Asynchronous group review of EFL writing: Interactions and text revisions

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Abstract

The current paper reports an empirical study of asynchronous online group review of argumentative essays among nine English as foreign language (EFL) Arab university learners joining English in their first, second, and third years at the institution. In investigating online interactions, commenting patterns, and how the students facilitate text revisions, a three-level analysis of learners’ comments in terms of the language functions, nature and focus area, and connections to subsequent text revisions was conducted. The learners produced a number of 1792 comments which were exploratory, including scaffolding and non-scaffolding (72%), procedural (11%), and social (17%) comments. In relation to the nature and focus area, 53% of the exploratory comments were revision-oriented comments—focusing on global (n = 799; 84%) and local (n = 149; 16%) issues of learners’ essays—whereas non-revision-oriented comments (47%) focused on learners’ socio-relational space (74%), task management (23%) and technical challenges (3%). The findings also showed that 46% of the overall global (n = 615) and only 10% of the overall local (n = 838) text revisions were connected to learners’ comments, indicating the value of global oriented comments in facilitating learners’ global text revisions. Differences of occurrence of these commenting patterns among the three groups were found. Such findings suggest that global text revisions need to be modelled by instructors.

Keywords: Asynchronous Group Review, Interactions, Text Revisions, EFL Learners

Language(s) Learned in this Study: English


Introduction

Peer work such as peer review plays a role in mediating English as second language (ESL) and English as foreign language (EFL) learners’ cognitive processes and pooling their linguistic knowledge (Storch, 2005). It engages learners in reciprocally assisting and directing each other’s attention to various problems in their texts (de Guerrero & Villamil, 2000).

Recently, the increasing applications of synchronous and asynchronous technologies to ESL and EFL group learning (e.g., Darhower, 2002; Pena-Shaff & Nicholls, 2004) have attracted researchers’ attention to explore learners’ interactional dynamics in collaborative writing (e.g., Elola & Oskoz, 2010; Kessler, Bikowski, & Boggs, 2012) and in peer review (e.g., Jones, Garralda, Li, & Lock, 2006; Liang, 2010; Razak & Saeed, 2014). In online peer review, learners engage in questions seeking explanation and justification (Di Giovanni & Nagaswami, 2001), evaluation, clarification and suggestion (Liou & Peng, 2009), and even scaffolding (Razak & Saeed, 2014), involving themselves in a recursive process of reflection and revision of written texts (Saeed & Ghazali, 2016). Interaction in the revision-oriented space means that learners remain on the task, for they target global (content, organization, and purpose) and local (wording, grammar, and punctuation) issues of their texts (Bradley, 2014; Liou & Peng, 2009; Liu & Sadler, 2003; Pham & Usaha, 2015). Yet, most previous studies have disregarded the focus areas of