

Critical Peer Feedback For Business English Writing Through Qzone Blogs: A Mechanism Among Chinese Undergraduates

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ABSTRACT

This study explored critical peer feedback with critical thinking to improve Business English writing. Higher-order thinking skills in peer feedback is conducted to facilitate higher-level writing. This study focuses on the participants' mechanism of critical peer feedback, Qzone blog for critical peer feedback, and issues in critical peer feedback. A qualitative case study is conducted with six Chinese undergraduates. Three kinds of data including semi-structured interviews, Business English writing assignments and artifacts of critical peer feedback, are analyzed by QSR Nvivo 8. The findings reveal that critical peer feedback is a strategy of higher-order peer feedback to improve the higher-level writing. The Revised Bloom's Taxonomy is accepted for critical peer feedback. Critical peer feedback improves the quality of peer feedback and the quality of Business English writing. Qzone blog is a convenient ICT platform for critical peer feedback with many strengths. However, six issues are also perceived in the practice of critical peer feedback. The finding is significant to the process of critical peer feedback in second language writing.

Keywords: critical peer feedback; Qzone blog; Business English Writing; critical thinking; mechanism

INTRODUCTION

Peer feedback research emphasizes its efficiency in writing instruction at different settings, in which feedback content is most efficient (Narciss, 2008; Poulos & Mahony, 2008). The existing question still is how to improve the efficiency of peer feedback in L2 writing. The quality of peer feedback is significant to improve the quality of writing. High-quality peer feedback could enable students to identify the gap between their own performance and a given set of expectations and provide advice about their own writing for improvement (Lizzio & Wilson, 2008; Bayerlein, 2014). Previous studies reveal that students in higher education are less satisfied with peer feedback because of the inefficient quality of peer feedback information (Nicol, Thomson & Breslin, 2014). Feedback does not automatically lead to positive results (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Narciss, 2008; Shute, 2008; Strijbos, Narciss, & Dunnebie, 2010). This implies that high-qualified feedback does not emerge unconsciously, which needs higher stages of thinking and reasoning skills.

In order to improve the efficiency of peer feedback, some researchers realized the "mindful process" of feedback (Narciss, 2008; Poulos & Mahony, 2008). The mental process of peer feedback to improve its quality is based on the theories of constructivism and

psychological cognition (Narciss, 2008; Poulos & Mahony, 2008; Stevenson, 2006; Schraw & Robinson, 2012). This approach aims to study the thinking and reasoning process in giving feedback in order to improve the quality of feedback in writing. According to previous literature, Roscoe and Chi (2007) noticed that students who assess the work of their peers are engaging in a cognitively-demanding activity that extend their understanding of subject matter and writing. Jerry (2012) used the verbal protocol analysis to study the expert and novice raters' mental model in the process of rating in second language writing.

The integration of critical thinking and feedback have significant meaning in order to study the mechanism of mental activities in giving efficient feedback such as the mental process and content of feedback. "Critical peer feedback" and "critical feedback" are discussed to improve the quality of feedback. According to the literature review, Zhao (1996) studied the effect of anonymity on critical peer feedback in computer-mediated collaborative learning and articulates the theoretical framework of critical peer feedback from the constructivism, epistemology, Darwin's natural selection and criticism, and defines the term "critical feedback". However, he does not study how critical feedback improves the quality of writing; he focuses on the anonymous peer feedback. Pearlman (2007), based on the critical pedagogy, tried to transcend peer feedback through critical collaborative assessment, who articulated the importance of critical peer collaborative learning process. Li (2007) realized the "effects of critical assessment training on quality of peer feedback and quality of students' final projects in peer assessment", but "critical assessment" is not further discussed. Cox et al. (2013) reviewed the "ideal preceptor qualities" in peer assessment, one of which is to encourage critical thinking and problem solving. Wolff-Hilliard and Baethe (2014) argued to use digital and audio annotations to reinvent critical feedback with online adult students. They address that the experience of writing and receiving critical peer feedback help students work through the learning experience and emerge more informed and rejuvenated as developing writers.

Although the term "critical feedback" is mentioned in researches, the question is how to use critical feedback to improve the quality of feedback and writing, and what is the mechanism of critical feedback. Therefore, the research gap is, what is the mechanism of critical peer feedback in facilitating the quality of feedback and writing.

Business English is a university discipline in China for ten years. It aims to cultivate international businessmen with knowledge of English proficiency and international business. The curriculum contains the two parts of courses- English language and Business. Business English writing is one of the compulsive courses of Business English language. Peer feedback is regarded as low level thinking, inefficiency and time-consuming in Chinese universities (Yang, Badger & Yu, 2006; Zhang, 2007). However, the problem is how to improve the quality of Business English writing in process-oriented teaching.

CRITICAL THINKING AND CRITICAL PEER FEEDBACK

The three concepts - critical thinking, critical peer feedback and online feature are highlighted as conceptual framework in this study.

Critical Thinking (CT) studies the thinking and reasoning skills of mental reasoning activities by effectively analyzing, evaluating and creating arguments and truth claims. From the perspective of cognitive psychology in education, it can be explained by the following five features: 1) Critical thinking is a higher-order thinking with the activities of analyzing, evaluating and creating; 2) Critical thinking is influenced by individual background, previous experience, and previous knowledge; 3) Critical thinking is not a linear process, but one that flows back and forth (Boyd & Fales, 1983, p. 105; Shields, 1995); 4) Critical thinking is a process of thinking based on the cognition of knowledge, comprehension and application; 5)

Critical thinking ability and skills can be cultivated by teaching and practicing (Adams, 1999; Fahim & Eslamdoost, 2014).

In this study, “critical peer feedback (CPF)” is based on the concepts of “critical thinking” and “peer feedback”, aiming to study peer feedback performance with critical thinking skills by reasonably and comprehensively analyzing, evaluating and creating (Gao et al., 2016a). In writing instruction, “critical peer feedback” refers to a kind of higher-order assessment of writing with the critical thinking skills of analysis, evaluation and creation of peers’ work by the cognition foundation of writing knowledge, writing task comprehension and their application, which aims to scaffold peers’ writing and at the same time construct self-cognition of writing ability. It can be further explained as: 1) The higher-order reflective skills conducted by mediators and oneself, focused on the mental process of analysis, evaluation and creation, which is based on the lower-order thinking skills of knowledge, comprehension and application; 2) Its ability can be cultivated by teaching and practicing.

Qzone is a blog connected with IM software - QQ, which is different from Web 2.0 blog such as Google blog and Yahoo blog (Thang et al., 2016; Nafiseh & Supyan, 2014; Gao, Moses & Adelina, 2016b). Qzone blog has many particular features such as instant message notice, individual private blog and various decoration plates, etc. Qzone blog has been widely used in English writing instruction, which has many advantages for English writing instruction.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There are three research questions in this study:

1. What is Chinese undergraduates’ mechanism of critical peer feedback in Business English writing?
2. How does Qzone blog contribute to critical peer feedback in Business English writing?
3. What are issues in critical peer feedback through Qzone blogs to improve Business English writing?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative study is conducted in this study. The study is designed into two phases. The first phase is the workshop of critical peer feedback and Qzone blog for critical peer feedback. The second phase is the practice of critical peer feedback on Qzone blogs.

SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS

This study was conducted at the School of Foreign Languages, Xuchang University, which is located at Henan Province in the north of China. Xuchang University is a comprehensive provincial university with about twenty thousand undergraduates and one thousand and four hundred lecturers and professors. Xuchang University is a representative of the selected 600 universities in the education reform which is selected at the first turn by Chinese Ministry of Education to construct a university of applied science in 2014. Business English is a discipline in Xuchang University. Business English Writing is a compulsory course in the curriculum of Business English.

A large class of 42 students was chosen as the case class. The 42 students were divided into 7 groups. A group of 6 students was chosen as the case group for this study. The six students were the case participants (CP). They are the juniors majoring in Business English. They are coded as CP1 to CP6 for anonymity and are required to sign a consent form for this study.

In this study, the duration is one semester during the first semester of 2015/2016, according to the syllabus of Business English Writing at Xuchang University. Business English Writing assignments were uploaded on Qzone blogs for online critical peer feedback. According to the research schedule, the training of Qzone blog and the introduction of critical peer feedback need two three-hours of workshops. The three semi-structured interviews started from week 5 to week 16, which aim to get credibility after the participants had experienced critical peer feedback on Qzone blogs in their Business English writing. The document collecting started from week 2 to week 16, to collect participants' writing assignments and online critical peer feedback, based on the syllabus of Business English Writing (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. Duration of the Study

| Study Activity | Phase One (Week 1) | | Phase Two (Week 5-16) | | | Document Collecting |
|----------------|---|----------------|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------|
| | Training of Qzone | Training of CF | Interview 1 | Interview 2 | Interview 3 | |
| Time Span | 3 Hours*2 | 3 Hours*2 | Week 5-8 | Week 9-13 | Week 14-16 | Week 2-16 |
| Total Time | One Semester (Week 1 - Week 16) (1/2015-2016) | | | | | |

DATA COLLECTION

Three kinds of data were collected in this study including semi-structured interviews, Business English writing assignments, and artifacts of critical peer feedback. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted with interview protocols with each participant (see Appendix). The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Six Business English writing assignments were selected to upload on the case participants' Qzone blogs. The critical peer feedback for the writing assignments were uploaded on Qzone blogs in time.

DATA ANALYSIS

In this study, the qualitative data analysis was conducted on the three kinds of data. The computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software QSR Nvivo 8 was used to code and categorize the data sources. The use of QSR Nvivo 8 followed the five principal features for data analyses such as data management, ideas management, query data, and modeling from data and report from the data (Bazeley, 2007, p. 2).

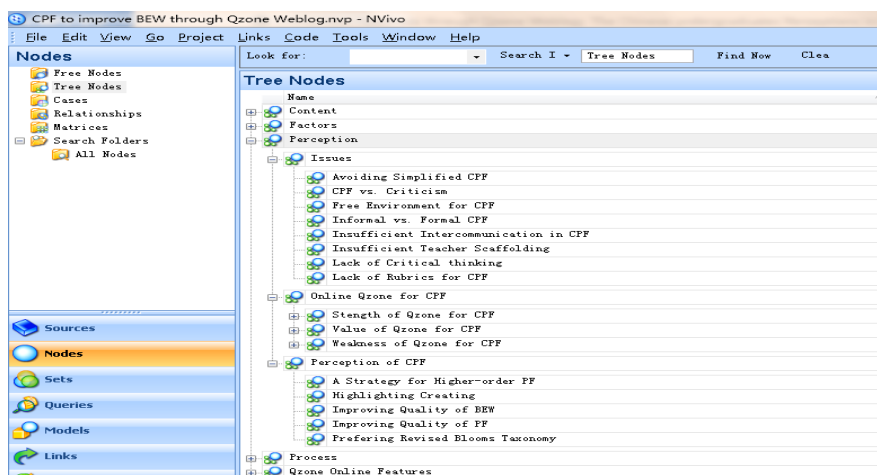


FIGURE 1. Nodes of Mechanism of Critical Peer Feedback in QSR Nvivo 8

FINDINGS

RQ1: WHAT IS CHINESE UNDERGRADUATES' MECHANISM OF CRITICAL PEER FEEDBACK IN BUSINESS ENGLISH WRITING?

According to data analyses, the case participants' mechanism of critical peer feedback to improve the quality of Business English writing through Qzone blogs in this study can be categorized into the following five parts: 1) offering a strategy for higher-order peer feedback; 2) using the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy for critical peer feedback; 3) emphasizing "creating" in critical peer feedback; 4) improving the quality of peer feedback; 5) improving the quality of Business English writing.

OFFERING A STRATEGY FOR HIGHER-ORDER PEER FEEDBACK

Based on the data analyses, the case participants stated that they mainly focused on error correction of grammar, spelling and punctuation in their prior peer feedback, and they had no knowledge of how to make a higher-order peer feedback except error correction. They regarded error correction as a lower-order peer feedback in writing assessment, which is more acceptable for primary and middle school EFL teachers and students. Except for error correction, they still have no definite concept and cognition of the contents, form and skills of higher-order peer feedback in higher-level writing such as Business English writing.

Nowadays, it is still looking for errors. Most of errors are grammar errors, which is very low level in feedback.[...] Before this, it's grammar error, because we all focused on grammar in senior middle school. Gradually, we found it's too "low" level, and we tried to find more constructive ideas. That will be better.

(Cited from Interview Transcript/CP6/23, Oct., 2015)

The six case participants believed that their English proficiency has reached a vantage or higher level as junior undergraduates of English Major. They believed that higher-level writing needs higher-order peer feedback, but not error correction. They agreed that Business English writing is a higher-level professional writing which has specific lexicon, register, style and audiences. However, they still do not recognize what kinds of higher-order thinking may scaffold them with higher-level and efficient peer feedback.

(For peer feedback,) It is to correct the errors, and how to use this word or how to use that grammar. We never learned it before. Now, our English is in a higher level. Where can we find so many errors? I have no idea what to do, if I can not find more errors (in peer feedback).

(Cited from Interview Transcript/CP5/30, Dec., 2015)

The case participants believed that critical peer feedback offers them a higher-order strategy of peer feedback to improve their Business English writing. CP6 indicated that her peer feedback was belonged to critical peer feedback and she has known what aspects could be reflected in her feedback. She argues that critical peer feedback is a higher-order peer feedback.

Now, our feedback is critical peer feedback. All are about higher-level, comprehensive and logic feedback, but not grammar errors. Our ability of critical peer feedback is improved, and we know which aspects can be reflected in feedback. Our ability of peer feedback is also becoming

more powerful (by critical peer feedback).

(Cited from Interview Transcript /CP6 /11 Dec., 2015)

The other five case participants also strongly believed that critical peer feedback offers them a strategy for higher-order peer feedback. Except for error correction, critical peer feedback provides a strategy for higher-order thinking skills to evaluate their Business English writing such as the skills of analyzing, evaluating and creating the writing tasks and contents. They accepted the six steps of critical peer feedback by the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy of critical thinking skills.

THE REVISED BLOOM'S TAXONOMY FOR CRITICAL PEER FEEDBACK

In this study, three models of critical thinking including Reichenbach's Six-steps Model (2001), the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy and Paul-Elder Model (2002), were presented to the case participants for critical peer feedback at the training workshop. They were encouraged to study other models or explore their own model of critical thinking in order to find a more reasonable and applicable model to practice their critical peer feedback.

The data analyses showed that the case participants all insisted that the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy is a reasonable, easy and clear model to conduct critical peer feedback. This model is more acceptable and easier to recognize and understand for beginners of critical peer feedback. In the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy, the first three steps through "remembering, understanding and applying" are processes of lower-order thinking. The last three steps of "analyzing, evaluating, and creating" are critical thinking which is more appropriate for critical peer feedback to assess Business English writing.

The key works of "analyzing", "evaluating" and "creating" in the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy, are frequently presented in their interviews' transcripts and artifacts of critical peer feedback. The critical thinking skills of "analyzing, evaluating, and creating" offer a general thinking logic to understanding and reflecting their peers' writing works. The key word "analyzing" is used to "analyze, classify, compare, contrast, identify, explain, interpret, reason and summarize" the Business English writing tasks. The use of "evaluating" is to "assess, critique, recommend, test and verify" the quality of the writing. And the use of "creating" is to "refine, improve, reorganize, revise, rewrite, summarize" the writing for higher requirements (Krathwohl, 2002).

I think the last two times of critical thinking have certain helps, especially in the process of writing. [...] But with critical peer feedback, we can find many problems and then analyze, summarize, evaluate, and rewrite it.

(Cited from Interview Transcript/CP1/23 Oct., 2015)

Critical thinking is a process of remembering, applying, analyzing, and concluding. [...] However, there is a lack of critical thinking education in China. (Cited from Interview Transcript/CP4/09 Dec., 2015)

The case participants' critical thinking skills are displayed through understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating, which is based on the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy. In the present study of critical thinking and critical peer feedback, all the six case participants have a definite statement that critical thinking skills of the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy is more acceptable for critical peer feedback.

EMPHASIZING “CREATING” IN CRITICAL PEER FEEDBACK

In the Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy, “creating” is defined as “putting elements together to form a coherent or functional whole” and “recognizing elements into a new pattern or structure through generating, planning or producing” (Krathwohl et al., 2001, p. 67-68). The case participants articulated that “creating” is highlighted as “creativity” in critical peer feedback. In the practice of critical peer feedback, main activities are not only including “evaluating coherence and logic”, “recognizing writing structure”, and “re-editing, rewriting the writing tasks”, but also highlighting the “creating” of sentence patterns, wording and the organization of writing concepts and structure.

My biggest harvest in this study is not the accumulation of words and sentence patterns, but is the creativity. My thinking stage reaches a new extent of height, which is very helpful for me. In Business English writing, creativity is also needed. It can make your writing more colorful, and attractive to the potential customers.

(Cited from Interview Transcript/CP2/23 Oct., 2015)

In critical peer feedback of the Business English writing, “creating” is to select more suitable and correct words, more logical sentences, and more sensible and reasonable writing structure. The case participants also emphasized the other “creative” factors for successful Business English writing such as the aspects of pragmatics like more flexible expressions for audience acceptance, politeness, cooperation and possibility of successful marketing. They echoed that their creativity in writing has improved by critical peer feedback. They try to improve peers’ writing from the perspective of creativity like wording, sentence, logic, cohesion and communicating skills. They believed that their Business English writing becomes more creative with new ideas of organization and improved expression after critical peer feedback.

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF PEER FEEDBACK

The case participants believed that their quality of peer feedback has improved in the aspects of content and process by critical peer feedback. With the study of critical peer feedback, they strongly believed that this study of “critical peer feedback” provides them with a new strategy of peer feedback, with critical thinking skills. By employing critical peer feedback for Business English writing, they found that they can present a higher-order peer feedback from the aspects of critical thinking including “analyzing, evaluating and creating”. They strongly agreed with the Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy Model of critical thinking. The critical thinking skills of “analyzing”, “evaluating” and “creating” are higher-order thinking which provide them with helpful skills to improve their quality of peer feedback.

In certain extent, our feedback is critical peer feedback. Our ability of feedback has improved. [...] By critical peer feedback, our group members feedback to each other. We learn from each other, and look for each other’s weaknesses. We also find our peers’ strength. We can improve our quality of peer feedback by mutual complement and scaffolding. [...] In our writing activities, we can use this method to make our ability of critical peer feedback improve greatly.

(Cited from Interview Transcript /CP1/23, Oct., 2015)

CP1 argued that his quality of peer feedback has improved by collaborative learning with critical peer feedback. They can give feedback to each other with their weaknesses and

strengths and learn from each other. They directed that critical peer feedback has improved their quality of peer feedback in this study.

Example:

(1) First, the writing shall be aligned, because it looks in a mess. Second, I think the telephone number and email address shall be put in the end. When you contact, you can find the information at the first sight. At last, if you can add your won contact information, your resume will become more attractive and eye-catching.

(2) I want to make a correction, the contact information can be written anywhere, if only it is eye-catching.

(3) First, you do not finish it (your writing). Second, it may be same with the composition that the teacher gives our (us). In my opinion, you should add something that different.

(4) First, there only is one person. You should not write the “cc”. Second, you need not add the name of the company in the first paragraph. Third, I think the third sentence is useless. Finally, you should be polite in the end.

(5) I think conclusion is too simple. You can add your ideas according to the result the part of finding, I just feel you directly write the information, do not deal with the information.

(6) Others are good. The information is detailed. It is worth learning.

(Cited from CPF Artifacts-CP3/CP3)

In this example, it lists the six feedback from CP3 to CP1 on his six times of writing assignments. From the examples of CP3 feedback, she seldom makes error corrections, and logically gives her feedback on style, writing tasks, and syntax. Although her feedback needs be improved, it is beyond error correction. Therefore, the quality of peer feedback has improved with different extent among the case participants. There still are many aspects needed to be improved, especially in content of feedback and feedback language.

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF BUSINESS ENGLISH WRITING

The case participants strongly believed that their quality of peer feedback has improved by using critical peer feedback and their quality of Business English writing will also be improved with critical peer feedback. With critical peer feedback, their Business English writing has improved with less errors, improvement were shown in content and style, and their writing became attractive based on the feedback of writing creativity.

Example:

Notice (First Writing)

Dear all staffs:

Please join me in welcoming Mr. Walt Dowling, who before was the assistant of the manager in Parlights company. Mr. Walt Dowling was very humorous in daily life. But he took work very seriously and was working hard. And now, I would like to tell all of you that he will be appointed our newly sales manager of Northeast United States from December 1, 2014. So let's hold a party to celebrate it.

Yours sincerely,

HR Department of Strand Lighting company

Notice (Rewriting)

October 15, 2014

Dear Staff,

Please join us in welcoming Mr. Walt Dowling, who was the assistant of the general manager in Parlights company. Mr. Walt Dowling was very humorous in daily life. But he took work very seriously and worked hard. And now, we would like to tell all of you that he will be appointed our new sales manager of Northeast United States from December 1, 2014. So let's hold a party to celebrate it on November 22, 2014, at the second floor of the Sunshine Hotel. For further information, please call us at 543210012.

Yours sincerely,

HR Department of Strand Lighting Company

(Cited from BEW Artifacts/BEW-CP5/CP5/A5)

The example quotes a notice writing from CP5, and her rewriting of the notice. Based on analyses of the two writings, her rewriting has improved in punctuation, time of notice, contact number, and the schedule of the party like place and time of the celebration, etc. The language is also re-edited. Although it needs further improvement in language and structure, she makes some improvement according to the critical peer feedback of CP2, CP4 and CP6.

Certainly, you give feedback to your classmates on their writing, and you will also pay attention to it. You will not make the same mistake next time. If we don't have critical peer feedback, you can not recognize it by yourself. We can give a more comprehensive feedback on it. An individual has limited ability on it. Other peers give you this feedback, you will revise it. Then you will have a big improvement. Because thinking from one person can not beyond many persons. Our Business English writing has a comprehensive improvement.

(Cited from Interview Transcript /CP6/23, Oct., 2015)

In this example, CP6 admitted that her quality of Business English writing has improved by critical peer feedback. By critical peer feedback, this activity is mutual beneficial among peers when she provides critical peer feedback to her peers, and she also learns from the feedback. Her peers can scaffold her to find more problems which she may not find by herself. Therefore, critical peer feedback improves her Zone of Proximal Development in Business English writing. From data analyses of Business English writings, their writings have improved with accurate language, logic expressions and cohesive discourses with the on-going of this study. However, it is necessary for a quantitative study to assess the effectiveness of critical peer feedback in Business English Writing.

RQ2: HOW DOES QZONE BLOG CONTRIBUTE TO CRITICAL PEER FEEDBACK IN BUSINESS ENGLISH WRITING?

Based on Qzone blog for online critical peer feedback, the case participants indicated that Qzone is a convenient and scientific technique blog platform for the practice of critical peer feedback. The participants have been regulars of IM communication by Qzone for least two years and are familiar with the functions of Qzone. In addition, Qzone blog has been developed by Tencent Company for more than ten years, which is a mature blog platform. They indicated that there is no need for specific knowledge about computer programming and web page design during the use of Qzone. They get used to updating their Qzone daily. They

also mentioned that there are efficient hardware maintenance of computer and mobile devices, and software support in their campus. The use of the Internet and mobile learning is also suitable for online collaborative learning.

However, the weakness for international users is that there is only a Chinese version of Qzone. The other weakness is that there is a character number limitation for each feedback, 5,000 bytes by computer feedback and 400 bytes by mobile devices. However, the case participants indicated that Qzone is suitable for short Business English writings, but not for more than 10,000 bytes of academic Business English writing or long Business English writing. Because there is a character limit of 10,000 bytes for the length of blog.

RQ3: WHAT ARE ISSUES IN CRITICAL PEER FEEDBACK THROUGH QZONE BLOGS TO IMPROVE BUSINESS ENGLISH WRITING?

According to data analysis based on QSR NVivo 8, there are six issues coded in this study: 1) insufficient teachers' scaffolding; 2) lack of supervision with many simplified feedback; 3) lack of rubrics for critical peer feedback; 4) inefficient peer communication during critical peer feedback; 5) ambiguity of critical peer feedback and criticism; 6) formal rather than informal critical peer feedback.

INSUFFICIENT TEACHER'S SCAFFOLDING IN CRITICAL PEER FEEDBACK

In this study design, the researcher is the interviewer and observer, and the lecturer in the class is the teacher, supervisor and assessor. This study does not give any requirements to the teacher on how much she shall be involved in this study and how much she should scaffold her students' peer feedback. In this large class, the case participants insist that they need the teacher's scaffolding. First, they have problems in their critical peer feedback. Second, they are short of self-confidence in critical peer feedback. They need authority to appraise and agree with their feedback. Last, they are still under the influence of teacher-centered teaching. They are not willing to learn by self-autonomy and need the scaffold and guidance of teachers. The role of the teacher is important for scaffolding in critical peer feedback which can be the instructor, supervisor and guider in the instruction.

LACK OF SUPERVISION WITH MANY SIMPLIFIED FEEDBACK

In this study, the researcher is not the lecturer in the Business English writing course and only an observer to observe their outcomes of critical peer feedback. There are seven groups in the case class and 42 students. They gradually have little pressure and motivation to reflect their critical peer feedback because there is no sufficient supervision for them.

Without our teacher's supervision, some students will become very free and arbitrary. When they are very busy, they will finish the feedback in seconds. This is completely a coping and useless feedback. (Cited from Interview Transcript/CP3/09 Oct., 2015)

They admit that there is a lack of supervision for online critical peer feedback, hence, the case participants have low self-autonomy and low motivation in the practice. Many problems have emerged such as delayed assignment uploading, delayed critical peer feedback, poor writing assignment and simplified feedback. The most serious problem is the simplified feedback which does not belong to critical peer feedback such as "Good!", "It is good!", and "Nice writing!". These are summative assessment of the writing. This type of simplified feedback does not fulfill the scaffolding and self-reflective learning purposes in critical peer feedback of formative assessment for Business English writing.

i think it is good (CP3:2015-12-24 19:20:34)
others are good (CP3: 2015-11-18 23:00:02)
maybe you can add the method, others are good especially the
recommedation (CP3: 2015-12-24 19:26:36)
(Cited from CPF Artifacts-CP4/CP4)

These feedback languages are unacceptable with errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation. This simplified feedback obviously needs the teacher's careful supervision and even criticism for a warning.

Therefore, it is important to build teacher supervision and peer supervision, especially during online critical peer feedback. The teacher should provide efficient supervision to the peers' performance of writing assignment, feedback outcomes and their attendance in critical peer feedback. Peer supervision is also an efficient way to ask peers to supervise and evaluate each others' performances during critical peer feedback. The performance of critical peer feedback can be assessed as a part of the final examination score. The punishing policies and weekly top CPF records show can also be demonstrated as methods for supervision. The research in this study indicates that if there is no supervision among these Chinese students, there will be no effectiveness of critical peer feedback.

LACK OF RUBRICS FOR CRITICAL PEER FEEDBACK

In this study, the interview data show that the case participants have a strong belief that their peer feedback are critical peer feedback, and their quality of peer feedback has been improved. However, there is no rubrics to assess the quality of their critical peer feedback.

In the second training workshop of critical thinking and critical peer feedback, Paul-Elder Model of critical thinking was interpreted as a rubric for critical peer feedback (Leist, Woolwine & Bays, 2012). Based on their Universal Intellectual Standards, six dimensions- clarity, accuracy, relevance, precision, logical and depth, are selected as rubrics to assess critical peer feedback in Business English writing, which six dimensions are rated number 1 (lowest) through 4 (highest) as a rating scale to assess the students' critical peer feedback. However, in this study, the case participants seldom discuss to use rubrics to assess their critical peer feedback. The lecturer is busy with the introduction of Business English writing knowledge and skills, who has neglected the assessment of the critical peer feedback. In the further study, the efficiency of critical peer feedback shall be assessed by rubrics to study the performance in critical peer feedback.

INEFFICIENT PEER INTERCOMMUNICATION DURING CRITICAL PEER FEEDBACK

From the analysis of data in the critical peer feedback, there are few intercommunication among the peers when they offered or received critical peer feedback. The case participants argue that they communicate with each other and discuss their critical peer feedback to enhance the understanding of critical peer feedback and to improve their writing.

It is convenient to communicate with each other through the Qzone blog, and offer feedback on the peers' critical peer feedback. However, there are few intercommunication among the peers. The reasons may be concluded as lack of motivation, or inefficient critical peer feedback which do not need further discussion. In this study design, the researcher also does not emphasize the intercommunication among peers to further discuss their feedback. Based on the suggestion of the case participants, further teaching and study activities should include attention given to the intercommunication among peers in order to improve the quality of critical peer feedback.

AMBIGUITY BETWEEN CRITICAL PEER FEEDBACK AND CRITICISM

During the introduction of critical peer feedback, “critical” in critical peer feedback is based on critical thinking. While “criticism” or “critique” means to make a summative judgment, to find faults, or to show disapproval (Hyland, 2000, p. 44). Carnegie (2010, p.60) indicates that criticism is futile and inefficient which cannot make people change their attitude, but put a person on the defense. Seltzer (1986) argues in details that criticism is judgmental, negatively evaluative, and accusatory, which makes the feedback inefficient and take the people under pressure. “Critical” in “critical peer feedback” in this study and “criticism” or “critique”, have completely different connotation and denotation. According to the data analysis, some of the case participants had misunderstood “critical” as “criticism” in critical thinking and critical peer feedback at the beginning of this study.

I like feedback online. I never comment others face to face. I can not criticize her writing. It is difficult for me to criticize somebody. This is my personality.

(Cited from Interview Transcript/CP4/08 Dec., 2015)

In the Chinese culture of Confucianism, the case participants insist that they are modest, shy and always think about saving others’ face and keeping their own face. Therefore, they do not dare to give critical peer feedback to “criticize” their peers’ writing. Some argue that they never criticize somebody. They misunderstand “critical” in critical peer feedback as “criticism”.

FORMAL RATHER THAN INFORMAL CRITICAL PEER FEEDBACK

During the daily IM communication like Qzone, QQ, Wechat and WhatsApp, informal language is popular among the users such as acronyms, word chunks and sentence clips. However, in this study of critical peer feedback, the researcher reveals that formal languages are more concise and understandable for higher-order thinking and reasoning.

Based on the data of critical peer feedback, the case participants use the informal languages and expressions for most of their critical peer feedback. There are acronyms, shorten words, fuzzy expressions, grammar errors which is harmful to the understanding of critical peer feedback and their writing practice.

Therefore, the lecturers or educators should ensure the advantages and disadvantages of formal and informal critical peer feedback. There are advantage of formal critical peer feedback and disadvantages of informal critical peer feedback. The lecturers must enhance the supervision of informal and formal critical peer feedback during the process of critical peer feedback.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study reveals that critical peer feedback provides a strategy of higher-order peer feedback in higher-level writing. Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy of critical thinking is regarded as a reasonable model for critical peer feedback. The six steps of critical thinking is widely accepted by the case participants. “Creating” is emphasized in Business English writing. They believe that critical peer feedback improves the quality of peer feedback, and the quality of Business English writing.

Qzone blog is accepted as a convenient ICT platform for online critical peer feedback. It has high efficiency of critical peer feedback in large class at Chinese universities. Qzone blog has six aspects of strength in critical peer feedback such as popularity among the students, unconstraint in place and time, mobile learning, instant message transfer,

convenient technique platform and privacy protection. The only weakness is the character limitation in feedback and blog. During the conduct of critical peer feedback in this study, the participants recognize six issues which need to be highlighted in the research and the practice of critical peer feedback. Some of the issues originated from the research design flaws, some from the conditions of the case participants.

This study makes some recommendations to the policy makers, lecturers and the learners for the practice of critical peer feedback. The policy makers should emphasize the education of higher-order thinking skills of critical thinking in tertiary education and extend the instruction reform. The lecturers should pay attention to the six issues in the practice of critical peer feedback, especially highlight teacher's supervision and scaffolding in critical peer feedback. The learners should improve their performance, self-autonomy and motivation in critical peer feedback.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. How do you understand critical thinking?
2. How do you understand critical peer feedback?
3. What are problems in your practice of critical peer feedback in Business English Writing?
4. What are your focuses (or preferences) in offering critical peer feedback in Business English Writing?
5. What are your critical thinking skills in critical peer feedback?
6. How does critical peer feedback improve your quality of feedback in Business English Writing?
7. How do you think of Qzone blog for critical peer feedback?
8. What are advantages and disadvantages of critical peer feedback in Business English Writing?
9. How does Qzone blog contribute to critical peer feedback in Business English Writing?
10. What kinds or types of critical peer feedback are more helpful to your Business English writing?
11. What are your suggestions for critical peer feedback in Business English Writing through Qzone?

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