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Interactional Details in Group Peer Feedback in an L2 Writing Class*

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The purpose of this study was to explore interactional details occurring in group peer feedback whose participants had different proficiency levels of English. The attention on peer feedback in the process of L2 writing has been paid enough to understand practical importance in developing L2 literacy. However, there was little inquiry in the peer feedback configuration of group, not paired feedback, which could disclose interactional dynamics. Through the interactional dynamics, we as researchers and practitioners in L2 writing can better understand the quality of peer feedback, instead of simply evaluating it from the differences between one draft before peer feedback and a subsequent draft after peer feedback. Therefore, this study examined interactional details in one group peer feedback session where four students provided feedback on one student's writing. The feedback took place in for about 40 minutes when the writer moderated the feedback process. This study found that the group peer feedback session itself was learning process as they clarified, argued about, and acknowledged what they were reading, as well as proposing and demonstrating an ideal solution. This interaction analysis demonstrated that all of the members contributed to active interaction for the feedback discussion.

**[L2 writing/peer feedback/group peer feedback/interaction/
제 2 언어작문/동료피드백/그룹동료피드백/상호작용]**

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I. INTRODUCTION

Peer feedback has received continuous attention along with the "phenomenal growth" (Kroll, 2003, p. 3) in L2 writing research. Its foci have covered nature of peer feedback, connection between peer feedback and outcomes, trained peer feedback, online peer feedback, and more. Although the results are varying, various authors (Carson & Nelson, 1994; Ferris, 2003; Leki, 1990; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994) have suggested many practical benefits in relation to critical thinking skills, collaborative learning, the development of socially justified knowledge, and the development of classroom community.

This suggestion has inspired researchers and practitioners to delve into the tailored methods for the purpose of practical application. Much research, however, tends to gravitate toward effectiveness, defining it as linking peer feedback with outcomes. In fact, its productivity can be found within its process itself if we can look into it thoroughly. Therefore, more studies should be added in order for researchers and practitioners to better comprehend what is really going on and what can be going on in peer feedback that involves much more complexity. This study attempts to explore interactional details, and the beginning of its exploration starts with the understanding of peer interaction and learning in general and the existing research studies about peer interaction in L2 writing.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Interaction and Learning

The roles that interaction plays in learning have been explained from a sociocultural perspective. Vygotsky (1978), Lantolf (2000) and Wertsch (1991) emphasized the importance of interaction with a person of a higher level of expertise such as teachers and parents. According to Vygotsky, however, learning does not occur by the transmission of knowledge from an expert to a learner. The expert refers to anyone who has a better understanding than the learner. Not only a teacher or a parent but peers or even a younger person can be the expert. Peer learning occurs when each member in a peer group promotes the others' learning playing a role as an expert.

For peer learning to be successful, members of a peer group are required to "talk to each other about the task, presenting their ideas and perspectives, asking questions, providing information, suggesting plans of action, and so on" (King, 1999, p. 89). Through such a meaning construction process, learners have an opportunity to recreate their cognitive structures and thinking processes. Also, they are able to "discover that their own

perceptions, facts, assumptions, values, and general understandings of the material differ to a greater or lesser extent from those of others with whom they are interacting" (King, 1999, p. 89).

Though peer learning brings many benefits to learners as previously mentioned, many studies have reported that explanation givers have the benefit of peer learning. For example, Webb (1989, 1991) found that giving explanations is in positive correlation with achievement. Other scholars such as Chi and VanLehn (1991) and King (1992) also showed that explanation givers had positive learning effects. Results from Webb and Farivar (1994, 1999) indicated that the receiving explanations is not highly correlated with achievement, but on the other hand it is noted that receiving explanations can hardly lead to learning but are necessary for future problem-solving.

To put it shortly, the results of previous studies demonstrated that peer learning involves active interaction, through which students learn from and with their peers without any authority's help, and that the effects of peer learning is testified to be more beneficial to the givers of explanation.

2. Interaction in Peer Feedback of L2 Writing

Studies about interaction have been conducted in different configurations and modes. Considering peer feedback in the online context, H. J. Yu and H. Choe (2010) conducted a study about the effect of online peer feedback with the tools: TrackChanges in MS Word and a synchronous chatting tool. They investigated peer online chatting with 10 university students, tracing feedback types and online interaction. Through the investigation, they concluded, "in online conferencing session, [the students] brought up important issues, clarified the highlighted comments, clarified meaning, and negotiated meaning before the student writers confirmed their mistakes to revise them in their subsequent drafts" (p. 210). In her study about online peer feedback via a synchronous computer-mediated communication, Liang (2010) analyzed online interaction with the framework: meaning negotiation, content discussion, error correction, task management, social talk, and technical action. Based on the framework, she looked into "the revision-related and non-revision-related discourse" (p. 57), but stated the distinction between them was not clear. Also, she claims that productive online interaction is based on the learners' writing experience and levels; therefore, teachers should pay attention to the diversity of students for their collaboration. Although both of the above studies presented several samples of online interaction, it is yet to delve into the interactional details.

The complexity of interaction hardly comes to the surface in the online setting; however, it is a little better in the offline setting. While analyzing the nature of peer interaction, some studies looked into the interactional nature in order to identify the meanings of interaction,

which can be associated with the subsequent revision of writing. Mangelsdorf and Schlumberger (1992) examined student comments that disclosed reviewers' attitude, and they classified it into three types: prescriptive, collaborative, and interpretive. In a similar vein, Lockhart and Ng (1995) explored peer feedback, classifying them into four types: authoritative, interpretive, probing, and collaborative. Both of the studies concluded that the collaborative stance of reviewers could contribute most positively to the peer feedback process.

Other studies examined a different configuration of peer feedback, which is group peer feedback (H. J. Yu & H. Choe, 2011; Nelson & Murphy, 1992). H. J. Yu and H. Choe's study, which is the foundation of this study, examined interaction patterns in the peer group session in which the four students became one group. By analyzing interaction, they investigated feedback areas and the patterns in which they incorporated peer feedback into writing revision. The study demonstrated how each student constructed feedback according to writing proficiency and attitude and how each student responded to peer comments on her own writing. The findings of the study implied that rapport is the key to engender meaningful feedback, specific revision strategies and concrete feedback are advisable, and attitude toward feedback is also what counts how much the students learn through the feedback session. However, the previous study did not present talk in the feedback session in detail as the present study did by analyzing each turn of participating students.

The insight of the above literature review indicates that studies about peer feedback are not simply limited to one writing procedure in the entire writing process. It is observed that they tried exploring the depth of writing process by looking closely into peer feedback interaction. However, it is yet to investigate different configurations of group, taking participants' contributions into account during the feedback process. Prior to the decision about whether students incorporate feedback into their revision, it should be acknowledged that peer feedback discussion itself is the process of meaningful learning. The meaningful learning process can be observed through the exhaustive description of interaction.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

1. Research Questions

Given the contextualization of studies about peer feedback in L2 writing, this study delved closely into interactional details in the feedback, guided by the three questions:

A. How does interaction flow?
B. What specific roles does each group member play in group peer feedback?

C. How frequently does each member contribute to the interaction?

2. Contexts

This section involves a brief description about contextual information that includes participants, the writing task, and peer feedback procedures. Participants of this study were four students specializing in English education at one university in Jeollabuk-do. All of them were highly motivated in taking and also talking in the course since English writing means a lot to most of the students who desire to become a teacher after their graduation. That is, writing competence is a growing concern in one of the key factors in passing the teacher appointment exam.

Nevertheless, the levels of language proficiency relevant to English writing in the group were varying. Based on the observation that the instructor of this course had made for two years, the student writer (S1) whose essay was analyzed in this study was relatively less proficient than the other students. Two students had a good command of English: One student (S2) was advanced in each area of making sentences with accuracy and presenting thoughts with logic; and the other student (S3) was highly advanced in using vocabulary and had excellent grammar knowledge, although her excellent grammar knowledge did not correspond to the excellent and accurate use of it. The remaining student (S4) had a good English intuition, with her English authentic, although her complexity and explanatory knowledge about the language was not as sophisticated as that of the previous two students.

The writing task was to complete one comparison-and-contrast essay about men's talk and women's talk. The instructional process of this writing task included reading a reference text and observation for writing preparation, drafting, group peer feedback, second draft, teacher feedback, and final draft. Group peer feedback that the present study investigated was conducted for about 2 hours and more for each group, which consisted of four students. The students in the writing class adjusted the ways of their conducting peer feedback as the semester went by (H. J. Yu & H. Choe, 2011). This particular group also made the most of the group peer feedback session in the ways that the student writer drew the group members' attention by reading part of her essay and inviting their oral comments, and the other members constructed feedback collaboratively. It was observed that the present peer feedback session was one of the most dynamic feedback sessions.

3. Data Processing and Analysis

We completed our research about the four different peer group feedback sessions. Although the research examined the group peer feedback sessions in a somewhat detailed manner, we realized that we needed to further our research from a more interactional

viewpoint, in order to disentangle the complexity and dynamics of interaction. Therefore, this qualitative discourse analysis was applied for one peer feedback session that lasted for about 40 minutes. Also, the group feedback was conducted in Korean, and the researchers translated it into English verbatim.

The foci of analysis, as indicated in the research questions, were on the interactional architectures of meaning units, the roles of each member, and the frequency of meaning units, the implications of each interaction.

To begin with, it is important to define ‘feedback’ in this present study. In our study, feedback is "all kinds of talk occurring in group feedback sessions, regardless of whether or not students associate them with their subsequent drafts” (H. J. Yu & H. Choe, 2011, p. 195). Feedback interaction must be meaningful when the writer has another opportunity to contemplate on his or her writing by summarizing or clarifying it and when the other member, as well as the writer, can learn some aspects in relation to content, organization, language use, or other aspects. Likewise, this study took a broad definition of feedback, whether or not it is correlated to subsequent revision.

The interaction analysis primarily resulted from what it means by each member's turn, observing initiating moves and responding moves (Jones, Garralda, Li, & Lock, 2006). In doing so, we decided not to analyze the sub-categories in a too detailed manner, as Jones and her colleagues attempted. We adapted their analytic language for our analysis, since some of it was useful to identify the interactional function of students’ utterance. However, what this study explored was to analyze interaction from a relational aspect between the student writer and feedback providers. Also, this study was to show architecture and details of each interaction in a more structured manner, so we designed our own coding schemes and coded each student's participation and explicated discursive functions within the following taxonomy:

A. *Inviting the group discussion* means that one group member directs the other students to examine whether any feedback is needed.
B. *Initiating feedback* means that one group member identifies one area that requires feedback.
C. *Requesting clarification to the writer* means that other group members ask the writer to explain content, language use, vocabulary, or paragraphing, sometimes showing disagreement with the writer or the other members.
D. *Responding to the request* means that the writer answers the other members' questions in diverse manners and complexities.
E. *Acknowledging explanation* means that mostly the peers show their understanding of the writer's *responding to the request*.
F. *Asking (requesting) an ideal solution to a group member(s)* means that the writer

asks how to fix her error and revise unclear parts.

G. *Proposing an ideal solution* means that group members suggest a solution to an error that the writer makes. This one occurs in the middle of feedback discourse, and the proposed one is a tentative solution, but possible to be a final solution.
H. *Demonstrating an ideal solution* includes three features: There should be extensive explanation; it is placed at the final turn of feedback; and there should be clear explanation excluding ambiguity or question. This type of turn is cognitively most challenging among all of the turns.

It was important to distinguish the talks that the student writing made since she actively participated in the feedback discussion to defend and clarify her writing. Of the above taxonomy, *responding to the request* that the student writer carried out was various. Therefore, we coded the turn like the sub-variety:

A. *Repeating*: The writer simply repeats a sentence.
B. *Paraphrasing*: She restructures a sentence in her writing or uses different words for the sentence.
C. *Interpreting*: She interprets a sentence(s) into Korean.
D. *Simple reasoning*: She explains her intention with one sentence. For example, “S2: You wrote about women and men separately, S1: I did that since there wasn't much space.”
E. *Simple answering*: She answers an interlocutor's question in a simple and clear-cut manner. For example, “S3: Aren't you structuring your essay in a topic-by-topic pattern? S1: Women and men.”
F. *Comparing*: She compares her writing with another student’s. For example, “You wrote that when a woman says, ‘I bought new clothes.’ She implies that she wants some praises,” or “Well, the overcall content may be similar.”
G. *Illustrating*: She explains a context in her writing by providing a concrete example.
H. *Positioning*: She explains or argues about her intention in a detailed way. For example, “That’s not what I meant. Let’s say, someone’s girl friend has trouble with her and she is grumbling about it. Then a man like her boy friend points out what she did wrong as well, instead of totally sympathizing with her.”

A unit of feedback for analysis was based on a feedback topic or area that the group focuses on. For example, topics included content, organization, sentence structure, style, word form, word use. A snapshot of interaction analysis is in the following:

S1: (She reads the target sentence.) Is there anything wrong? *(Inviting)*

S4: You use two different tenses in the same sentence as in 'they can easily get...used direct words.' *(Initiating)*
S1: Then, do I have to put 'use'? *(Asking an ideal solution)*
S2: Why don't you say the sentence in Korean, first? *(Requesting clarification)*
S1: (She translates the sentence into Korean.) *(Responding to the request-translating)*
S4: Doesn't she have to replace 'used' as 'use'? *(Proposing an ideal solution)*

This interaction is part of the unit in which the group constructs feedback on the sentence, "As using implied articulations, they expect the response that they can easily get if they used direct words," that S1 wrote in her first draft. It consists of 6 turns, which represent *inviting*, *initiating*, *requesting clarification*, r*esponding to the request*, and *proposing an ideal solution*. As aforementioned, the above interaction is part of an excerpt. The finding section demonstrates the complete excerpt of units, identifying how each group member contributes to feedback interaction in more detail.

IV. FINDINGS

The number of the total units is 21, which covered six feedback areas: *content, organization, sentence structure, word choice, word form,* and *number*. The shortest unit consists of 2 turns, while the longest unit 17. Table 1 shows the frequency of turn for each group member: 52 for S1, 18 for S2, 23 for S3, and 23 for S4.

TABLE 1
Frequency of Group Members' Turn

	S1	S2	S3	S4	Total
No. of turns	52	18	23	23	116
Percentage (%)	45	15	20	20	100

Considering the number of turns, S1 contributed most to the group peer feedback. The discourse functions and their features of her turns explain her participation in the group feedback discourse. Most dynamic in regard to frequency and sub-variety are the ways of responding to the other members. Of 52, 20 features one way or another of responding. Many techniques observed in responding to the others' requests. Out of the eight ways, *simple answering* (6[1]) is most dominant in frequency, and *interpreting* (3) and *positioning* (3) relatively high, followed by *paraphrasing* (2), *simple reasoning* (2), *comparing* (2),

[1] The number indicates the frequency of the function of each turn.

repeating (1), and *illustrating* (1).

Along with the responding turns, inviting group discussion for unit feedback was conspicuous. Inviting the discussion does not mean that she initiated feedback with a specific topic to discuss, but orchestrated or structured the group talk. Mostly, this invitation took place by reading a sentence or a series of sentences that she wrote. Reading her writing amounts to one-fourth of the total turns (12). Another, not high, but noticeable type in frequency (5) features asking an ideal solution to her errors. For example, "Then, what am I supposed to say? Am I supposed to say that they are completely different beings from different planets," or "I don't know why I wrote it. Should I change it into 'use'? Is this sentence wrong?" The high tendency can be an indicator to determine the writing proficiency of a writer.

S2, as an active feedback provider, contributed to the group discussion in various ways. The analysis of her turns disclosed that she *initiated feedback discussion* (3), *proposed an ideal solution* (7), and also *demonstrated an ideal solution* (2). First, she initiated the group discourse by identifying problematic areas in regard to content, word form, and mechanics. For example, "If you say that there are tremendous differences, does it mean that they are different" or "However, it is clearly fact that... Isn't 'clearly' strange?" In such ways, she helped students to deliberate over the writing problems and to resolve them. The dominant number of her turns was dedicated to proposing an ideal solution to the discussed areas. Some examples for such proposal are, "Doesn't she have to replace 'used' as 'use'?"; "you can consistently use a singular pronoun, 'one'; "Then, are you supposed to write, 'The man made my heart palpitate,' rather than 'the man made me palpitate' since 'palpitate' means '(a heart) beat rapidly and strongly.'" Almost all of her proposed solutions occurred in the middle of feedback talk were appropriate so that they could be led to further discussion. Although the frequency is not high, S2 demonstrated an ideal solution so that she helped S1 to revise her writing. One example can be found in "You can write, 'They can be abandoned.' Or, you may add 'they' like 'they cannot abandon.' Adding 'they' can be a simple solution." As explained in the definition section, demonstration indicates the final stage in which the feedback provider presents her accurate solution to the given issue after summarizing all of the proposed alternatives.

The three types of turn – *initiating feedback discussion*, *proposing an ideal solution*, and *demonstrating an ideal solution* – which S2 generated are most dominant when she participated in the discussion. It is evaluated that these types are involved with revision-oriented turns. The other turns characterized requesting, paraphrasing, comparing, social talk, or confirming, which is not directly associated with the writer's revision.

Excerpt one is one of the interactional units that shows S2's participation, when the peer group is constructing their comments on the clause, "The man made me palpitate."

Excerpt one:

S1: (She reads her writing).
S4: What does ‘palpitate’ mean?
S1: It means ‘a heart is beating rapidly and strongly.’
S2: Then, are you supposed to write, ‘the man made my heart palpitate,’ rather than ‘the man made me palpitate’ since ‘palpitate’ means ‘make a heart beat.’
S1: Well, ‘make’ is a ‘causative verb,’ which means to force one to do something.
S2: My point is that you said you’re trying to mean that he made you feel, so it is better to say, ‘he made my heart, not me, palpitate.’

After the student writer reads her sentence, S4 requests the student writer to explain the definition of ‘palpitate.’ S1 responds the request by stating the definition. S2 proposed an ideal solution, spelling out the meaning and usage of ‘palpitate.’ Then, as the student writer responds to S2’s explanation, however, without understanding the subtle difference, she tries to explain the usage in a more detailed way.

Like S2, S3, as an active feedback provider and mediator, helped the student writer to review her writing. The functions of S3's turns represent the specific ways in which she contributed to the writer's reviewing. The functions covered various areas by *initiating feedback* (3), *requesting clarification* (5), *responding to the request* (3), *acknowledging explanation* (3), *proposing an ideal solution* (6), and *demonstrating an ideal solution* (2). One turn features her complementation of the student's writing, which is not included in the analytic scheme of this study.

The thorough observation of her turns can lead us to divide her participation into two features. First, the same as S2 did, S3 made meaningful contributions by identifying possibly problematic points to initiate feedback discussion, proposing ideal solutions, and also demonstrating ideal solutions. It was also observed that she participated in the group discussion on behalf of the writer. In doing so, first S3 tried to understand what the writer wrote by asking questions, like “You mean. ‘They consider others' saying as a problem to be solved.’ What does ‘them’ refer to? Does ‘them’ indicate ‘they’ or ‘other’?” and by acknowledging the writer's explanation, as in “I see. Women tend to just provide a clue that they bought new clothes, but never directly ask others to comment on her new clothes. Right! That is how our points are different from each other.” Likewise, S3 showed her tendency that she tried to understand her writing as exactly as she could. This attitude evolved to defend her writing by answering the other members’ questions, as follows:

Excerpt two:

S1: (She reads part of her essay.)
S2: You use another aspect. Isn't it better to separate the aspect from the previous one?
S3: Aren't you structuring your essay in a topic-by-topic pattern?
S1: Women and men.
S2: You wrote about women and men separately.
S1: I did that since there wasn't much space.

The above interaction indicates that the students are talking about the organization of her essay when the writer, S1, moves onto another difference between women's talk and men's talk. S2 points out that the writer starts a new paragraph since she describes a different aspect of talk from the previous one. However, the writer is structuring the features of women's talk in one paragraph and those of men's talk in another paragraph. It seems that S3 understands the writer's organizational intention, identifying a topic-by-topic pattern. In such way, S3 responds to the request or helps the writer to do that in the peer group discussion.

All in all, S3 played a role of an active feedback provider and mediator. As explicated, this dual role showed that she contributed to the collaborative feedback while tried to understand the writer's intention from the standpoint of the writer.

Although S4 contributed to the feedback discussion, the ways of participating in the feedback interaction are dissimilar with those of S2 and S3. The analytic details of her turns feature that S4 contributed most to *initiating feedback discussions* (12), while sometimes *requesting clarification* (4) and *proposing an ideal solution* (3). The others, excepting one turn of responding to the question, feature the managerial functions – like "S1: Can we move to another part?" – to make the feedback discussion flow naturally, whose functions are unidentifiable, also not meaningful, with the analytic scheme determined for this study.

To make the turn analysis a little more specific, we could look into the features of her initiations in a couple of stances. First, most of her initiations involve language use. For instance, "Well, 'abandon' is a transitive verb. There is neither subject nor object"; "You use two different tenses in the same sentence as in 'they can easily get if they used direct words'"; "Did you use 'ordinary' for an adverb?" As indicated in the examples, her initiations relate to specific corrections. Sometimes she wanted to be clarified about the meanings of words. The examples are: "What does 'palpitate' mean?" and "What does 'ascertain' mean?" The attitude in the context of being clarified is somewhat different from the attitude that S3 shows. S4 simply intends to be clarified, while S3 moves onto the further discussion based on her being clarified. The discursive features that S4 has are in

the following excerpts:

Excerpt three:

S4: Well, ‘abandon’ is a transitive verb. There is neither subject nor object
S1: I wrote ‘strategy that can.’
S2: ‘Strategy’ can’t ‘abandon.’ But, you can write, ‘strategy can’t be abandoned.’
S4: I don't know what that means.
S1: (She interprets it in Korean.)
S2: You can write, ‘they can’t be abandoned.’ Or, you may add ‘they’ like ‘they cannot abandon.’ Adding ‘they’ can be a simple solution.

Excerpt three shows that S4 is initiating the feedback discussion by pointing out a mistake in a concrete way. This initiation leads to the feedback where the group helps the writer to fix the sentence according to the correct structure of voice.

All in all, S4 plays a little distinctive role by focusing on language- or vocabulary-oriented feedback in the feedback contribution. Although her foci were on the local areas of feedback, her role can be considered as meaningful in the sense that she also demonstrated active interaction showing her frequent participation.

IV. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This peer group feedback explained the meanings from various perspectives. The active participation shown in the study data implies that all of the students experience the process of learning. For example, most apparently, S1 better understood the accurate use of language receiving feedback from the other students. Sometimes, she explained her intention in certain parts of writing, which demonstrated her in-depth understanding. Other members who pinpointed and proposed an ideal solution reinforced and challenged their current knowledge in writing and language use. This group peer feedback session itself is learning process as they clarify, argue about, and acknowledge what they are reading, as well as proposing and demonstrating an ideal solution, whether or not the student writer uses it for the subsequent revision. In the long run, this interaction analysis demonstrated that all of the members contributed to active interaction for the feedback discussion. It is safe to claim that the interactions that all of the group members demonstrate are worthy of practicing to support student writing and collaborative learning.

The detailed description about interaction with the writing draft also made clear what the students can do and what the teacher can support in the process of writing. Such results can

provide foundation for teacher feedback. For example, the group did not deal with the sentences like 'It does not mean I thought him handsome,' 'Please buy it and present to me,' or 'Another way of their speaking is emotion-centered response to other people.' It is likely that feedback on these sentences is challenging, so that they need to be handled by teachers or experts available. If teachers are open to such interaction, it must be valuable resources in teaching. In fact, such participation by teachers can be made in the following way. First, teachers have to implement peer feedback and analyze it to determine what students need more in revising their draft in terms of language aspects and interactional aspects. Then, teachers demonstrate them in an entire class before students conduct another peer feedback. This demonstration helps students to support peer feedback, and they will be able to grasp what they need to do for more effective feedback.

Pedagogical and research implications are interwoven for the context where this type of study is conducted. Considering pedagogical implication, it is important that teachers and researchers need to explore peer feedback process in detailed ways, one of which is shown in this study, to understand what is really happening in peer feedback process. Authentic talks can disclose one but a very significant aspect of peer feedback process. The understanding of the process can contribute to guide students to orchestrate their talk productively by demonstrating an interaction sample in order to train students for the peer work. Future research should cover a different configuration of group according to learners' language levels (e.g., a group of beginners, intermediate, advanced learners, or a mixed group), their motivation and attitude, or their personality. These aspects reflect the reality of current writing classroom. Through research findings with the various aspects, we as researchers or practitioners can help students to understand the nature of group talk and manage group peer feedback effectively.

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Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: Elementary

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