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Peer Review, Revision, and Writing Quality in L2 Writing*

Woo-hyun Jung
(Yeungnam University)

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This study explores how high- and low-skilled students provide peer feedback, how they revise their writing after receiving peer feedback, and how peer feedback influences writing quality in terms of five component areas (content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics). Data were collected from 102 Korean and international university students, who implemented three tasks: a writing task, a peer-review task, and a revision task. The results showed that the high- and low-proficient reviewer groups were preoccupied with giving the surface aspects of peer review, especially grammar feedback. A similar trend was evident in the revision task since the writers adopted and incorporated more grammar feedback into their revisions than any other type of feedback regardless of their level of writing proficiency. As for the reasons for refusing peer review, both high- and low-skilled writers resorted to self-justification of their ideas. Especially worthy of note was the finding that peer review had an overall beneficial effect on writing quality. In particular, the low-proficient writers improved the quality of their essays more significantly than their high-proficient counterparts after receiving peer review. On the basis of the results, the study provides helpful suggestions to help the learners enhance their writing skills.

[writing/proficiency/peer review/revision/writing quality]

I. INTRODUCTION

Peer review, which has been used interchangeably with peer feedback or peer response is an activity in which students receive comments on their writings from their peers (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). It has gained theoretical and practical support over several decades (e.g. Liu

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& Hansen, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978). From a theoretical perspective, sociocultural theory put forth by Vygotsky (1978) provided convincing justification for peer review (Rahimi, 2013). According to this theory, peer review provides students with good learning opportunities within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which refers to the distance between what a learner can do on his/her own and what he/she can potentially achieve with the assistance of a more capable peer (Vygotsky, 1978). This highlights the importance of fine-tuned scaffolding or support from more capable peers (Villamil & De Guerrero, 1998). From a practical perspective, peer review practice through scaffolding was reported to provide overarching benefits (Berg, 1999; Liu & Hansen, 2002), leading to improvements in writing quality.

Peer review has been extensively documented from different angles (Allen & Mills, 2014): (a) computer-mediated peer review; (b) a comparison between peer and teacher feedback; (c) the perception and nature of peer review; and (d) peer review training, to name only a few. However, few studies to date have thoroughly delved into peer review, revision, and writing quality altogether using the same taxonomy. Indeed, many researchers (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Min, 2006; Penn & Lim, 2016; Rahimi, 2013) took a similar position, arguing that the investigation into the extent to which students incorporate their peers' comments into their revisions and the extent to which their peers' comments influence their writing quality has been largely ignored in peer review literature. More seriously, the prior studies have not devoted judicious attention to identifying the types of improvements students make, whether in global or local aspects of writing (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). Though there were a handful of studies conducted along this line, they did not go further to pinpoint why writers incorporate or discard particular comments given by their peers (Penn & Lim, 2016) nor did they yield consistent results (Paulus, 1999). Another noticeable weakness of the prior studies was that they did not pay due heed to the impact of L2 proficiency on peer review interactions, despite some researchers' view that L2 proficiency is likely to be a potentially important factor in the process of peer feedback (Allen & Mills, 2014). While a few studies dealt with this issue, they failed to scrutinize mixed-proficiency dyadic interactions (Yu & Hu, 2017). Methodologically, many of the previous studies (e.g., Liu & Sadler, 2003; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Min, 2008; Stanley, 1992) were limited due to their use of a small sample size, which suggests that there is a clear need to employ a larger sample size.

To fill these voids, this study deals with peer review, revision, and writing quality altogether using the same taxonomy in EFL university settings. The three-dimensional approach to peer interactions is fully justified by Liou and Peng's (2009) claim that peer review, revision, and writing quality should be examined altogether in order to precisely pinpoint how peer review can facilitate EFL writing instruction. The main purpose of the study is three-fold: to examine (1) what type of peer comments student reviewers prefer to

provide; (2) what types of peer review student writers adopt and refuse at the revision stage, and if they refuse a peer comment, why they do so; and (3) to what extent their incorporation of peer review into their revised texts influences the quality of their writing. These research issues are analyzed according to learners' English writing proficiency, which is the main variable in this research. This study will help language professionals to understand EFL learners' peer interactions including peer review and peer revisions and the effects of peer review on writing quality.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since there is a substantial body of literature on peer review interactions, literature reviewed here focuses on the variables influencing peer review patterns, revisions, and writing quality, which suits the purpose of the present study.

1. Proficiency-related Peer Review Interactions

One significant research theme garnering attention was the impact of L2 proficiency on peer review interactions. In this connection, Allen and Mills (2014) showed from the analysis of Japanese EFL learners' peer feedback that higher proficiency reviewers made more suggestions on peers' writing than lower proficiency reviewers and that lower proficiency writers incorporated significantly fewer meaning-related suggestions into their revised texts than higher proficiency writers. L2 proficiency was also highly influential in Kamimura's (2006) Japanese EFL research, which revealed that the high-proficient students made more global comments and more substantial revisions, contrary to their low-proficient counterparts, who focused on sentential comments and local revisions. He further showed that peer feedback had a positive effect on both proficiency groups' writing performance in terms of overall essay quality.

Contrary to his findings, Wu (2019) reported in Chinese EFL classrooms that the high- and low-proficient groups do not differ in feedback amount or feedback quality, though they differ in feedback type. These results indicate that the effects of L2 proficiency on peer review interactions varied in different language learning environments.

2. Peer Feedback vs. Teacher Feedback

The effectiveness of teacher and peer feedback has been a heated issue in ESL and EFL contexts. A majority of prior studies reported that teacher feedback had a considerable advantage over peer feedback. In ESL settings, Connor and Asenavage (1994) showed that

teacher feedback had a much more significant effect on revisions than peer feedback, with only a small percent of peer feedback resulting in changes. Their finding was congruent with that presented by Paulus (1999), who reported that teacher feedback resulted in more changes than peer feedback. A similar tendency was true in Chinese EFL classrooms in that Yang et al.'s (2006) study and Zhao's (2010) research similarly found that teacher feedback is incorporated more than peer feedback into the revised essays and leads to greater improvements. However, the former study further revealed that teacher-initiated revisions are less successful than peer-initiated revisions.

The efficacy of teacher feedback on written work was also evidenced by research conducted in Korean EFL contexts. Joo and Kim (2010) and Kim and Joo (2010) similarly found that the learners made significantly greater writing improvement after receiving teacher feedback than peer feedback and that the teacher's direct feedback was more effective than any other type of feedback. However, Cho and Sohn (2007) supported the complementarity of teacher and peer feedback, indicating that both the teacher and peer feedback were effective in promoting revisions. This was compatible with Wu's (2019) claim that peer feedback and teacher feedback can play complementary roles in EFL writing pedagogy. The above results taken together indicate that peer feedback has a smaller effect on revisions than teacher feedback, but it can serve as a complementary source of feedback in the L2 writing classroom (Villamil & Guerrero, 1998).

3. Computer-Mediated Peer Review Interactions

One of the most popular approaches to peer review interactions was computer-mediated peer review interactions. In this line of research, Kessler et al. (2012) analyzed collaborative writing using a Web-based tool and reported that students focused more on meaning than form, but that when they did focus on form, they made correct changes more often than incorrect changes.

Some research compared peer review interactions in the technology-enhanced mode and other modes. For instance, Liu and Sadler (2003) examined peer feedback and revisions made by two different groups: a technology-enhanced group vs. a traditional group. They revealed that the technology-enhanced group made a larger number of revision-oriented comments than the traditional group and that the former group resulted in a larger number of revisions overall than the latter. In a similar vein, Tuzi (2004) compared electronic feedback (e-feedback) with oral feedback and showed that students preferred oral feedback over e-feedback. However, the latter mode had a greater impact on revision than the former, which implies that e-feedback might be more useful than oral feedback.

In Korean EFL contexts, Cha (2006) also examined two modes of peer response, that is, chatting and bulletin board, and found that regardless of using either chatting or bulletin

board, the participants incorporated a high portion of peer responses into the revised drafts. Technology-mediated peer feedback was also examined by So and Lee (2014), who focused on peer response in blended learning. Their findings indicated that the students produced more language related episodes in online than offline sessions, but they discussed their drafts in more depth during offline sessions. More importantly, peer response in their study led to revisions and better writing quality. As shown above, computer-mediated peer review had beneficial effects on learners' writing in one way or another.

4. Effects of Peer Review Training on Revisions and Writing Quality

The effects of peer review training on L2 learners' writing have been examined in ESL and EFL writing classrooms. In ESL settings, Stanley (1992) showed that coached peer reviewers were able to offer the writers more specific guidelines for revision than did their uncoached counterparts. The same was true in Berg's (1999) research, which revealed that trained peer response positively affected ESL students' revision types and quality of essays. In a more recent study, Min (2006) confirmed the importance of peer review training, indicating that Taiwanese ESL students incorporated a significantly higher number of peer comments into revisions after they had received peer review training. Unlike these studies, Lundstrom and Baker (2009) took a different approach to peer review, focusing on who benefits more from peer review training, feedback givers or feedback receivers. They revealed that after peer review training the feedback giver group made a greater improvement than the feedback receiver group, particularly in the global aspects of writing.

The positive effects of peer review training were also apparent in EFL writing classes. For example, in Iranian EFL classrooms Rahimi (2013) revealed that the trained group made significant improvements in their writing and wrote paragraphs of a much higher quality, as opposed to the untrained group. In a more comprehensive research using Asian EFL learners, Liou and Peng (2009) provided somewhat different results, showing that although the adoption rate of peer review was lower than 50%, the adoption of peer feedback mostly led to successful revision with better writing quality.

The positive impact of peer review training was also identified in Korean EFL classrooms. For instance, Choi and Seong's (2011) research found that the trained peer tutor group made much greater improvement than the untrained group. Along the same lines, Kang (2019) also reported that the peer review group significantly outperformed the comparison group, especially in terms of organization, content, and grammar. In another study, Penn and Lim (2016) came up with similar results, indicating that after receiving peer review training, both feedback givers and receivers could benefit from peer feedback activities.

5. Other Approaches to Peer Review Interactions

In addition to the studies discussed thus far, there have been many other approaches to peer review interactions in L2 writing classrooms. Villamil and De Guerrero (1998) compared two rhetorical modes, narration and persuasion, to delve into the impact of peer revision on writers' final drafts. They revealed that students focused equally on grammar and content when revising the narrative essays and predominantly on grammar when revising the persuasive essays. In another line of research, Suh (2005) compared the effectiveness of written and oral feedback and showed that the latter type of feedback was more effective than the former to promote and enhance students' writing interest and writing ability. In Hong Kong ESL contexts, Lee (1997) analyzed peer reviewers' responses and writers' responses and found that the most frequent types of peer reviewers' responses were suggesting and evaluating, whereas the most frequent type of writers' responses was explanation of unclear points.

Mendonca and Johnson (1994) approached peer review interactions from a different angle. They analyzed audio-taped transcripts of the peer comments and showed that although student writers utilized their peers' comments to revise their essays, they incorporated those comments into their revisions in a selective manner, deciding for themselves what to revise in their own essays. The selective incorporation of peer review was also observed in Korean EFL classrooms. Cho (2005) demonstrated that the students were able to selectively accommodate peer feedback into their revisions based on their own judgment of its appropriateness or correctness. A similar trend was also detected in Moon's (2000) research, which showed that the students generally exchanged high-quality feedback and incorporated it in their revisions selectively.

In a nutshell, some studies focused on the types of peer review, others on the types of revision, and still others on the effects of peer review on writing quality. This suggests that most of the previous studies presented only partial aspects of peer review interactions, failing to provide a whole picture of peer review interactions in L2 writing classrooms. In order to bridge this gap, this study addresses the following research questions:

(1) What type of peer comments do the high- and low-skilled reviewers provide most frequently?
(2) What type of peer comments do the high- and low-skilled writer groups adopt most frequently?
(3) What is the most common reason for rejecting peer comments given by the high- and low-skilled writers, respectively?

(4) Does the adoption of peer comments lead to the improvements in writing quality from the drafts to the revisions made by the high- and low-skilled writer groups, respectively?
(5) Do the high- and low-skilled reviewer groups' comments have different effects on the quality of the revisions made by the high- and low-skilled writer groups, respectively?

III. METHOD

1. Participants

A total of 102 university students participated in this study. Most of them were Korean students (n = 98, 96.1%), with four students (3.9%) being international students (3 from Uzbekistan and 1 from Sri Lanka). All of them were enrolled in a course entitled "English Language Teaching and Learning" at a university in the fall semester of 2021. This course, which was taught by a male professor with over twenty years' teaching experience, dealt largely with different language skills including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Detailed demographic information of the participants is listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Distribution of the Participants

		High group		Low group		Total	
		n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Gender	Male	19	37.3	19	37.3	38	37.3
	Female	32	62.7	32	62.7	64	62.7
Academic year	Sophomore	29	56.9	29	56.9	58	56.9
	Junior	12	23.5	13	25.5	25	24.5
	Senior	10	19.6	9	17.6	19	18.6
Major	English major	47	92.2	48	94.1	95	93.1
	Double major	4	7.8	3	5.9	7	6.9

Since L2 writing proficiency was an important consideration in this study, the participants were divided into two proficiency groups: high-skilled and low-skilled groups. This division was made based on a mean split of the students' writing scores on the first drafts of their essays, as was done by many researchers (e.g. Allen & Mills, 2014; Pae, 2009; Stanley, 1992). Their writing scores were obtained by using Lundstrom and Baker's (2009) ten-point scoring rubric. To be specific, the learners' drafts were assigned a score on the scale from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest) for each of the five component areas: content, organization, grammar,

vocabulary, and mechanics. The total score for the five component areas added up to 50 points. Since the mean score of the first drafts was 30.26 out of the total score of 50, the students with a score above 30.26 were classified as the high-skilled group, and those with a score below it, as the low-skilled group. On the basis of this criterion, the study made mixed-proficiency pairs by pairing a high-skilled student with a low-skilled one at random, as was done in Villamil and De Guerrero's (1998) research. The two proficiency groups were equally divided into 51 students, which in turn formed 51 pairs.

The proportion of females (n = 64, 62.7%) was higher than that of males (n = 38, 37.3%) for the reason that there were a larger number of female students enrolled in the English department's courses. More than half of the participants were sophomores (n = 58, 56.9%), which were followed by juniors (n = 25, 24.5%), while even fewer students were seniors (n = 19, 18.6%). Freshmen did not participate in the study due to the fact that this course was offered to the students in higher grades. A great majority of the participants were English major students (n = 95, 93.1%), with only a few (n = 7, 6.9%) double-majoring in English and another field.

In addition, the amount of time the participants had spent studying English per week ranged from 1 to 7 hours with an average of 2.56 hours. In regard to the experience of studying in English-speaking countries, only 16 students (15.7%) had such an experience. Their length of stay in English-speaking communities ranged from 1 to 60 months with an average of 14.3 months. It is vital to note that the participants did not have much writing experience prior to this study. More importantly, they had not been exposed to peer review activities nor had they received peer review training prior to this research.

2. Instruments and Data Collection Procedure

The complete data set comprised three major tasks: (1) a writing task, (2) a peer-review task, and (3) a revision task. For the writing task, all the participants were instructed to draft an argumentative essay on the following topic: "Are the English programs and curriculum in our English department effective or not?" This task was conducted in class in a 75-minute timed condition in order to prevent the students from referring to writing materials and dictionaries and/or getting any help from others.

As a follow-up task, a paired peer-review task was performed in a written mode as part of course assignments. For this task, the researcher formed mixed-proficiency dyads where a high-proficient student was paired with a low-proficient one. The peer-review task was implemented anonymously, which helped the reviewers provide more honest comments without being aware of their partners. Hence, the researcher distributed the writers' drafts to their partners after eliminating their personal information. On the receipt of his/her partner's draft, each reviewer was asked to read it carefully and provide feedback on it. More

specifically, in each dyad, both the high- and low-proficient students reviewed the other's essay. They were told to give whatever feedback they wanted to. In other words, there was no limit to the number and length of peer comments. In this case, they were guided to number each comment according to the order of occurrence of comments, as was done in Min's (2006) research. The main reason for numbering each comment was that it helped to compare the reviewers' comments with their partners' responses to them. All the participants were allowed to use either English or Korean for peer-review activities. They were also allowed three days to complete the review task. Upon completion of this task, they were required to upload it onto the "Lecture Portal System" managed by the university by the due date.

The peer-review task was followed by the last task, a revision task, which was also implemented as part of the course assignments. For this task, the anonymized peer-review sheets were handed to the writers. This task covered two sub-tasks. As for the first sub-task, the writers were asked to decide which comments to adopt and which comments to refuse. If they decided to accept a peer comment, they were instructed to indicate "Acceptance" and if they decided to refuse one, indicate "Refusal" along with their reasons for refusing it on the revision task sheets. Here again, they were required to number their responses in the same order as the reviewers numbered their comments. This numbering process was intended to help to identify which comments the writers adopted and which comments they refused. For the second sub-task, the writers were required to revise their drafts on the basis of their partners' comments they had decided to accept.

The total number of students enrolled in the "English Language Teaching and Learning" course was 108 students. Out of them, three students did not submit the revision task sheets, though they submitted the remaining tasks. Since their tasks were incomplete, the study excluded the three students' tasks together with their partners' tasks. The main reason for doing so was that their partners' task data alone could not provide a complete picture of peer review interactions. Hence, 102 students' task data were under analysis in the present research.

3. Data Analysis

It is crucial to note that this study focused solely on revision-oriented comments to the exclusion of non-revision-oriented comments such as complimentary comments (e.g. *I like your ideas*.) now that the latter type does not trigger revisions. The total number of revision-oriented comments added up to 1,465 comments, with the high-skilled group making 911 comments (62.2%) and the low-skilled group, 554 comments (37.8%).

Data collected from the three tasks were coded and assessed blindly by two professors (a male and a female) in the area of TESOL, both of whom had more than 15 years of teaching experience in English. For both coding and rating the data, this study employed the identical

taxonomy, which consisted of five component areas: content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. This taxonomy was widely employed in many other studies (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1992; Shehadeh, 2011; Villamil & De Guerrero, 1998). According to Brown (2015) and Shehadeh (2011), content refers to knowledge of subject, development of thesis, development of ideas, coverage of topic, and relevance of details, while organization pertains to effectiveness of introduction, logical sequencing, organization of ideas, and conclusion. At the surface level, grammar involves the accurate use of sentence structures, while vocabulary refers to word or idiom choice. The last category, mechanics, has to do with conventions of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraph of indentation.

For the measurement of writing quality, the two different raters carefully read and scored the drafts and the revised texts. This evaluation process was intended to gauge whether the quality of the students' drafts was actually improved in the subsequent revisions as a result of peer feedback in terms of the five component areas. The ratings of the drafts and the revised texts were guided by a modified version of Lundstrom and Baker's (2009) ten-point scoring rubric. The major reason for adopting their scale was that it allowed for an analytical assessment of both the global and local aspects of writing in addition to providing a holistic assessment score (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). Thus, the drafts and the subsequent revisions were scored holistically and analytically by the two raters. The two versions of essays were assigned a score on the scale from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest) for each of the five component areas (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). Thus, the maximum score for each component area was 10 points, which suggests that the total score for the five component areas added up to 50 points. The scores received on each of the five component areas were then averaged to figure out the overall trend in the quality of writing.

The five component areas used for scoring essays were also used for coding peer comments provided by the reviewers on the one hand and adopted by the writers on the other. More specifically, the peer comments made by the reviewers were coded by the two professors with a focus on whether each comment belongs to content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, or mechanics. The peer comments assigned to each component area were then counted and averaged. In a similar fashion, the peer comments adopted by the writers were also coded according to the five component areas. After completion of this process, the two raters carefully checked whether the writers actually incorporated the peer comments they accepted into their revised texts.

With respect to the writers' refusal of peer comments, five reasons for refusing peer comments were identified from the analysis of the revision task data. They are summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Reasons for Refusing Peer Review

Type	Definition	Example
Reviewer-defective	The writer thinks that the reviewer's comment is unqualified (incorrect, vague, or unclear).	*The reviewer's suggestion that I should delete "it is" is wrong. (#90)*
Writer-defensive	The writer justifies his/her own ideas or provides more detail to make his/her text clear to the readers.	*I used "However" to make a contrast between positive and negative aspects. (#73)*
Negotiated	The writer finds the reviewer's feedback okay, but he/she thinks his/her own idea is better.	*The reviewer's feedback is OK, but the choice of "problem" is more relevant. (#11)*
Unnecessary	The writer thinks that the suggestion given by the reviewer is not actually necessary to accept.	*It is not necessary to divide the clauses. (#55)*
Unknown	The writer does not understand the reviewer's intention.	*In my writing, there is no comma, but I don't know why the reviewer gives feedback on the comma. (#34)*

This taxonomy was not predetermined but emerged from the analysis of the data, though some of the categories were akin to Pham and Usaha's (2016) framework. On the basis of this taxonomy, the two coders determined which category each reason given by the writers belongs to. In the rating and coding processes, the two raters first coded and scored 10% of the data together in order to establish common criteria for judgment. After this, each rated and coded the remaining data independently. This procedure was common in many other studies (e.g. Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Kamimura, 2006; Rahimi, 2013).

In order to measure inter-rater reliability, an intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) was calculated for the scores of the drafts and the revised texts and for the coding of the feedback types provided by the reviewers, the feedback types adopted by the writers, and the reasons for refusing peer feedback. The results are displayed in Table 3.

TABLE 3
Inter-Rater Reliability

Area	Initial drafts	Revised texts	Feedback types provided	Feedback types adopted
Content	0.895	0.784	0.977	0.977
Organization	0.893	0.846	0.894	0.896
Grammar	0.888	0.848	0.994	0.993
Vocabulary	0.870	0.857	0.982	0.981
Mechanics	0.792	0.784	0.990	0.992
Reason				
Reviewer-defective			0.987	
Writer-defensive			0.979	

Negotiated	0.984
Unnecessary	0.898
Unknown	0.981

Most of the ICC values reached 0.9 and greater, which is a token of excellent reliability, while the content and mechanics of the revised texts showed the lowest ICC value, 0.784, which is indicative of acceptable reliability. The small variations between the two judges were discussed until they were resolved by mutual agreement.

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 25 package. Descriptive statistics was used to verify whether there are any differences among the five component areas (content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics) not only in the reviewers' provision of peer feedback but also in the writers' adoption of peer feedback. The same statistical tool was also used to assess whether any differences occur among the five reasons for refusing peer feedback. On the other hand, a paired samples *t*-test was run to ascertain whether any differences exist between the mean score of the drafts and that of the revised texts in each component area. In addition, an independent samples *t*-test was calculated to detect whether there are any differences between the high- and low-skilled writers in the degree of improvement from the drafts to the revisions made in response to peer comments.

IV. RESULTS

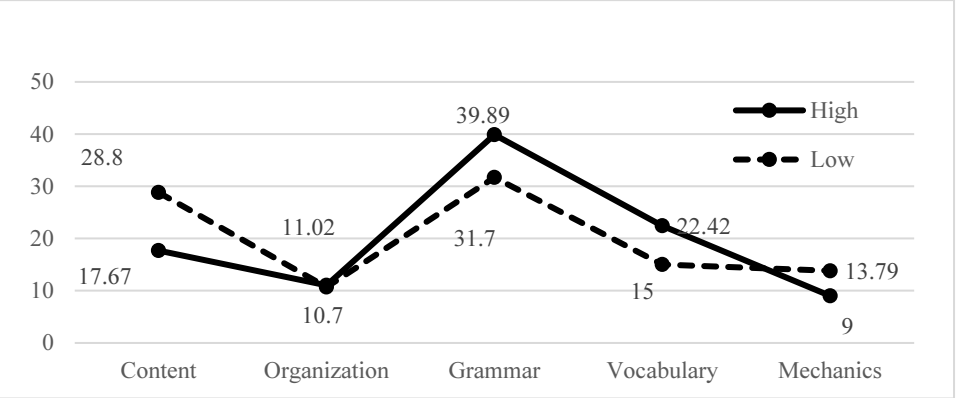
1. Peer Review: The Reviewers' Provision of Peer Review

The first research question pertains to what type of peer comments the high- and low-skilled reviewers provide most frequently. The two reviewer groups' provision rates of peer feedback are presented in Table 4 and Figure 1.

TABLE 4
The High- and Low-Skilled Reviewers' Provision of Peer Comments

Group	Area	*n*	*M*	*SD*
High-skilled reviewers	Content	51	17.67	18.63
	Organization	51	11.02	9.34
	Grammar	51	39.89	23.24
	Vocabulary	51	22.42	15.11
	Mechanics	51	9.00	12.68
Low-skilled reviewers	Content	51	28.80	27.58
	Organization	51	10.70	14.04
	Grammar	51	31.70	24.48
	Vocabulary	51	15.00	18.29
	Mechanics	51	13.79	17.93

FIGURE 1
The High- and Low-Skilled Reviewers' Provision of Peer Comments



As shown in Table 4 and Figure 1, the most common type of peer feedback provided by the high-skilled reviewers was grammar feedback (M = 39.89). In addition, their provision rate of vocabulary feedback (M = 22.42) was far higher than that of organization feedback (M = 11.02) and that of mechanics feedback (M = 9.00).

Similarly, the low-skilled reviewers devoted even greater attention to giving grammar feedback (M = 31.70) than organization (M = 10.70), vocabulary (M = 15.00), and mechanics (M = 13.79) feedback. Their provision rate of content feedback (M = 28.80) was higher than that of organization feedback (M = 10.70).

Although an exploration into the differences between the two proficient groups in the provision of peer feedback was out of the scope of this study, it was interesting to see that the low-skilled learners (M = 28.80) provided a greater number of content feedback than the high-skilled ones (M = 17.67). This may be in part due to the low-skilled learners' insufficient knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. In other words, since they had less knowledge about grammar and vocabulary, they seemed to pay more attention to content than the high-skilled learners. Further studies are warranted to further explore this issue.

The results presented above clearly indicate that the reviewers in both groups tended to place grammatical accuracy in the forefront of the provision of feedback. This is largely because English teachers heavily emphasize the importance of grammar knowledge, spending considerable time in teaching grammar in Korean EFL classrooms.

2. Revisions: The Writers' Adoption and Refusal of Peer Review

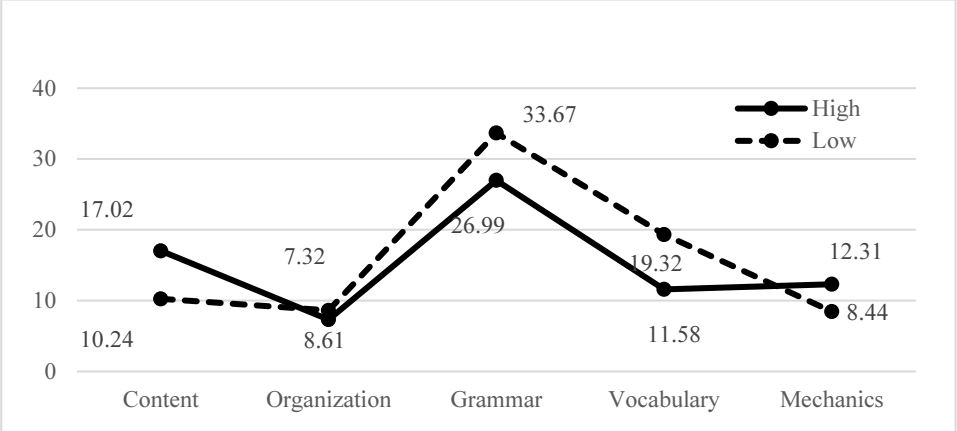
Another research question deserving attention is to what extent the two proficiency groups of writers adopt and incorporate peer comments into their revised texts on the one hand and to what extent and why they refuse peer comments on the other. Table 5 and Figure 2 provide

the writers' adoption and incorporation rates of peer feedback.

TABLE 5
The Writers' Adoption and Incorporation Rates of Peer Comments

Group	Area	*n*	*M*	*SD*
High-skilled writers	Content	51	17.02	19.80
	Organization	51	7.32	10.81
	Grammar	51	26.99	23.33
	Vocabulary	51	11.58	16.87
	Mechanics	51	12.31	15.68
	Total	51	75.22	20.83
Low-skilled Writers	Content	51	10.24	14.77
	Organization	51	8.61	7.73
	Grammar	51	33.67	22.76
	Vocabulary	51	19.32	14.92
	Mechanics	51	8.44	12.18
	Total	51	80.27	17.83

FIGURE 2
The Writers' Adoption and Incorporation Rates of Peer Comments



As revealed in Table 5 and Figure 2, the high- and low-proficient writer groups' overall adoption rates of peer comments were fairly high, with the mean score of the former group reaching as much as 75.22% and that of the latter group, as much as 80.27%. This finding is in line with that reported by Min's (2006) research, which found that after peer review training, students incorporated 77% of the peer comments into revised drafts. Such high adoption rates indicate that both groups of writers were willing to use peer comments in their subsequent revisions.

A closer look at the writers' adoption of specific feedback types for revision showed that the high-proficient writers adopted grammar feedback (M = 26.99) at the highest rate, as

contrasted with the far lower adoption rates of mechanics (M = 12.31), vocabulary (M = 11.58), and organization (M = 7.32) feedback provided by the low-proficient reviewers. Their content feedback (M = 17.02) had a higher adoption rate than their organization feedback (M = 7.32) did.

In a similar vein, the low-skilled writers' adoption rate of grammar feedback (M = 33.67) predominated over their adoption rates of other component areas. Moreover, their adoption rate of vocabulary feedback (M = 19.32) was greater than that of organization feedback (M = 8.61) and that of mechanics feedback (M = 8.44).

The results discussed hitherto clearly indicate that the writers were preoccupied with grammar in the provision and adoption of peer feedback, irrespective of their proficiency level. These findings were compatible with those of some previous studies (e.g. Leki, 1990), which showed that L2 students tended to focus primarily on surface-level revisions.

Another research question meriting much consideration is to what extent and why the writers refuse peer comments. As pointed out earlier, there were five reasons for refusing peer comments. Consider the results of the descriptive statistics on the rates of the reasons for refusing peer comments in Table 6.

TABLE 6
The Rates of the Reasons for Refusing Peer Comments

Group	Reason	*n*	*M*	*SD*
High-skilled writers	Reviewer-defective	51	5.42	9.91
	Writer-defensive	51	13.69	12.80
	Negotiated	51	2.57	5.63
	Unnecessary	51	2.27	5.49
	Unknown	51	0.83	3.50
	Total	51	24.78	20.83
Low-skilled writers	Reviewer-defective	51	3.64	5.42
	Writer-defensive	51	11.37	12.96
	Negotiated	51	0.58	1.85
	Unnecessary	51	2.83	6.02
	Unknown	51	1.31	3.65
	Total	51	19.73	17.83

The high- and low-skilled writers exhibited really low refusal rates of peer comments, with the former group's rate reaching as much as 24.78% and the latter group's rate, as much as 19.73%. In regard to the reasons for refusing peer comments, the high-skilled writers provided the writer-defensive factor (M = 13.69) far more frequently than any other factor while they provided the reviewer-defective factor (M = 5.42) more often than the category of unknown (M = 0.83).

The same was exactly true for the low-skilled writers. Specifically, the occurrence of the writer-defensive factor (M = 11.37) emphatically predominated over the other factors. In

addition, the reviewer-defective factor (M = 3.64) occurred at a greater rate than the category of negotiated (M = 0.58). The overall results clearly suggest that in their refusal of peer review, the writers concentrated on defending their ideas rather than reacting negatively to their peers' suggestions. This may be because they believed their ideas to be correct and clear enough.

3. Writing Quality

Since the writers revised their drafts on the basis of peer comments they accepted, the subsequent question addressed here is whether the high- and low-skilled writers make improvements in writing quality from their drafts to their revised texts after receiving peer feedback. For this, it was vital to scrutinize every change made in each component area from the drafts to the revisions as a result of peer comments. This was examined using a paired samples t-test, as tabulated in Table 7.

TABLE 7
The Improvements in Writing Quality from the Drafts to the Revisions

Area	Group	Draft		Revision		Difference		t	p
		M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		
Con	High	6.76	0.71	7.22	0.64	0.46	0.73	4.413***	0.000
	Low	5.51	0.83	6.22	0.78	0.71	1.10	4.579**	0.000
Orga	High	6.88	0.52	7.10	0.41	0.22	0.46	3.341**	0.002
	Low	5.45	0.67	6.14	0.75	0.69	0.88	5.551***	0.000
Gram	High	6.08	0.66	6.86	0.85	0.78	1.06	5.263***	0.000
	Low	4.76	0.65	6.65	1.04	1.88	1.41	9.539***	0.000
Voca	High	6.61	0.57	7.10	0.57	0.49	0.78	4.464***	0.000
	Low	5.22	0.58	6.63	0.66	1.41	0.98	10.252***	0.000
Mech	High	7.10	0.57	7.25	0.52	0.16	0.37	3.050**	0.004
	Low	6.16	0.58	6.55	0.64	0.39	0.60	4.647***	0.000

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01
Con = Content, Orga = Organization, Gram = Grammar, Voca = Vocabulary, Mech = Mechanics, Difference = Difference between the draft and the revision

The improvements in writing quality were measured based on the gaps between the mean scores of the drafts and those of the revisions. As shown in Table 7, statistically significant differences emerged in all the five component areas between the drafts and the revised texts regardless of the writers' level of writing proficiency. More specifically, the high- and low-skilled writers made significant improvements in the area of content from their drafts to their revisions after receiving peer review, with the high-skilled writers obtaining the average improvement of 0.46 from their drafts (M = 6.76) to their revisions (M = 7.22) (t = 4.413), and the low-skilled writers, 0.71 from their drafts (M = 5.51) to their revisions (M = 6.22) (t

= 4.579) out of a total of 10. Similarly, both proficiency groups made significant improvements in the area of organization from their drafts to their revisions, with the high-skilled writers obtaining the average improvement of 0.22 from their drafts (M = 6.88) to their revisions (M = 7.10) (t =3.341), and the low-skilled ones, 0.69 from their drafts (M = 5.45) to their revisions (M = 6.14) (t = 5.551). Grammatical structures were also improved as a result of peer comments in that for the high-skilled writers the mean score of grammar increased by 0.78 from their drafts (M = 6.08) to their revisions (M = 6.86) (t = 5.263) and for the low-skilled ones, by 1.88 from their drafts (M = 4.76) to their revisions (M = 6.65) (t = 9.539). The same was also true for the area of vocabulary in that for the high-skilled writers the mean score of vocabulary in their revisions (M = 7.10) turned out to be significantly higher than that in their drafts (M = 6.61) (t = 4.464), while the low-skilled ones also made an improvement of 1.41 in the area of vocabulary from their drafts (M = 5.22) to their revisions (M = 6.63) (t = 10.252). Significant gains in punctuation and spelling were also obtained by the high-skilled writers from their drafts (M = 7.10) to their revisions (M = 7.25) and by their low-skilled counterparts from their drafts (M = 6.16) to their revisions (M = 6.55) (t = 4.647).

These findings taken together demonstrate that the writers in both proficiency groups exhibited significant improvements from their drafts to their revised texts in the five component areas (content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics). This suggests that the writers' adoption and incorporation of peer review into their revisions had beneficial effects on their writing quality, resulting in significantly greater improvements, as was the case in many prior studies (Kamimura, 2006; Min, 2006. Yang, et al., 2006).

Closer examination of whether there are any differences in the degree of improvements of writing quality between the high- and low-proficient writers also yielded fruitful results, as encapsulated in Table 8.

TABLE 8
The Improvements of Writing Quality by Proficiency

Area	Group	*n*	*Draft→Revision*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
Content	High	51	6.76 → 7.22	0.46	0.73	-1.378	0.172
	Low	51	5.51 → 6.22	0.71	1.10		
Organization	High	51	6.88 → 7.10	0.22	0.46	3.374**	0.001
	Low	51	5.45 → 6.14	0.69	0.88		
Grammar	High	51	6.08 → 6.86	0.78	1.06	4.441***	0.000
	Low	51	4.76 → 6.65	1.88	1.41		
Vocabulary	High	51	6.61 → 6.96	0.35	0.59	5.570***	0.000
	Low	51	5.22 → 6.49	1.27	1.02		
Mechanics	High	51	7.10 → 7.25	0.16	0.37	2.381*	0.020
	Low	51	6.16 → 6.55	0.39	0.60		
Total	High	51	33.43 → 35.39	1.96	1.61	6.484***	0.000
	Low	51	27.10 → 32.04	4.94	2.86		

***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05

An independent samples *t*-test showed statistically significant differences between the high- and low-skilled writers in the improvements of writing quality on most component areas except for the content area. Specifically, significantly greater gains were made by the low-proficient writers than by their high-proficient counterparts on organization ($M = 0.69$ vs. $M = 0.22$), grammar ($M = 1.88$ vs. $M = 0.78$), vocabulary ($M = 1.27$ vs. $M = 0.35$), and mechanics ($M = 0.39$ vs. $M = 0.16$). This suggests that the high-skilled reviewers' feedback given to the low-skilled writers had greater effects on writing quality than the low-skilled reviewers' feedback given to the high-skilled writers. However, no significant differences were detected between the two writer groups in the improvements of writing quality on content ($M = 0.71$ vs. $M = 0.45$). This suggests that both groups made a similar degree of improvements on content.

When the five component areas were combined, the low-skilled writers ($M = 4.94$) who received feedback from the high-skilled reviewers made more overall gains than the high-skilled writers ($M = 1.96$) who received feedback from the low-skilled reviewers. This clearly indicates that the low-skilled writers benefitted more from peer review than the high-skilled ones. This finding concurs with that presented by some research (e.g. Kamimura, 2006; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009), which revealed that the low-skilled students exhibited a greater improvement in writing quality as a result of the scaffolding feedback than their high-skilled counterparts. This in turn suggests that the high-skilled reviewers' feedback made more contributions to writing quality than the low-skilled reviewers'. From a Vygotskian (1978) sociocultural perspective, the scaffolding behavior from the high-proficient reviewers enabled the low-proficient writers to move further through their ZPDs beyond their current levels of development to higher levels of achievement (Villamil & De Guerrero, 1998).

V. CONCLUSIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Our analysis thus far has focused on how the learners provide and adopt peer feedback in writing and whether they benefit from peer feedback. This analysis has yielded many intriguing findings. One noticeable finding from the peer-review task was that when they provided peer feedback, both the high- and low-proficient reviewers had a profound preoccupation with micro-level features, especially grammar feedback. This finding suggests that they prioritized grammatical accuracy with too much focus on grammatical forms. This is by no means congruent with the writing principle that reviewers should resist the temptation to treat minor (local) grammatical errors for the first draft (Brown, 2015). This certainly indicates a great need for peer review training in EFL writing classrooms. Given the findings of the study, it is of great importance to highlight the writing principle that at the initial stage, peer feedback should focus on global areas (content and organization),

while at the later stage, on local aspects (grammatical and mechanical errors) (Brown, 2015).

A similar tendency was also true in the revision task, given that the great majority of peer comments adopted by the writers for revision fell into grammar feedback irrespective of the writers' level of proficiency. This finding was in accord with Villamil and De Guerrero's (1998) finding that students tend to concentrate more on surface revisions than on changes that affect meaning. This signals that the students in both groups failed to go beyond the mere focus on the surface revisions to the broader aspects of revisions. Villamil and De Guerrero (1998) provided several reasons why students make more revisions in grammar than in any other area. First, learners are unstable in their command of language structure and, consequently, feel the need to deal with aspects of form. Second, students think they need to 'clean' the text first of linguistic anomalies that may obscure the meaning of the text. Third, students simply follow their habitual tendency to focus on grammar. While these accounts are also true for Korean EFL students, there seems to be an additional reason for the learners' reliance on grammatical structures when revising their essays: The traditional grammar teaching method is still popular in Korean EFL classrooms and thus it may lead the students to focus predominantly on grammar at the expense of content and organization in the revision process. In this sense, the peer review training sessions should steer the students away from their heavy reliance on the adoption of surface-level feedback toward the adoption of meaning-based feedback, especially at the initial stage of revision. This is in conformity with Villamil and De Guerrero's (1998) suggestion that explicit instructions should concentrate on content and organization first and then on language use and mechanics. Hence, writing instructions should direct a good deal of attention to the following factors: whether a thesis statement is relevant; whether a topic is well developed; whether main ideas are clear and well supported by detailed information; whether writing is well-organized with clear transitions and logical sequences; whether introduction and conclusion are effective (Brown, 2015), among many others.

With respect to the reasons for refusing peer review, the writer-defensive factor was predominant regardless of the writers' level of proficiency. This implies that in their refusal of peer review, the writers preferred to justify their own ideas over criticizing peers' suggestions. This finding can be accounted for in terms of sociocultural conventions. In Korean culture, students usually avoid showing a negative attitude toward their peers' suggestions since peer feedback itself is potentially a face-threatening act (Lee, 1997) and so is the act of criticizing (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Accordingly, the feedback receivers' avoidance of direct criticism about the reviewers' feedback in favor of their justification of their ideas seems to be a token of their efforts to mitigate face threats, which is eventually a way to show politeness to the feedback givers.

While it was found that the learners relied heavily on the area of grammar in their provision and adoption of peer feedback, their adoption of peer comments accounted for

their significant improvements in writing quality in all the five areas (content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics). It follows that both groups found each other's comments beneficial to improve the quality of their writing, as was shown in many other studies (e.g. Kamimura, 2006). More specifically, their adoption of peer comments in the different component areas helped them improve their content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics in one way or another. This finding lends support to the idea that peer review is a viable and important activity to improving one's own writing (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009).

A more in-depth analysis showed that the high- and low-skilled reviewers' comments had different effects on the quality of revisions, seeing that the low-proficient writers who received feedback from the high-proficient reviewers made more significant improvements in writing quality than the high-proficient writers who received feedback from the low-proficient reviewers. This finding was a clear signal that the high-proficient reviewers' comments were of higher quality and thus had more beneficial effects on writing than the low-proficient reviewers' comments. This seems to be in keeping with the narrow traditional interpretation of ZPD and scaffolding, which states that high-proficient students could contribute to peer feedback more than low-proficient ones (Allen & Mills, 2016; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). On the other hand, the low-proficient reviewers' poorer comments may be largely due to their limited English proficiency and their lack of knowledge about writing skills. Indeed, this claim has been widely held by many researchers (Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Kamimura, 2006). Such being the case, peer review instructions should assist the low-skilled reviewers to increase linguistic knowledge and writing knowledge, which are the fundamental elements of peer review activities.

The above findings lead us to consider how to make peer interactions more effective. The finding that the high-skilled writers benefitted far less from peer review than their low-skilled counterparts raises a question as to how to help the high-skilled writers benefit more from peer review. One way to do this is to capitalize on group work at the expense of pair work since peer interactions in groups will provide a group member with the opportunities to receive a greater diversity of comments from other members with different proficiency levels.

This research is not without limitations. Though this study made a good attempt to deal with mixed-proficiency peer interactions, it did not take into account matched-proficiency peer interactions. In this sense, a research theme worthy of further investigation is how different pairings of students (High-High, High-Low, Low-Low dyads) influence peer review and revision activities. Despite this limitation, this study made some important contributions to L2 writing research and pedagogy. It made a methodological advance over the prior studies in that it employed a far larger sample size. More importantly, the findings of the research corroborated Vygotskian (1978) sociocultural theory since they demonstrated that peer review assisted the learners to improve the quality of their writing in one way or

another. Moreover, L2 writing proficiency, as can fairly be expected, was found to be a crucial variable influencing writing quality. These findings will provide useful insights into what types of peer feedback should be accentuated in peer review training sessions for EFL writers. When implemented properly, peer review training will enable the students, especially the low-skilled writers, to enhance their writing skills, which will eventually pave the way for improving the quality of their writing.

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Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: Secondary

Woo-hyun Jung (professor)
Dept. of English Language & Literature
Yeungnam University
38541 Daehak-ro 280, Gyeongsan-si, Gyeongsangbuk-do, Korea
E-mail: woohjung@ynu.ac.kr

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