Peer response in Chinese as a foreign language context: A classroom-based case study

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Abstract

The task of writing in a second/foreign language is challenging, as it requires not only linguistic knowledge but also cultural, rhetorical, and content knowledge. Peer response, where students provide feedback on each other's writing and revise their work accordingly, can be an effective instructional method to support second/foreign language writers. Although peer response has been widely used in English as a Second/Foreign Language contexts and has demonstrated cognitive, social, affective, and linguistic benefits, little is known about its use in other foreign language contexts, such as Chinese as a Foreign Language. Therefore, a classroom-based case study examined peer response in an upper-division CFL writing course at a research university in the United States to contribute to a better understanding of peer response in broader instructional contexts and inform the learning and teaching of Chinese.

1   Introduction

Writing in a second/foreign language is a complex task. Composing a text in the target language requires the writer to bring to the writing task not only fundamental linguistic knowledge in the areas of grammar, vocabulary, and usage but also content, cultural, and rhetorical knowledge (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). Gaps in the writer's knowledge in the above-mentioned areas could pose difficulties for writing. Due to the potential complexities and challenges inherent in writing in a second/foreign language, it is crucial to offer student writers various sources of instructional support. This approach aims to optimize learning and foster the development of writing skills.

An instructional method that can support writers in a second/foreign language is peer response, which is occasionally termed peer revision or peer review. In peer response, students provide written and/or oral feedback on each other's writing and revise their writing taking into consideration the feedback peers offer. Peer response has found extensive use in English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) writing instruction. Research has highlighted its cognitive, social, affective, and linguistic benefits (e.g., Min, 2016). However, little is known about peer response in other foreign language contexts, including Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL). The classroom-based case study reported below addressed this gap by examining peer response in the setting of an upper-division CFL writing course at a research university in the United States. Research on peer response in the CFL context will not only inform the learning and teaching of Chinese, which continues to attract language learners worldwide, but will also contribute to a better understanding of peer response in broader instructional contexts.

2   Literature review

Peer response is often associated with the process approaches to teaching writing, which emphasize meaning discovery, recursiveness of writing process, and revision (Perl, 1980; Zamel, 1982). From a writing process perspective, revision is essential to writing improvement. Peer response allows students to intervene in each other's writing process and supports writing development through opportunities for students to interact on and respond to each other's writing (DiPardo & Freedman, 1988).

Peer response is also supported by Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the social and mediated nature of learning (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky (1978), learning is a social activity in nature and is mediated by various tools and semiotic signs, with language constituting an important means of mediation in the learning process. Learning occurs in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), "the distance between the actual development 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, p. 86). Related to learning in the ZPD is the construct "scaffolding", referring to support, assistance and guidance experts provide to novices so that the latter can achieve the level of potential development (Neumann & McDonough, 2015; Villamil & de Guerrero, 2006). While Vygotsky's theory was initially centered on expert-novice/adult-child interaction and scaffolding, second language learning research exploring peer interaction from a sociocultural theoretical perspective has shown that students are capable of engaging in collective or mutual scaffolding (Donato, 1994; de Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Storch, 2002). In collective scaffolding, there is "no one clearly identifiable expert" (Storch, 2002, p. 122), and peers share their linguistic knowledge and resources to provide mutual support and assistance for each other. For example, in de Guerrero and Villamil's study (2000), two ESL student participants were able to provide support for each other and shared expert roles as they revised one participant's essay.

The benefits of peer response in the second language (L2) context have received much discussion in relevant literature. Cognitive benefits include that peer response supports student revision process, helps students develop audience awareness, and allows students to develop analytical skills which can be applied to the students' own writing (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014; Liu & Hansen Edwards, 2018; Min, 2016; Mittan, 1989). Thus, peer response makes it possible for students to learn from not only receiving feedback but also providing feedback (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). Socio-affective benefits include that peer response allows students to build confidence as writers, enhances the development of interpersonal skills, and promotes positive attitudes toward writing (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014; Min, 2016; Mittan, 1989). Linguistic benefits include that peer response allows students opportunities for language practice and meaning negotiation (Liu & Hansen Edwards, 2018; Min, 2016).

L2 peer response research has attracted much attention, with the majority of research having taken place in the ESL/EFL contexts. To date, L2 research has examined a) the nature of peer feedback and the impact of peer response (Caulk, 1994; Kamimura, 2006; Mawlawi Diab, 2016; Paulus, 1999; Ruegg, 2015; 2018; Villamil and De Guerrero, 1998; Wu, 2019; Yang et al, 2006; Yu & Lee, 2016); b) students' attitudes towards and perceptions of peer response (Mangelsdorf, 1992; Nelson & Carson, 1998; Wakabayashi, 2013; Wang, 2014; Yu & Lee, 2016; Zhang, 1995); c) students' interaction and stance during peer response (de Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Lockhart and Ng 1995; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996; Zhao, 2018; Zhu & Mitchell, 2012); d) training for peer response (Berg, 1999; Min 2006, 2016; Rahimi, 2013); and e) the role of language proficiency in peer response (Allen &Mills, 2016; Wu, 2019; Yu & Lee 2016; Zhao, 2011). Of the various lines of research, those focusing on the nature of peer feedback, impact of peer response, and students' perceptions are most relevant to the present study and will be discussed in more detail below.

Aiming at understanding the nature of peer feedback generated by ESL/EFL students in different contexts or with different proficiency levels, some studies have examined what peer feedback focuses on. In these studies, peer feedback is often classified into various categories such as content, organization, and language, with the category of language often broken down into more specific sub-categories such as grammar and vocabulary (Ruegg, 2015; Wu, 2019; Yu & Lee, 2016). Findings indicate that while students are able to provide feedback on global features of writing (e.g., content and organization), they tend to focus on language-related aspects when providing feedback (Nelson & Murphy, 1992; Ruegg, 2015; Wu, 2019). One area which has been given less attention in L2 peer response research concerns the accuracy of peer feedback. Although some research has examined peer feedback with respect to its usability (Yang et al., 2006) or quality in comparative terms, namely whether the suggested change conveyed in peer feedback is better than what is originally written (Wu, 2019), accuracy of peer feedback in terms of whether the feedback correctly targets a problem or error in peer writing represents an underexplored area. To fully understand the role of peer feedback in student learning and writing, examining the accuracy of peer feedback becomes "certainly a worthwhile avenue" of peer response research (Ruegg, 2015, p. 79).

A significant focus of L2 peer response research has been to assess the influence of peer response on student writing. This is often done by studying how students integrate peer feedback into subsequent revisions (Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Nelson & Murphy, 1993; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1998; Yang et al, 2006; Zhao, 2010). This line of research has yielded mixed results. Findings of some studies indicated that students used some to a large portion of peer feedback in their revisions. For example, intermediate level ESL participants in Villamil and de Guerrero's seminal study (1998) incorporated into their revisions 74% of the peer feedback on various types of "troublesources" in their drafts on two assignments. Other studies have examined student use of peer feedback in comparison to teacher feedback and have reported divergent results (Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Paulus, 1999; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Yang et al, 2006; Zhao, 2010). One finding emerging from this line of research is that although students tend to adopt more teacher feedback in comparison to peer feedback, they still incorporate a rather large amount of peer feedback in their revisions (Yang et al, 2006; Zhao, 2010). Taken together, there is some evidence that peer feedback plays a role in influencing student revisions; however, such evidence is not conclusive. Further research is needed, particularly in underexplored contexts.

L2 peer response research has also examined students' perceptions of peer response and reported varied results. Some studies report that students find peer response to be helpful for revision (Mangelsdorf, 1992; Tang & Tithecott, 1999) but also note difficulties associated with peer response as perceived by students, including students' limited language proficiency and ability to provide quality feedback (Mangelsdorf, 1992; Wang, 2014; Zhao, 2011). Research also indicates that students recognize the benefits of peer response from the writer/feedback receiving as well as reader/feedback giving perspectives (Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Tusi & Ng, 2000; Wakabayashi, 2013; Yang et al., 2006) and that students value peer feedback in combination of, rather than as an alternative to, other sources of feedback (Jacobs, et al; 1998; Vasu, et al, 2016). Further, students may attribute different value to peer feedback depending on the aspects of writing addressed by the feedback.

While content-related peer feedback is valued (Mangelsdorf, 1992; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Tang & Tithecott, 1999), feedback on language use may be held in a different light, as students prefer language-related feedback from teachers (Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Nelson & Carson, 1998). Because understanding students' perceptions of peer response can shed light on factors which may influence students' provision and use of peer feedback, further research in this area is needed.

As discussed above, the majority of L2 peer response research has taken place in the EFL/ESL contexts; only a few studies have focused on contexts of other target languages. Of the limited number of studies conducted in contexts other than ESL/EFL, two studies have compared the effects of peer feedback with those of teacher feedback or self-review on student writing in the French as a Foreign Language context (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1992; Tigchelaar, 2016), one study has examined the impact of training students for peer response in the Spanish as a Foreign Language context (Sanchez-Naranjo; 2019), and another study has examined Chinese heritage learners' perceptions of peer feedback in the CFL context (Ji, 2019).

Since existing peer response research has primarily focused on the ESL/EFL contexts, research in under-explored contexts is needed because these contexts may have some unique features. As noted in Yue (2017), the absence of "grapheme-phoneme conversion rules" (p. 602) in written Chinese renders reading and writing in Chinese a real challenge for CFL learners, and the demand for a large number of Chinese characters for literacy activities adds to the challenge. Further, writing instruction focusing on composing essays tends to begin in upper-division CFL courses at the university/college level, and students often bring a wide range of language skills to these courses due to their varied backgrounds and learning experiences. These features may make peer response a particularly challenging task in CFL classrooms. An examination of peer response in the CFL context may not only inform pedagogical practices in CFL writing instruction, an area which is gaining increasing attention (Li, 2006; Liu & Du, 2018; Luo, 2002; Xiang & Ji, 2017; Yuan, 2010; Zhao, 2017), but also contribute to a broadened understanding of the role of peer response in students' development of L2 writing skills.

Aimed at addressing gaps in current peer response research and contributing to effective instructional practices, the classroom-based case study reported below examined three research questions concerning peer response in the CFL context:
1.   What is the nature of the feedback generated by CFL students on peer writing?
2.   To what extent do CFL students use peer feedback when revising their writing?
3.   How do CFL students perceive peer response?

3   Method

3.1   Research design

The study employed a case study method. This approach suits the study's purpose as it enables researchers to investigate a research phenomenon within its natural context (Yin, 2014), which holds significant relevance for language studies conducted in classroom settings.. By describing and analyzing one or more cases that exemplify the research phenomenon under investigation (Duff, 2014), case study research facilitates a comprehensive exploration, yielding a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. (Duff, 2014), case study research allows a more in-depth examination and fuller understanding of the research phenomenon. Case studies prioritize triangulation by incorporating diverse data sources and can differ in terms of time duration and case types (Duff, 2008; 2014). In contrast to single-case studies, multiple-case studies provide stronger evidence as they enable the examination of the research phenomenon through multiple case participants (Yin, 2014).

3.2   Context

The study took place in an upper-division Chinese composition course at a large research university in the U.S. The Chinese language program of which the composition course is a part offers

Chinese language courses designed for beginning to advanced CFL learners, with the lower –level courses placing an emphasis on oral communication skills. The composition course aimed at developing students' reading and writing proficiency in Chinese and promoting cultural and language learning through introducing students to a range of primary texts in Chinese.

Students read and wrote a variety of text types in the course. In particular, writing activities progressed from cards, notes, personal and formal letters earlier in the semester to different types of descriptive essays later in the semester. Peer response was conducted on the last two assignments, by which time the students had accumulated more writing experience in the course. Both assignments were descriptive essays and created to develop students' ability to describe details, organize ideas in essays with well-developed paragraphs, and practice written Chinese. These assignments were also longer assignments of the semester. Of the two essays, "My Favorite Book" required students to discuss a favorite book of their choice in 600–650 characters; the other essay, "I Am Interested in Chinese Culture" prompted students to describe their interest in Chinese culture in 700–800 characters.

3.3   Participants

Seven students were enrolled in the course and were introduced to the study. Four (all female students) were willing to participate in the study and completed peer response tasks and an individual interview. Those four students, all business majors, became participants of the study.

The writing proficiency levels of Diana, Anna, Ruolan and Ping (all pseudonyms) were evaluated by the co-author, an experienced CFL instructor, to range from Intermediate-Mid (Diana and Anna), Intermediate-High (Ruolan) to Advanced-Mid (Ping) in accordance with the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) writing proficiency guidelines (ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012). As noted earlier, students in upper-division CFL courses often exhibit varied language skills due to their language backgrounds and learning experiences, and this was observed in the participants. Diana and Anna had spent two and a half years studying Chinese in the program while Ruolan and Ping had been studying in the Chinese program for one year and one semester respectively. Both Ruolan and Ping were heritage learners and each had experience with a Chinese dialect at home, with Ruolan also reporting learning some Mandarin Chinese from her mother. Nevertheless, Ruolan considered English her native language while Ping reported Fuzhou dialect as her native language. Ping also reported that she could read Chinese before taking the Chinese writing course but had no formal experience with Chinese writing.

3.5   Materials and procedures

The authors prepared students for peer response by discussing the purpose and rationale of peer response and areas of writing which students needed to attend to when providing peer feedback. To provide further guidance and to facilitate the peer response activity, a peer feedback form (see Appendix 1 for the English version) was prepared for the students. The form focused on four main areas of writing: essay structure, content, grammar, and vocabulary and provided criteria for students to consider when commenting on peer writing. These areas reflected the course goals to develop students' written communication and language skills in Chinese and were similar to those referred to as students' "troublesources" in writing in peer response research (e.g., Villamil & de Guerrero, 1998). The form also provided an "other comments" category for students to write in additional comments and suggestions.

For the peer response tasks, students with similar proficiency levels were assigned into two pairs, with Diana and Anna (Intermediate-Mid) working together in one pair, and Ruolan and Ping (Intermediate-High and Advanced-Mid respectively) working in the other. Dyads with students of similar writing proficiency were formed to allow time for more in-depth engagement with peer text (Villamil & de Guerrero, 2006, cited in Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014) and to promote reciprocity of feed-

back. In alignment with recommended practice (e.g., Liu & Hansen Edwards, 2018) and task procedures adopted in relevant research (e.g., Paulus, 1999), peer response took place on the first drafts of the students' writing. The teacher, who is also the co-author, collected students' drafts on the last two assignments of the semester and distributed them to the peer response partners via email. In her email, the teacher explained the task procedures and sent all students both the Chinese and English versions of the peer feedback form. The students were instructed to read each other's drafts and to give feedback in Chinese or English by making notes on the feedback form and/or providing written feedback on peers' drafts directly. Students provided written feedback at home and discussed their feedback in class the following day. They revised their essays subsequently and submitted the revised drafts to the instructor. Ping, Ruolan, and Diana submitted complete data set on one essay (initial draft with peer feedback, completed peer feedback form, and revised draft) while Anna provided data on both essays.

To minimize any potential teacher influence on students' interview responses, the first-author, who was not the classroom teacher, interviewed all four participants. The interviews, ranging from 29 to 37minutes, were semi-structured (Dörnyei, 2007) and conducted in English. The interviewer elicited information about the participants' backgrounds and Chinese learning experiences and invited the participants to comment on their experience with peer response. Main interview questions concerning participants' perceptions included: 1) What is your perception of the peer feedback you received? 2) How did you feel about giving feedback?

3) What did you think about the peer response process? 4) Did you follow the peer feedback in your revisions? What helped you decide what feedback to follow or not? 5) Is there anything else you would like to tell me? Where appropriate, the interviewer asked follow-up questions, including questions concerning specific feedback points provided on the participants' writing and the participants' reasons for incorporation or disregard of certain feedback points in their revised drafts. The interviewer transcribed all interviews for analysis.

4   Data analyses

Multiple data sources were examined, encompassing participants' written feedback on each other's initial drafts and peer feedback forms, along with their initial and revised drafts, as well as interview transcripts. o address the initial two research inquiries concerning the nature and application of peer feedback, the authors scrutinized the peer-generated written feedback. Given that participants primarily provided feedback directly on each other's drafts, this emerged as the primary data source, subject to analysis through a coding protocol devised by the authors to align with the study's objectives. More specifically, peer feedback points, —corrections, comments, suggestions, and queries— pertaining to participants' drafts were initially classified based on their focus. This entailed determining whether the feedback pertained to grammar, lexis/vocabulary, usage, content, organization, or mechanics within writing. These coding categories for focus were in alignment with main categories used in relevant peer response research (Ruegg, 2015; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1998; Yu & Lee, 2016). Informed by resources on Chinese grammar (e.g., Lu, 2013), the authors coded grammar-related feedback points as those that addressed sentence structure issues (e.g., sentence elements and word order) as well as use of function words, including conjunctions and aspectual particles. Lexis-related feedback dealt with choice and use of lexical words while usage-related feedback concerned use of idiomatic expressions, conciseness of written expressions and appropriateness of register used in the essay. Content-related feedback encompassed focus, idea development, use of details, and cultural or factual information in the essay. Organization-related and mechanics-related feedback addressed, respectively, issues concerning the overall structure of the essay and sequencing of ideas, and aspects such punctuation and indentation of paragraphs. Examples of feedback points are provided in the findings section below.

Furthermore, the feedback points were subjected to coding regarding accuracy, discerning whether they were precise (addressing issues in peer writing), inaccurate, or suggesting alternative remedies (indicating that the original text was acceptable but alternatives were proposed). Further,

the feedback points were coded for use in revision—whether they were incorporated into the students' revisions. The authors compared each participant's first and revised drafts to determine if a feedback point was adopted or not.

The written feedback was independently coded by both authors, establishing inter-rater reliability by gauging the agreement percentage. The consensus stood at 91% for the total count of identified feedback points, 80% for focus, 94% for accuracy, and 86% for incorporation in revision. Differences in coding were resolved through discussion.

After completion of peer feedback coding, the authors tabulated the results for each participant with respect to 1) the total number of feedback points she provided on peer writing; 2) the number of feedback points she provided under each focus category (i.e., grammar, lexis, usage, content, organization or mechanics); 3) the number of feedback points she provided in each accuracy category (i.e., accurate, inaccurate or alternative); and 4) the number of peer feedback points she incorporated in revision.

Considering that participants provided only a modest quantity of comments and suggestions on the peer feedback forms, the authors scrutinized this feedback source, assessing its thematic emphasis, linkage to feedback on peer drafts, and integration into students' revised drafts.

Interview transcripts were scrutinized to address the third query concerning students' viewpoints on peer response. The authors embraced an inductive analytical strategy (Patton, 2015), involving iterative review of students' remarks to identify "the salient, grounded categories of meaning held by the participants in the setting" (Mall & Rossman, 2006, p. 159).

5 Findings

5.1 Overview of peer feedback

The four case participants provided a total of 89 feedback points directly on peer drafts. Ping, who had the highest level of Chinese writing proficiency in the group (Advanced-Mid), provided the largest number (30) of feedback points on her partner's essay of 654 Chinese characters; Ping's partner, Ruolan, whose Chinese writing proficiency was rated as Intermediate-High, offered 12 feedback points for Ping's essay of 540 Chinese characters. Diana, one of the two participants with a lower (Intermediate- Mid) level of writing proficiency, provided the least number of feedback points (6) on her partner Anna's essay (551 Chinese characters) while Anna offered 25 and 16 feedback points respectively on Diana's essays (500 and 566 Chinese characters respectively). An overwhelming majority (83 or 93%) of the feedback points were provided in the form of corrections.

5.1.1 Focus of peer feedback

Of all peer feedback points, 37 (41.5%) focused on grammar, 26 (29%) on lexis, 14 (16%) on usage, 9 (10%) on content, and 1 (1%) and 2 (2%) respectively on organization and mechanics. Thus, the majority (77 or 86.5%) of peer feedback points dealt with language-related aspects (i.e., grammar, lexis, and usage).

The dominance of language-related feedback was also observed when feedback points were examined per individual case participant, as shown in Figure 1. Note that the results in Figure 1 are reported in percentages (rather than raw numbers) to more accurately reflect the proportion of feedback in the various focus categories. Except for Diana, whose feedback was evenly divided between grammar and content, more than 85% of the feedback points from Anna, Ruolan, and Ping were on grammar, lexis, and usage.

Figure 1.
Focus of Peer Feedback by Individual Case Participant
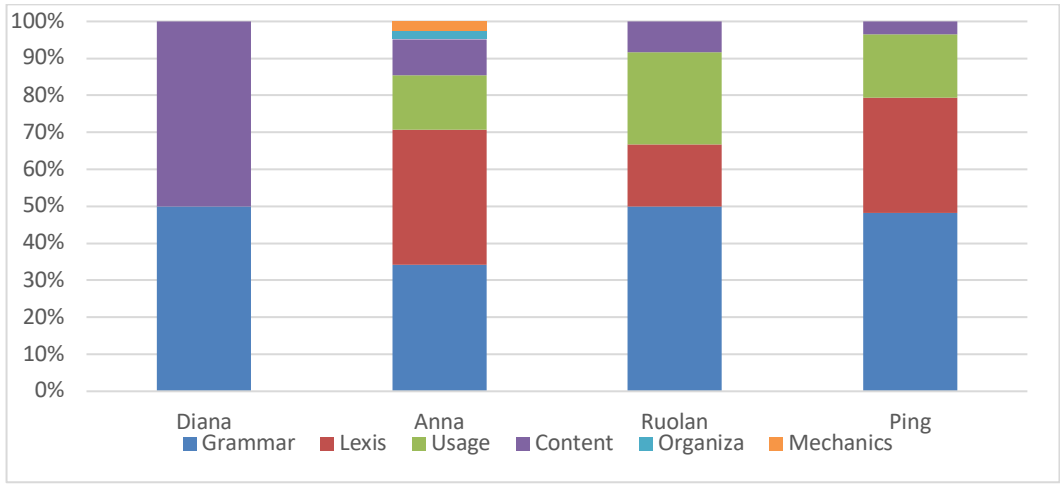
5.1.2   *Feedback on grammar*

All four participants provided grammar-related feedback, and this feedback addressed a range of grammar issues, including use of specific grammatical words, sentence structure (word order and sentence elements), and sentence connection (e.g., the use of cohesive and linking devices). One observation that could be made was that participants with higher levels of writing proficiency were able to address more complex grammar issues in their feedback. The two participants with Intermediate-Mid level of proficiency (Diana and Anna) were able to point out errors concerning grammatical words and word order in peer writing. For example, Diana corrected superfluous"已经" [already] and "吗" (a question marker) in two separate sentences in Anna's writing. When providing feedback on Diana's essay, Anna corrected "跑来跑去罗马" [running back and forth Rome] to "在罗马跑来跑去" (in Rome running back and forth) by adding a missing preposition "在" [in] and adjusting word order so that the revised phrase adhered to Chinese word order rule. In comparison, feedback from the two participants with higher levels of proficiency addressed more complex sentence structure and sentence connection issues. Ruolan (Intermediate-High) attended to sentence structure problems by modifying sentence elements and adjusting their order, and Ping (Advanced-Mid) addressed not only grammatical accuracy issues like her peers but also sentence connection issues, as illustrated below:

Original Sentence (by Ruolan)
但是 我 对   中国 文化   还有 兴趣。 我 对 中国 音乐   很有   兴趣.
But   I towards Chinese culture still have interest. I towards Chinese music very have interest.
But I am still interested in Chinese culture. I am very interested in Chinese music.

Corrected Sentence (by Ping)
但是 我 对   中国 文化   也 有 特殊的 感觉.   特别是 中国   的 音乐.
But   I towards Chinese culture also have special feeling. Especially Chinese music.
But I have a special interest in Chinese culture, especially Chinese music.

As shown above, Ruolan originally wrote two short and loosely connected sentences, which are typical of CFL student writing at the intermediate level. In her feedback, in addition to other changes, Ping added "特别是" [especially] before the second sentence and changed that sentence to a phrase"

中国的音乐" [Chinese music] so that "特别是中国的音乐" [especially Chinese music] was better linked to the preceding sentence. Such changes improved connections between sentences and created a better flow of ideas in Ruolan's essay.

5.4 Feedback on lexis

Except for Diana, all participants provided lexis-related feedback in which they addressed issues concerning incorrect use of synonyms, incorrect lexical expressions, and semantically redundant lexical items. For example, Anna replaced "找到了" [found] in Diana's essay with a semantically close but more appropriate word "发现" [discovered]. Ping changed an incorrect expression Ruolan used, "年多" [years many] to "多年" [many years], and Ruolan removed semantically redundant lexical items in Ping's writing. For example, Ping wrote "可以能够" [could be able to] in a sentence where both "可以" [could] and "能够" [be able to] expressed the same meaning of ability. Ruolan deleted "可以" [could] from the sentence.

5.4.1 Feedback on usage

Except for Diana, all participants provided usage-related feedback (i.e., feedback dealing with idiomatic expressions, conciseness of written expressions and appropriateness of register). While feedback points on usage were fewer compared to those on grammar and lexis, they helped to enhance the clarity, conciseness, and expression of nuanced meaning. For example, a usage feedback point Ping offered entailed the addition of a hedging expression "似乎" [it seems] at the beginning of a sentence in Ruolan's essay to soften the strength of an assertion and to express more nuanced meaning. Although such usage-related feedback points did not affect the grammatical or lexical correctness of writing, they helped to convey more sophisticated and appropriate meaning indicative of writing at an advanced level.

5.4.2 Feedback on content, organization and mechanics

The four participants generated a total of 12 feedback points on content, organization, and mechanics. While each participant offered at least one content-related feedback point (for a total of nine such feedback points), only Anna provided a feedback point on organization (paragraphing), and Diana and Ping each provided a feedback point on mechanics (punctuation). In their content-related feedback points, the participants conveyed their reactions to meaning expressed in peers' writing, provided brief suggestions for content-related changes or added new content to clarify meaning. For example, Diana wrote "confusing to me" to indicate an idea in Anna's essay was not clear to her and Ruolan added "他是一个吸血鬼" [he is a vampire] to a sentence in Ping's essay to clarify meaning. Overall, the participants did not seem to pay as much attention to content, organization, and mechanics as they did to grammar, lexis and usage when providing feedback on their peers' writing.

5.4.3 Accuracy of peer feedback

Of the 87 feedback points coded for accuracy (two feedback points were not coded due to their affective nature), 55 (63 %) were accurate, 9 (10 %) inaccurate, and 23 (26%) alternative, meaning that what was originally written was fine but peer feedback provided an acceptable alternative solution. For example, Diana used the expression "中华文化" [Chinese culture] and Anna suggested an alternative expression "中国文化" [Chinese culture]. As shown in Figure 2, the majority of the feedback points provided by each participant were in the "accurate" or "alternative" categories, with only a small portion of the feedback in the "inaccurate" category. These indicate that, overall, the

four participants were able to provide helpful feedback for each other. Ping, the most advanced learner in the group, provided the highest percentage of accurate feedback.

Figure 2.
*Accuracy of Peer Feedback by Individual Case Participant*
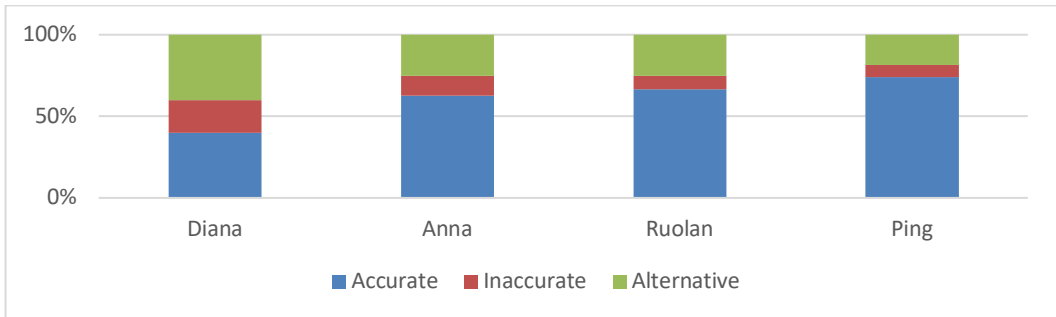
As mentioned earlier, the participants also provided a small amount of feedback on the peer feedback forms. This feedback primarily consisted of comments or suggestions on content and organization in peer writing. The content-related comments or suggestions focused on issues not addressed in feedback points provided directly on peers' drafts but they tended to be rather general. For example, Ping wrote that some of the information in Ruolan's essay was not necessary but did not elaborate on what information lacked relevance. Similarly, Diana suggested that Anna "work on flow, [because the essay was] little hard to understand" but did not indicate how "flow" could be improved. Anna and Ruolan made suggestions for their partners on the organization (paragraphing) of writing. Diana and Ping each wrote a one-paragraph draft, and Anna and Ruolan stated that the essay needed to be divided into clear paragraphs. None of the participants provided additional feedback on language-related issues.

5.5   Use of peer feedback

The participants used 64 (74%) peer feedback points in their revised drafts. Except for Anna, who used exactly half of the peer feedback points, Diana, Ruolan, and Ping used 63%, 87%, and 83% of the feedback points respectively, as shown in Figure 3. Interestingly, the two participants in the higher proficiency pair (Ruolan and Ping) used a higher percentage of peer feedback than peers in the lower proficiency pair. Ping, the most advanced learner (Advanced-Mid), accepted the majority of the feedback points her partner Ruolan (Intermediate-High) provided.

Figure 3.
Use of Peer Feedback by Individual Case Participant
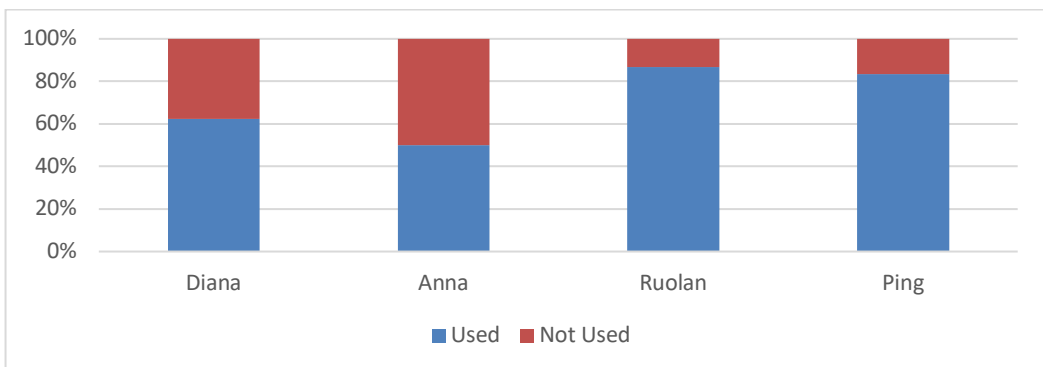
A closer examination indicated that the participants incorporated predominantly accurate feedback, with only four of the 64 feedback points (about 6%) incorporated coming from the "Inaccurate" category. Of the 23 feedback points not used in the revisions, 11 (48%) were in the "Alternative" and five (22%) in the "Inaccurate" category respectively. These results mean that, to a considerable degree, the participants were able to recognize optional feedback and reject inaccurate feedback. For example, Anna did not follow an incorrect suggestion from Diana to use "没" [no] before "常常" [often].

As discussed above, the participants provided a few general content-related comments on the feedback forms but none of those comments were addressed in the revisions. However, Diana and Ping adopted the feedback on organization (paragraphing) and divided their one-paragraph first drafts into several paragraphs in the revised drafts.

5.6 Perceptions of peer feedback

Analyses of the interview data revealed three major themes concerning the participants' perceptions of peer response, which are discussed below.

5.6.1 Benefits of peer response

Overall, the four participants commented on the positive impact of peer response and addressed its benefits from two perspectives: learning from receiving peer feedback and learning from reading peer writing and giving feedback.

5.6.1 Learning from peer feedback received.

Diana and Ruolan, the two participants who received more peer feedback in each pair, focused on how the peer feedback they received from their partners enhanced their writing and learning. Diana, commenting on the feedback from Anna, said, "I thought the feedback I received was very good. I think, she did…a good job helping me out, she definitely helped my paper out." Ruolan's response was similar in its emphasis on how helpful the peer feedback she received (from Ping) had been. She said, "…it's good feedback… when she gave me the feedback, it was like 'wow, why didn't I think it that way?' It would have been a lot easier. So, yeah, it helped me a lot." Ping also recognized the benefits of peer feedback, although in a somewhat qualified manner, referring to the feedback she received (from Ruolan) as "somewhat helpful."

Anna and Ping, who gave more feedback in each pair, commented on how students could learn from reading and critiquing peer writing and from more practice of peer response. Although Anna indicated that she would have liked more feedback from her partner, she highlighted the benefits of peer response from the perspective of giving feedback, stating that "I think it [peer response] will be beneficial for the students because they can read their classmates' compositions and they can help them correct their mistakes or something, and then thereby learning after correcting their peers' compositions." Ping indicated that students could become more effective peer feedback providers if they had the opportunity to practice peer response more.

5.6.2 Role and nature of scaffolding.

Comments from the participants revealed how peers were able to scaffold each other's learning, and how peer feedback scaffolded revision. Ruolan and Diana highlighted the scaffolding their partners provided for them. Ruolan, who worked with Ping, the most advanced learner in the group, commented:

There were some parts where um like I didn't know how to use some of her words that she knows how to use. Like I said, her vocabulary, her Chinese is actually probably at a greater level than mine,

so there is something I don't really know how to use that she knows how to use so I found that's really helpful cos she could tell me.

Although Diana and Anna had a similar level of Chinese writing skills (Intermediate-Mid) as evaluated by the course instructor, Diana perceived Anna to have stronger Chinese skills and commented on how Anna's feedback scaffolded her revision:

> Um…like the girl that I was working with, Anna, her level of writing and reading is a little bit higher than mine so she was able to give me a lot more feedback than I was able to give her…You know, on my end I thought it was really good because I was able to go through and edit my paper accordingly. I think I did come out with a better paper after the feedback that she gave me.

While Ruolan and Diana stated that they benefitted from their partners' scaffolding, they also indicated they were able to scaffold their partners. Ruolan commented:

> Um, at first I feel that Ping is better, you know, she is better at Chinese than I am so I feel like she would know better, you know, she would know how to do this and do that so I feel like her paper would automatically be better than mine. I feel like 'do I know how to give her feedback properly?' I feel even though I think that way, I know there were still issues with her paper, so I just tried to find whatever I KNEW was there.

Similarly, Diana commented on how she provided feedback on her partner's writing by focusing on areas where she had developed knowledge:

> Um, I just focused on some things, you know, just things that I thought had to be corrected …like grammatical type of things."

Ruolan's and Diana's comments indicated that students at a lower level of Chinese writing proficiency, actual or perceived, were not simply at the receiving end of scaffolding. Ruolan and Diana were able to, with varying degrees of success, discern gaps in their partners' writing and provide scaffolding accordingly. Ping and Anna acknowledged the help they received. Ping said she "pretty much agreed" with the feedback Ruolan provided and followed that feedback in her revisions when possible. Anna also stated that she agreed with and used some of the feedback from Diana.

5.6.3   Factors Influencing Peer Response and Use of Peer Feedback

During the interviews, the participants identified a few factors they perceived to be important for peer response. Good rapport with peers was referred to as a factor conducive to sharing feedback. For example, Diana regarded commenting on peer writing as a "comfortable situation" because "we are friends." A factor perceived to affect the provision of feedback concerned vocabulary knowledge. Anna and Ruolan identified lack of vocabulary knowledge relevant to the topic of peer writing as a factor restricting their provision of feedback. Anna commented:

> There are a lot of things I wasn't sure about her paper because she wrote about, I think one of hers was Angels and Demons… so I didn't know how to say angels and demons. There are a lot of words in there I didn't understand. So I think that hindered me from helping her more cos I was already unsure about some of the words in there.

The participants also pointed out a few factors that affected their use of peer feedback in their revisions. The first such factor was not understanding the meaning of words used in peer feedback. Anna mentioned that she did not follow a content-related feedback point because her partner, Diana, used the word "文库" (used to refer to *book series*) in the feedback and she "wasn't sure about that word." Additional factors included time, confidence in peer feedback (or lack of it), and certainty of their own writing. Ping stated that the limited time allowed for revision affected her decision and ability to use content-related peer feedback. Ping explained that she did not follow a suggestion to

include more details about a character due to time constraint, stating "in my revision, I didn't do much with it because I don't feel like I have enough time to do all that details. But I agree with her." Anna explained that she did not adopt Diana's suggestion to use "没" [no] before "常常" [often], an inaccurate feedback point, because of her lack of confidence in the suggested change. Diana indicated that her confidence in the correctness of the expression"遭人杀害" [murdered by someone] used in her writing prompted her to disregard an alternative feedback point "被人杀害" [murdered by someone] from her partner, stating "I thought that was okay, so I left it."

6 DISCUSSION

Aimed at contributing to peer response research in the CFL context, the present study examined research questions concerning 1) the nature of peer feedback, 2) students' incorporation of peer feedback in subsequent revisions, and 3) students' perceptions of peer response in the setting of an upper-division CFL writing class. Findings showed that all four participants were able to provide multiple feedback points on their peers' writing, that the peer feedback predominantly focused on language-related aspects, and that more than 60% of the feedback points accurately targeted problems in peer writing, with an additional 26% of the feedback providing acceptable alternatives. Further, the participants incorporated a large portion (74%) of the peer feedback in their revisions and they were also selective in what feedback they would accept. Analysis of the interview data corroborated and extended findings from analysis of written peer feedback. For example, analysis of feedback points revealed that peer feedback was largely accurate, and analysis of the interview data indicated that the participants indeed perceived peer feedback as good and helpful. Also, the participants reported that they adopted peer feedback in their revisions, corroborating the finding concerning incorporation of feedback based on the analysis of peer feedback and students' revisions. These findings indicated that the participants were able to provide helpful language-related feedback and that peer response played a role in supporting the participants' revisions.

Similar to what has been reported in previous L2 peer response research (e.g., Ruegg, 2015; Wu, 2019), the participants of the study focused more on language-related aspects in their feedback. However, in contrast to findings indicating that students were skeptical about the quality and effectiveness of language-related peer feedback and used little peer feedback (Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Mangelsdorf, 1992; Nelson & Carson, 1998; Zhao, 2011), the participants in the study valued language-related peer feedback and used a rather large portion of peer feedback in subsequent revisions. Prior research shows that students' positive judgement of peer feedback is a factor influencing adoption of peer feedback (Chang, 2016; Yu & Lee, 2016), and this factor may have contributed to the participants' incorporation of peer feedback in their revisions. As reflected in their interview comments, the participants perceived peer feedback to be helpful, demonstrating positive judgement of peer feedback.

The participants of the study perceived peer response to be beneficial from writer and reader perspectives, similar to students in some prior ESL/EFL peer response research (e.g., Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Wakabayashi, 2013) and in recent research examining Chinese heritage learners' perspectives of peer response (Ji, 2019). Although the benefits of peer response are often explored from the perspective of receiving feedback, L2 peer response research has revealed that students set goals to learn and benefit from critiquing peer writing and giving feedback (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Zhu & Mitchell, 2012). The participants of the study indicated that peer response provided them opportunities to learn both from receiving feedback and from reading peer writing and giving feedback. This adds evidence that the value of peer response transcends that of being just a source of feedback for students.

Further, participants' interview comments indicated that the participants were able to provide mutual scaffolding. The comments on mutual scaffolding were particularly notable between Ruolan and Ping, whose Chinese writing proficiency levels were Intermediate-High and Advanced-Mid respectively. While the more advanced partner, Ping, provided a large amount of feedback for Ruolan,

Ruolan was also able to use her knowledge of Chinese to recognize some of Ping's writing issues and offer helpful feedback, with Ping adopting most of Ruolan's feedback. This shows that writing expertise was fluid and shared between the partners (de Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Storch, 2002).

Although the study did not set out to examine the role of language proficiency in peer response, findings of the study shed some light on the role language proficiency may play in peer response. On the one hand, proficiency levels seem to affect peer feedback, as observed in some studies (Wang, 2014; Zhao, 2011). In the present study, although all participants focused on language-related aspects in their feedback, the pair of students with higher levels of proficiency (i.e., Ruolan and Ping) were more able to address complex language issues than their lower proficiency peers. On the other hand, within each pair (and particularly in the pair of Ruolan and Ping), not only could the more advanced learner support her less proficient partner but the student at the lower proficiency level (actual or perceived) could also provide help for her more proficient partner. This finding indicates that learners at a higher writing proficiency level may still benefit from peer help in areas where their otherwise less proficient partners have developed linguistic knowledge or awareness. Since writing in the target language entails a multitude of macro and micro skills, it is unlikely that any individual student writer has developed superior skills in all areas of writing. Students may bring to peer response tasks complementary knowledge and skills, and the complementarity of peer knowledge affords the learning potential of peer response. Seen in this light, language proficiency may play a contributing but not determining role in peer response.

The present study also identified a few factors which may influence CFL peer response. The participants perceived that positive interpersonal dynamics among peers was conducive to the provision of peer feedback, and that lack of time for revision (as pointed out by Ping) and disagreement with peer feedback (as demonstrated in Anna's disregard of Diana's incorrect suggestion to use "没" [no] before "常常" [often]) would constrain efforts to use peer feedback in revision. One factor that participants of the study identified as affecting both the provision and use of peer feedback was vocabulary knowledge, which might reflect the challenges associated with learning Chinese characters and developing vocabulary knowledge in Chinese. Reading peer writing addressing different topics and processing peer feedback in Chinese may place a high demand for vocabulary knowledge on the part of CFL students, and this may be an issue to consider for effective implementation of peer response in CFL classrooms.

The present study focused on four CFL students conducting peer response on expository writing tasks. Given the limited number of participants and writing tasks, findings of the study need to be interpreted with some caution. Nevertheless, findings of the study shed some light on the value of peer response in the CFL context. In CFL classrooms such as the one where the study took place and where language development is a key goal, language-related peer feedback can provide valuable opportunities for learning and development. Findings of the study also indicate that CFL students may benefit from peer response through both receiving feedback and giving feedback. These findings indicate that peer response may be used to support student writing and learning as a complement to teacher feedback (Villamil & de Guerrero, 1998) in CFL classrooms.

The present study reveals a few factors for CFL teachers to consider when implementing peer response in their classrooms. To support peer interaction, teachers may provide opportunities for students to work together and establish rapport. To promote engagement with peer feedback in the revision process, teachers may provide students ample time for revision so that students can better process peer feedback and address feedback concerning substantive revisions. Considering the potential challenges posed by students' yet developing vocabulary knowledge, CFL teachers may also wish to provide sufficient time for students to read peer drafts so that they can look up unfamiliar words used in peer writing. Further, teachers may wish to draw students' attention to the importance of feedback on global features of writing and provide more extensive training (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014; Liu & Hansen Edwards, 2018). To promote effective content-and-organization-related feedback, teachers may provide students with writing samples resembling the writing tasks required of

the students, lead class discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of the writing samples, and model how to provide specific content-and-organization-related feedback.

7   Conclusions and Future Directions

In summary, this case study on peer response within the CFL context contributes to both CFL-specific literature and the broader peer response research landscape. While the study is limited by its modest sample size and writing task variety, it highlights the pivotal role of peer response in CFL classrooms. It is recommended that future research may examine peer response with larger samples of students, different research designs (e.g., quantitative or mixed methods designs), or other types of writing tasks. While not the primary goal of this study, future research could delve into comparative analyses of peer and teacher feedback, as well as the impact of peer feedback on revision quality. In an age of increasing technological integration, future investigations might also explore peer response in online learning environments. The present study hopes to stimulate further dialogue and research on peer response, particularly in other language contexts currently underexplored in research.

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Appendix 1.

English Version of Peer Feedback Form

Peer Review Feedback form	
Reviewer	
Review time	
Composition title	
Author	
Structure	Overall evaluation: Criteria: 1) clear focus; 2) good balance between general statements and supporting details; 3) logical structure, 4) clear paragraphs, 5) good organization and development of ideas
	Areas needing improvement
	Suggestions for revision:
Content	Overall evaluation: Criteria: 1) amount of information, 2) interest, 3) Readability
	Areas needing improvement
	Suggestions for revision

Grammar	Overall evaluation criteria: 1) clear and coherent sentences, 2) correct word order3) correct use of tenses, 4) appropriate use of conjunction words
	Grammatical errors and revision suggestions: 1) 2) 3) …
Vocabulary	Overall evaluation Criteria: 1) correct and accurate 2) appropriate, 3) rich, 4) vivid use of vocabulary
	Errors in vocabulary use and suggestions for revision: 1) 2) 3) …
Other comments	

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