peer interaction) and group dynamics in peer feedback. Such research is informed by two major theories of learning: the psycholinguistic theory of interaction and Vygotsky's SCT (Vygotsky 1987; Long 1996). The studies have focused on how students interact in pair and small group activities of peer feedback, and how the nature of peer interaction affects learning outcomes (Storch 2002, 2007; Villamil & Guerrero 2006; Yang & Wu 2011; Crossman & Kite 2012; Zheng 2012; Yu 2014).

Most of the studies on patterns of interaction and group dynamics in this line of research build upon Storch's (2002) work. Storch (2002) revealed four patterns of dyadic

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interaction in L2 collaborative tasks: collaborative, expert/novice, dominant/passive, and dominant/dominant based on two indexes proposed by Damon & Phelps (1989): 'equality (the degree of control or authority over the tasks) and mutuality (the level of engagement with each other's contribution)' (Storch 2002: 127). The findings of her study showed that a collaborative pattern of interaction with a moderate to high degree of equality and mutuality enables students to provide more scaffolding than pairs in the other three patterns.

More recently, some studies have explored how the nature of peer interaction affects learning outcomes in peer feedback activity. For instance, Zheng's (2012) ethnographic study explored the learning possibilities in the process of peer feedback activity in a college English classroom for non-English majors in China. Guided by exploratory practice principles and using multiple sources of data including classroom observation, discourse analysis, discussion, interviews, and drafts of students' writing, the study found five group cooperative patterns, similar to what has been revealed by Storch (2002): collaborative, expert–novice, dominant–dominant, dominant–passive, and passive–passive. The findings showed that the EFL participants in the collaborative pattern made contributions to the peer feedback task in 'a symmetrical participating distribution mode' (p. 115). The findings also revealed that the collaborative pattern provided more learning possibilities for students to develop themselves by scaffolding assistance or by changing their participation from a peripheral to a more central role. Yang & Wu (2011) conducted a collective case study to investigate the influence of peer interaction patterns on students' text revisions. Twenty-five Taiwanese undergraduate EFL students served multiple roles as readers (read peers' essays), writers (wrote and rewrote their own texts), editors (edited peer writers' errors), and commentators (evaluated peer editors' suggestions and corrections) in the peer feedback interaction. Although it was revealed that the participants interacted for the common goal of text improvement, the findings demonstrated significant differences in students' interaction patterns and their final texts. While the students involved in a one-way interaction pattern made only local revisions (grammatical corrections), the students with an extensive and reciprocal interaction made both local and global (the development, organization, and style of texts) revisions.

In addition to the nature of peer interaction in peer feedback, some research (e.g. Storch 2004), though limited, has explored how the patterns of interaction in peer feedback – i.e. collaborative, expert/novice, dominant/dominant, and dominant/passive patterns – are influenced by student motives and goals for participation in peer feedback tasks. The qualitative interviews with eight ESL learners found that students in patterns like dominant/dominant and passive/passive held motives and goals that focused on product or performance tended to 'seek positive judgements on their performance' while students in collaborative or expert/novice patterns held goals that attended to learning processes and tended to 'seek to increase their understanding or competence' (Storch 2004: 474). Yu (2014) found that student motives for peer feedback had great influence on students' stances for group peer feedback, the patterns of group interaction, as well as the text revisions. Driven by different motives, the students were involved in different peer feedback systems in which they took different stances for peer feedback and interacted differently with their group members, even though some of them were working in the same group and were of similar English proficiency level.

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Among the literature on peer interaction, some studies have examined the use of language(s) in peer interaction during peer feedback, most of which are informed by SCT (Villamil & Guerrero 2006; Storch & Aldosari 2010; Zhao 2010; Yu & Lee 2014; Yu 2014). These studies showed that students tended to use both first language (L1) and L2 to give peer comments especially in EFL contexts (Villamil & Guerrero 2006; Zhao 2010). For instance, Zhao (2010) found that Chinese EFL learners used some L1 to give peer comments and the use of Chinese in peer interaction could improve students' understanding of their peers' comments.This finding has supported some early studies on L1 use in peer feedback (e.g. Villamil & Guerrero 1996; Guerrero & Villamil 2000).

Some other studies attempted to find out the factors that influenced students' use of L1 during peer feedback. For instance, Storch & Aldosari (2010) examined the use of L1 by EFL learners in Saudi Arabia as they attended pair work and revealed that task type had a greater impact on the amount of L1 use in peer interaction than L2 proficiency. DiCamilla & Antón (2012) investigated the effects of Spanish learners' L2 proficiency on the extent to which languages (L1 English and L2 Spanish) served social and cognitive functions in peer interactions in a writing class in the United States. The findings of their study indicated that L2 might take the place of L1 as a mediating tool for more advanced L2 learners to perform various language functions in peer interaction. Yu & Lee (2014) investigated the use of L1 and L2 in peer written comments and the factors that might influence students' switch between L1 and L2. The results showed that EFL learners used L1 to give peer feedback that focused more on content and organization whereas L2 was used to mainly give feedback on language. The study revealed a number of interacting factors that affect L2 learners' utilization of L1 and L2 as major mediating artefacts during peer feedback, such as L2 proficiency, student beliefs, learning goals, teacher requirements, teacher feedback practices, and power relationship between reviewers and writers.

This line of research has shown that there are different patterns of dyadic/group interaction in peer feedback. Since the collaborative pattern of interaction with a high degree of equality and mutuality is more conductive to L2 learning and writing development than other patterns, more knowledge needs to be provided regarding why students interact differently with their peers and how collaborative patterns could be developed to promote the effectiveness of peer feedback in L2 writing. The factors that account for the nature of the collaborative pattern of group interaction, therefore, deserves further investigation (Wigglesworth & Storch 2012). Studies on peer interactions in L2 learning have examined the influence of factors like task type, time, and students' language proficiency on the patterns of peer interaction, yielding inconsistent findings (Storch 2002; Kim & McDonough 2008; Watanabe 2008). In order to provide an in-depth understanding of the possible factors affecting peer interaction during peer feedback, qualitative studies on group work and in-depth interviews with learners to elicit their personal beliefs, motives and attitudes, as well as the influences of the contextual factors is needed (Wigglesworth & Storch 2012). Compared with studies on patterns of interaction and group dynamics, research on language use in peer feedback is still in its infancy. Future research can explore how L2 writers employ different languages to interact with their peers during peer feedback and how language use impacts on the quality of peer feedback and text revisions. Multiple case studies with multiple sources of data like video recordings of peer

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feedback sessions and stimulated recall interviews can be conducted to reveal how L2 writers use languages in peer feedback in different educational settings.

3.7 Cultural issues in peer feedback

Cultural issues, defined as 'a complex of cultural and social differences' (Hu & Lam 2010: 364), may influence peer dyadic/group interaction and negotiation and act upon peer comments and student revisions of L2 writing (Nelson 1997; Hu 2002; Hyland & Hyland 2006; Nelson & Carson 2006; Yu, Lee & Mak 2016). Informed by the situated learning theory and SCT, which highlight the social, cultural, and historical aspects of learning (Vygotsky 1978; Lave & Wenger 1991), peer feedback can be conceptualized as 'a classroom practice socially constructed by the educational power structure' (Nelson & Carson 2006: 53). As such, peer feedback does not take place in a vacuum but it is embedded in the specific sociocultural context in which culture plays a pivotal role (Goldstein 2005, 2006; Hyland & Hyland 2006; Lee 2008). One important issue in peer feedback is how peers work as 'individuals-in-context' (Atkinson 1999: 642) to engage in group discussion and provide useful comments (Nelson & Carson 2006). Some early studies have revealed that in ESL contexts, students (e.g. international students) with various cultural backgrounds often have different sociolinguistic rules of peer communication and divergent conceptions of good writing (Allaei & Connor 1990), which may give rise to improper comments, unhelpful feedback, misunderstandings, and even conflicts in peer feedback (Nelson & Murphy 1992; Carson & Nelson 1994, 1996; Nelson & Carson 1995; Hyland 2000; Hyland & Hyland 2006). On the other hand, it has been suggested that students in homogeneous cultural groupings can have more successful peer feedback interactions (Nelson & Carson 2006); however, empirical evidence in support of this is limited.

While peer feedback in L2 writing has gained theoretical and empirical support in recent years (Liu & Hansen 2002; Zhu & Mitchell 2012), it has not been widely used in some L2 writing classrooms, particularly in EFL writing contexts where students still rely on teacher feedback to improve their writing. One possible reason lies in the so-called 'cultural issue' (e.g. collectivism, power distance, the concept of 'face', and interpersonal harmony) which is found to exert negative influence on students' engagement with or participation in peer feedback (Carson & Nelson 1994, 1996; Nelson & Carson 1998; Hyland 2000; Tsui & Ng 2000, 2010; Hu & Lam 2010; Yu, Lee & Mak 2016). For example, early research has shown that Chinese students refrain from giving critical comments to avoid tension and disagreement and to maintain interpersonal/group harmony (Connor & Asenavage 1994; Carson & Nelson 1994, 1996), and they are reluctant to 'criticize their peers, disagree with their peers, and claim authority as readers' (Nelson & Carson 1998: 127).

A number of recent studies have shown that L2 students can actively take part in peer interactions and produce effective language episodes to enhance their peers' writing (Hu 2005; Yang et al. 2006; Ruecker 2011; Hu & Ren 2012). Focusing on the comparison between teacher and peer feedback, Yang et al.'s (2006) study suggests that peer feedback is associated with a greater degree of student autonomy, and there is a role for peer feedback in cultures that are believed to give authority to the teacher. Hu & Lam (2010) investigated how

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culturally-based beliefs and practices impact on the effectiveness of peer review as a pedagogical activity with adult Chinese students in Singapore. The analyses of the questionnaire and interview data revealed a general acceptance of peer review as a socioculturally appropriate pedagogical activity for Chinese students. The participants in their study neither saw anything culturally unacceptable in peer feedback nor regarded it as highly incongruent with Chinese conceptions of learning. While the Chinese cultural tradition of maintaining group harmony has been perceived as a constraint in group collaboration (Carson & Nelson 1996; Thonus 2004), the findings of Tsui & Ng's (2010) case study show this is not the case. They warn against cultural stereotyping with regard to peer feedback: 'sweeping generalizations regarding local cultural traditions and the constraints they impose on pedagogical possibilities may lead to stereotyping, which is often unhelpful. Such stereotyping hinders a deeper understanding of the complex interplay of factors impingeing on student learning and the exploration of opportunities for learning . . . ' (Tsui & Ng 2010: 365). More recently, Hu & Ren (2012) conducted a survey-based study to explore Chinese EFL university students' peer feedback experience in their local cultural contexts and revealed that the majority of the participants had positive previous experience with peer feedback.

Some recent studies have examined the role of peer feedback in intercultural contexts (Ruecker 2011; Bradley 2012). Nguyen (2008a, 2008b) investigated the pragmatic strategies (i.e. how students use pragmatic devices to communicate with their peers) used by Vietnamese EFL learners while engaging in peer feedback interaction. Two respective groups of 12 Vietnamese non-native English speakers and 12 native English speakers of Australian English participated in Nguyen's studies. The findings demonstrated that the Vietnamese EFL learners criticized in greatly different ways from the Australian native English speakers with regard to 'their preference for realization strategies, their choice of semantic formulae, and their choice and frequency of use of mitigating devices' (Nguyen 2008a: 41). The researcher concludes that several factors could account for these discrepancies: EFL learners' L2 linguistic competence and lack of fluency, the insufficiency of L2 pragmatic knowledge, and the impact of learners' native language pragmatics. Ruecker (2011) explored the potential of dual-language cross-cultural peer feedback between Chilean and US university students and how it improves on traditional monolingual and monocultural peer feedback. His study illustrates that this mode of peer feedback can ensure that students receive quality feedback and comments from more advanced peers and enhance the quality of text revisions while promoting greater cross-cultural understanding. It is concluded that dual-language cross-cultural peer feedback offers the opportunity to foster authentic and helpful interactions between students. Bradley (2012) investigated the nature of peer comments and students' perceptions of the comments in an educational design of online intercultural peer feedback in technical writing where Swedish EFL students collaborate with American English-speaking students. The findings of this study suggest that the intercultural peer feedback exchange enable students to understand dimensions of feedback from peers with different educational and cultural backgrounds.

To better understand students' perceptions and behaviours in peer feedback, there is a need to examine cultural issues in relation to the specific context of peer feedback. The above findings about the role of cultural issues in peer feedback, however, mostly emanate from

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studies conducted in ESL contexts. Less research has been conducted to examine the cultural issues in different EFL contexts such as China, Korea, Taiwan, and Japan, and how they impact on the peer feedback activity among EFL students. Future research could employ various research methodologies such as case studies, conversational analysis, surveys, and quasi-experimental research to provide more in-depth data and address how EFL writers deal with the cultural issues and how their perceptions of cultural issues influence their participation in peer feedback and use of peer feedback in text revisions.

4. Context and peer feedback research

While several researchers have identified the social nature of teacher feedback and the significance of contextual factors in influencing teacher feedback practices (Goldstein 2006; Hyland & Hyland 2006; Lee 2008), little attention has been paid to how peer feedback practices are shaped by students' personal belief systems and their sociocultural contexts. Goldstein (2004) defines context as 'a unique combination of factors stemming from the institution and the program within which the writing, commenting, and revision takes place, and factors that teachers and students bring to the process, as well' (p. 65). In this section, we attempt to illustrate how peer feedback studies have been informed by the contexts where they were conducted and which contexts are neglected in current research and deserve more attention in future studies.

Firstly, while earlier peer feedback research was conducted in ESL contexts, there has been a proliferation of peer feedback research in EFL contexts in recent years, e.g. Mainland China, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Malaysia, Jordan, and Sweden (e.g. Min 2008; Zheng 2012; Rahimi 2013; Yu & Lee 2014, 2015). This is mainly because EFL writing research has received more and more attention in the past decade (Manchón 2009; Cimasko & Reichelt 2011; Lee in press). These EFL studies have contributed to knowledge by extending peer feedback research in ESL contexts and illustrating how peer feedback can facilitate EFL students' writing and learning. Unlike ESL students, who are usually from different cultural backgrounds, students in EFL contexts are likely to share similar experiences and cultural backgrounds, which may contribute to more successful peer feedback activities (Nelson & Carson 2006). Although research has demonstrated that teacher, peer, and self-feedback each plays a role in EFL students' writing development, compared with ESL contexts it seems more challenging to implement peer feedback in EFL classrooms as writing teachers tend to be regarded as the sole authority and teacher feedback is to be trusted much more than peer feedback (Yang et al. 2006; Zhao 2010). How to change student perceptions through peer feedback training is a worthwhile area for future research (Min 2006; Rahimi 2013). Another challenge in some EFL contexts concerns the use of language: should students use L1 or L2 to give peer feedback (orally and/or in writing)? EFL learners have at least two languages at their disposal when they participate in peer feedback activities. While L1 is considered a mediating strategy that facilitates peer interaction (Villamil & Guerrero 1996), L2 may pose difficulties for EFL writers since they may lack the pragmatics and communication skills for successful peer interaction (Hyland & Hyland 2006). Of the limited research on language use in peer feedback in EFL contexts,

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there is evidence to show that L1 use can improve students' peer feedback practices and work as a significant mediating strategy in peer interaction (Villamil & Guerrero 2006; Yu & Lee 2014). More research is needed to shed light on this important aspect of peer feedback in EFL contexts.

Secondly, while the majority of studies on peer feedback in L2 writing have been conducted in the context of ESL/EFL, there is a paucity of research that explores issues in peer feedback of writing in other second or foreign languages. This is not surprising as research on writing in other second or foreign languages is scarce, and with the widespread use of English in the world (Cumming 2009; Reichelt 2009), L2 writing research has focused on ESL/EFL writing contexts. Several recent studies gave attention to peer feedback of writing in other second or foreign languages like French, Spanish, and Chinese (e.g. Gabarre & Gabarre 2012; O'Donnell 2014). For instance, Gabarre & Gabarre (2012) discussed the selection criteria (i.e. quantity of messages, quality of contributions, linguistic proficiency, and accuracy of objectives) for qualified French peer reviewers of writing. Díez-Bedmar & Pérez-Paredes (2012) investigated the type of feedback and the impact of English native-speakers' feedback on Spanish peers' discourse restructuring in an online collaborative writing task involving tertiary students of English and Spanish as foreign languages. Tian (2012) examined the effects of peer feedback, individual writing and collaborative writing on writing in Chinese as a foreign language. The research found no statistically significant differences in measures of fluency and complexity. However, peer feedback and collaborative writing resulted in significantly more accurate writing than individual writing, though no difference was observed in the two collaborative writing activities. Although students tended to prefer co-writing to peer feedback and peer feedback to individual writing, they held competing attitudes toward the three activities and believed each of them had unique strengths. The findings suggest that peer feedback, co-writing, and individual writing play different roles in Chinese L2 learners' development of writing skills. Since the effectiveness of peer feedback depends very much on the language learners' belief systems and their sociocultural contexts, much more research (e.g. replication studies) can be conducted in other L2 or foreign language contexts to examine the multifarious issues that have been explored in studies on peer feedback in ESL/EFL writing, such as the seven themes reviewed in the previous section.

Another contextual issue in peer feedback research relates to L2 students' educational contexts, their ages, and learning experiences, which could have a direct impact on the effectiveness and efficacy of peer feedback. While the current studies have provided much knowledge on peer feedback in L2 writing at university/college levels, limited attention has been paid to peer feedback in L2 writing at the school and graduate level. The school context (e.g. primary and secondary schools) is quite different from the tertiary setting in terms of 'scope, time available for a specific task, and the students' proficiency level' (Berggren 2015), and many other contextual factors like curricular requirements, exam culture, teacher requirements and training, and institutional attitudes toward L2 writers also differ (Goldstein 2006). For school students, the writing task is more difficult because it requires 'extensive self-regulation and intentional control to manage the writing environment, the constraints imposed by the writing topic, and the processes involved in composing' (Graham & Harris 2000: 3). Early research has also shown that beginning writers face more challenges in self-regulation in writing tasks, compared to adult students (Bereiter & Scardamalia 1987;

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Zimmerman & Martínez-Pons 1990; Graham & Harris 2000). Research on peer feedback in EFL schools shows that peer feedback can be a successful collaborative learning activity in school settings. For example, Woo, Chu & Li (2013) investigated the use of a wiki for collaborative writing among primary levels five (P5) and six (P6) students (n = 119) in a Chinese primary school in Hong Kong. Findings from the study shed light on how wikis can help provide support for students' collaborative writing process with wikis, and how peer feedback can influence this process. Vorobel's (2013) case study explored the peer review practices of four adolescent students in face-to-face and online contexts from the ecological perspective. Kong (2013) adopted the mixed-mode approach to explore how training and other sociocultural factors affect Hong Kong secondary school students' peer review activity. Berggren (2015) presents how Swedish secondary students improve their writing by giving feedback to their peers' writing. All these studies showed the peer feedback was a useful collaborative learning task in primary and secondary writing classrooms.

With the insights drawn from peer feedback research conducted in the college context, it is meaningful to explore how peer feedback can be fruitfully conducted with school learners to benefit their writing development (Kong 2013; Vorobel 2013; Woo et al. 2013; Berggren 2015). In particular, research on peer feedback with younger learners, like elementary students, will be a welcome addition to the current research base. Possible themes to explore include peer interaction, language use, student motives and stances, and computer-mediated peer feedback. Replication studies can be conducted to yield new knowledge about the implementation of peer feedback with younger learners in L2 writing contexts.

Compared with university students, research students including master's and doctoral students are different due to their English proficiency levels, learning experiences, academic writing purposes, ages, the nature of their study programmes, personal beliefs, and other contextual factors. Although there are a few studies on teacher feedback/supervisor feedback on postgraduates and doctoral students' L2 writing (Bitchener & Basturkmen 2010; Kumar & Stracke 2011; Yu & Lee 2013), less research has been conducted to explore peer feedback in L2 academic and scholarly writing (Chen 2010; McGarrell 2010; Hu & Lam 2010; Poverjuc, Brooks & Wray 2012; Crossman & Kite 2012; Zhu & Mitchell 2012). While Chen (2010) revealed that Taiwanese master's students held positive attitudes toward providing and receiving peer feedback and peer comments were related to higher order issues, Poverjuc et al. (2012) found that master's students' lack of prior peer feedback experience and their perceptions of peers' inability to provide valid feedback constituted potential barriers to the success of peer feedback. Their study suggests that the use of well-structured collaborative activities and tutors' intervention are required for effective peer feedback. While these studies were conducted with master's students, research on peer feedback among doctoral students is almost non-existent. It would be interesting to find out how peer feedback could benefit doctoral students, both in their capacity as feedback-givers and -receivers.

5. Researching peer feedback: Methodological issues

Previous research on peer feedback in L2 writing has adopted a variety of qualitative and quantitative research methods such as the case study, ethnography, experimental study, quasi-

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experimental research, survey research, and mixed-methods approach. In this section, we review the research methodology and the actual research methods employed in the literature, and discuss (1) how different research methodologies are used to advance knowledge in peer feedback research; and (2) what research methodologies are promising to move knowledge forward and address the unresolved issues in peer feedback in L2 writing.

Qualitative case studies with a single-case or multiple-case research design have been used in the majority of recent studies on peer feedback in L2 writing. Such studies have focused on the process of peer feedback, i.e. how learning takes place in the process of peer feedback. Drawing upon multiple sources of data such as drafts of students' writing, peer comments, interviews, stimulated recalls, classroom observation, and audio/video recordings of peer feedback sessions, case study research has focused on individual L2 writers or on a small group of L2 writers in specific writing contexts and has provided substantial accounts of the use and implications of peer feedback in the L2 writing classrooms, examined various aspects of peer interaction and collaboration, and explored affective and contextual factors involved in peer feedback. Case studies are also adopted to examine the different roles of the three feedback approaches – teacher, peer and self-feedback in the teaching and learning of L2 writing – as well as the implementation of computer-mediated peer feedback. These studies are a response to Hyland & Hyland's (2006: 96) call for more 'systematic and comprehensive descriptions of the contextual environments in which feedback is given and used'. The triangulation of multiple sources of data presents a relatively complete picture about how peer feedback is implemented in specific contexts and how it impacts on student learning. Case studies have contributed much to our understanding of the use of peer feedback in specific classroom settings and how the contextual factors exert influence on text revision and student learning. Due to the distinct and unique features of writing in different sociocultural contexts like school, college, graduate and other L2/foreign language contexts, case studies can continue to be adopted to address the unresolved issues (as discussed in Section 3) in peer feedback.

Quantitative studies like experimental and quasi-experimental studies in particular have been adopted to address the effectiveness of peer feedback on student text revisions and writing performance (Kamimura 2006; Trautmann 2006; Lundstrom & Baker 2009; Van Steendam et al. 2010; Baleghizadeh & Arab 2011; Diab 2011; Birjandi & Tamjid 2012; Ciftci & Kocoglu 2012; Goldberg 2012; Rahimi 2013; Yang & Meng 2013; Wang 2014). Such research studies have focused on the outcomes of peer feedback and involved both control groups and experimental groups to compare (1) the effectiveness of peer feedback, teacher feedback, and self-feedback; (2) the benefits of providing feedback vs. receiving feedback; (3) the impact of face-to-face peer feedback vs. computer-mediated peer feedback; (4) the effects of peer feedback training; (5) the effectiveness of different technology tools in computer-mediated peer feedback; and (6) the effects of asynchronous and synchronous online peer feedback. Such a line of research establishes a causal relationship between different types of peer feedback and students' text revisions and examined the relationships between other variables related to peer feedback (e.g. the sources of feedback, the medium of giving and receiving peer feedback, and peer feedback training) and students' text revisions and writing quality, contributing to our understanding of the extent to which and the ways in which peer feedback can impact student revisions and writing performance. Findings from these studies provide useful information to help L2 writing teachers select and implement the

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types/modes of peer feedback that suit their students in the writing classes, contributing to L2 writing instruction and peer feedback practice. As most of the studies have examined 'the more immediate effects' (Hu & Lam 2010) of peer feedback on text revision and writing performance, firm causal evidence on the long-term positive impacts of peer feedback on students' L2 writing development is yet unavailable. This calls for experimental research studies to ascertain the long-term effects of peer feedback on students' writing development, though it should be noted that controlling extraneous variables in educational contexts is difficult to implement (Hu & Lam 2010). In addition, longitudinal studies can be conducted to follow up a group of L2 writers throughout a long period of time to investigate how peer feedback can mediate their writing development.

Though limited, action research, exploratory practice research, and ethnographies have been used in several recent studies on peer feedback in L2 writing (Hu 2005; Lam 2010; Ruecker 2011; Zheng 2012). These research methods take an ecological perspective to inquire into the use of peer feedback as a pedagogical and collaborative learning activity in situated contexts in L2 writing classrooms. Such methods contribute to the literature in two significant ways. Firstly, these methods illustrate the ways in which peer feedback can serve as a meaningful pedagogical activity in L2 writing classes (Hu 2005), showing how L2 writing teachers resolve various problems during peer feedback, like students' low language proficiency and their focus on only surface levels of writing. Secondly, these methods have revealed students' learning process during peer feedback and shown how classroom contextual factors can impact on student learning (Zheng 2012). As classroom-based research on peer feedback in L2 writing is scant, more research informed by these research methods (i.e. action research, exploratory practice research, and ethnographies) is needed to advance knowledge about the pedagogical value of peer feedback in specific classroom contexts (including the traditional notion of physical classroom and the new virtual online classroom). In particular, such research conducted in different educational settings can illuminate the whole range of issues that are of interest to peer feedback researchers and practitioners, such as those reviewed in Section 3 in the above.

In addition to the research methods reviewed above, a mixed-methods design has been increasingly used in recent studies (Hu & Lam 2010; Rosalia 2010; Shih 2011; Chang 2012; Diéz-Bedmar & Pérez-Parades 2012; Gabarre 2012; Tian 2012; Woo, Chu & Li 2013) mainly to address two key issues: the value of peer feedback as a whole and computer-mediated peer feedback. Quantitative methods like questionnaire surveys, pre- and post-tests of writing skills and corpus analysis, and qualitative methods such as peer comments, drafts of writing, audio/video transcripts of peer talks, and interviews were often mixed in this line of research. Quantitative analysis of peer comments and drafts of student writing was also conducted in these studies. As a mixed-methods approach can offset the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research and provide more sources of evidence than either quantitative or qualitative research alone, such an approach can contribute to current peer feedback research thereby enhancing its reliability and validity and the trustworthiness of the research findings (Creswell & Clark 2011). Given its potential, mixed-methods research can address some unresolved issues like the impact of language use and mediating strategies on students' participation in peer feedback and their text revisions, how students' feedback-giving experience may impact on their writing development and the effectiveness of different modes of CMC peer feedback on students' revisions and writing development.

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6. Directions for future research

While research on peer feedback in L2 writing in the past decade has significantly advanced knowledge in the field, more efforts are needed to revisit its long-term effects on students' writing development in order to maximize its pedagogical value and to explore its potential benefits for students' text revisions and writing development. Inquiry into the long-term impacts of peer feedback via both face-to-face and CMC modes, and longitudinal studies on the learning processes involved in peer feedback, are needed. A related, under-explored issue is the impact of different modes of peer feedback on the development of different aspects (e.g. language accuracy, content, and organization) of L2 writing. Future research might also explore the impact of peer feedback on the writing development of students with different proficiency levels and the role of peer feedback at different phases during the writing process. Longitudinal studies, experimental research, case studies, mixed-methods approaches, and ethnographic studies (Séror 2011; Wang 2014) could be conducted.

Given the increasingly important role of technology in the writing classroom (both physical classrooms and virtual online classrooms), more research needs to examine the potential of technology-enhanced peer feedback. There is also a need to explore the impact of 'virtual' classrooms on the use of peer feedback and investigate how and to what extent peer feedback can be accommodated in the new type of online instruction, as well as teachers' perceptions as to the usefulness and value of online peer feedback. Research could explore teachers' professional readiness, attitudes, beliefs, and competence when it comes to the use of computer-mediated peer feedback in L2 writing.

As we have seen, research on peer feedback in important educational contexts like other L2/foreign language contexts (apart from ESL/EFL contexts), school settings, as well as master's and doctoral students' academic writing contexts is limited. We know little about whether the value of peer feedback can be generalized to these educational contexts and how peer feedback can facilitate writing in these contexts. More studies are also needed to show how the contextual factors that influence students' writing (such as educational policies, conditions of writing, and writing instruments) impact peer feedback practices. To advance our theoretical and pedagogical understanding of peer feedback in L2 writing, replications of some of the work conducted in ESL/EFL contexts or at university levels may be useful.

As peer feedback training is necessary for successful peer feedback activities in L2 writing, future research might investigate the role of teachers in implementing peer feedback. While the existing research focuses either on students or on student texts, more studies are needed to explore the scaffolding role of teachers in the pre-, during and post-stages of peer feedback. This direction is also true of CMC peer feedback. More knowledge with regard to teachers' roles in facilitating different modes of CMC peer feedback could be obtained through case studies or action research. Future research could also explore how teachers can be equipped with professional knowledge, skills, and strategies to implement peer feedback in L2 writing classrooms and how to train pre-service and in-service teachers to conduct peer feedback (both face-to-face and CMC peer feedback) effectively. For instance, research could examine whether and how L2 writing teachers use various educational tools to implement peer feedback activities. Studies could also explore L2 writing teachers' beliefs and practice about peer feedback in order to promote the role of writing teachers in peer feedback activities.

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Another key area for research concerns the affective, cognitive, and sociocultural aspects of peer interaction and negotiation during peer feedback in L2 writing. Future research might explore L2 students' motives and attitudes, cognitive conflicts and constraints, sociocultural and contextual issues related to peer interaction like power relationships, grouping of students, group dynamics and strategy use, and self-regulation. Such research will advance our knowledge about how learning takes place in peer interaction and what factors may facilitate or impede student learning during peer feedback in L2 writing.

When it comes to theory and methodology in peer feedback research, multidisciplinary theories and various methods could be used to examine under-explored issues. Apart from process writing theory, collaborative learning theory, interactionist theory in the SLA and cognitive field, and SCT, researchers may consider the possibility of using genre theory to inform research on peer feedback in L2 writing. In genre-based L2 writing instructional settings, researchers could investigate how peer feedback can promote L2 writers' understanding of the relationship between the communicative purpose and the features of text at the discourse level (Johns 1997). Researchers could also explore the issues about peer feedback mentioned in Section 3 in the context of English writing for specific purposes (Swales 1990; Hyland 2014). AT might be used to further explore how L2 writers as agents of the activity system draw upon cognitive and sociocultural resources to facilitate collaborative learning and achieve the goals and object of the peer feedback activity. With regard to research methods, two types of methods are expected to provide insights into both research and practice. On the one hand, to enhance the generalizability of the findings from peer feedback research, more quantitative studies like (quasi-) experimental research following a pre-test/post-test-delayed post-test design and large scale questionnaire survey studies are needed. Such studies can provide insights into the causal relationships among variables like types of peer feedback, modes of peer feedback, focus of peer feedback, linguistic error reduction, student revisions, text quality, and students' L2 writing development. On the other hand, longitudinal case studies and ethnographies can give due attention to the contextual and sociocultural nature of peer feedback in L2 writing classrooms, as well as the learning processes involved in peer feedback.

A final area for future research is how to bridge the gap between research and practice in terms of peer feedback in L2 writing. Despite the vigorous peer feedback research in the past decades, in some educational contexts students still rely on teacher feedback, and peer feedback is not widely adopted. It is, therefore, useful to examine the impact of peer feedback research on classroom practice, the extent to which the findings of the existing research have been brought into the real-life contexts, and whether L2 writing teachers benefit from research insights and use them to improve practice. Thus, more work is needed to investigate why peer feedback research has not informed classroom practice in certain contexts, and how research insights can be used to enhance writing instruction in general.

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