EFFECTS OF ELECTRONIC PEER RESPONSE IN COMPARISON WITH FACE-TO-FACE PEER RESPONSE ON CHINESE EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' WRITING REVISION

Song Wang

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การศึกษาเปรียบเทียบผลของการวิพากย์แบบเผชิญหน้าและแบบอิเล็กทรอนิกส์
ที่มีต่อการแก้ไขงานเขียนของนักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยจีนที่เรียน
ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ

นายซ่ง หวาง

EFFECTS OF ELECTRONIC PEER RESPONSE IN COMPARISON WITH FACE-TO-FACE PEER RESPONSE ON CHINESE EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' WRITING REVISION

Suranaree University of Technology has approved this thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Thesis Examining Committee

_____

(Assoc. Prof. Songphorn Tajaroensak)

Chairperson

_____

(Asst. Prof. Dr Siriluck Usaha)

Member (Thesis Advisor)

_____

(Assoc. Prof. Dr Kanit Khaimook)

Member

_____

(Assoc. Prof. Dr Sripen Srestasathiern)

Member

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(Asst. Prof. Dr Banjert Chongapiratanakul)

Member

_____   _____

(Prof. Dr Sukit Limpijumnong)   (Dr Peerasak Siriyothin)

Vice Rector for Academic Affairs   Dean of Institute of Social Technology

ซ่ง หวาง : การศึกษาเปรียบเทียบผลของการวิพากย์แบบเผชิญหน้าและแบบอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ที่มีต่อการแก้ไขงานเขียนของนักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยจีนที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ (EFFECTS OF ELECTRONIC PEER RESPONSE IN COMPARISON WITH FACE-TO-FACE PEER RESPONSE ON CHINESE EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS'WRITING REVISION) อาจารย์ที่ปรึกษา : ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ ดร. ศิริลักษณ์ อุสาหะ, 247 หน้า.

แม้ว่าจะมีงานวิจัยไม่น้อยที่พบว่าการวิพากย์งานเขียนระหว่างนักศึกษา มีผลดีต่อการแก้ไขปรับปรุงงานเขียนก็ตาม แต่มีจำนวนไม่มากนักที่ศึกษาเปรียบเทียบผลของการวิพากย์แบบเผชิญหน้า และแบบอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ต่องานเขียน การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายที่จะศึกษาประเภทของคำวิพากย์ หน้าที่ของคำวิพากย์ บทบาทของวัฒนธรรมในการให้คำวิพากย์ต่องานเขียน การนำข้อวิพากย์ไปใช้ในการแก้ไขปรับปรุงงานเขียน และคุณภาพของงานเขียนอันเนื่องมาจากการใช้คำวิพากย์ทั้งสองแบบดังกล่าว

กลุ่มตัวอย่างได้แก่ นักศึกษาจีนระดับมหาวิทยาลัยชั้นปีที่ 3 วิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษ ที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ จำนวน 40 คน หลังจากการฝึกประเมินผลความเรียงแบบโน้มน้าวเป็นเวลา 2 ชั่วโมง กลุ่มตัวอย่าง 20 คน ได้รับการฝึกให้คำวิพากย์งานเขียนของเพื่อนแบบเผชิญหน้า ส่วนอีก 20 คน ได้รับการฝึกให้คำวิพากย์ แบบอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ เป็นเวลา 2 ชั่วโมง กลุ่มตัวอย่างทั้งสองกลุ่มเขียนความเรียงแบบโน้มน้าว 3 เรื่อง ในการเขียนแต่ละเรื่องผู้เขียนแต่ละคนจะแก้ไขปรับปรุงงานเขียนของตน 2 ครั้ง หลังจากที่ได้รับคำวิพากย์จากเพื่อนในกลุ่ม คำวิพากย์งานเขียนที่ได้รับและที่ถูกใช้จริงในการแก้ไขปรับปรุงงานเขียนถูกนำไปวิเคราะห์และความเรียงทุกชิ้น ได้รับการประเมินจากผู้เชี่ยวชาญ จำนวน 5 คน

ผลการวิจัยพบว่า กลุ่มตัวอย่างทั้งสองกลุ่มให้คำวิพากย์ต่องานเขียนต่างกันเนื่องจากสภาพแวดล้อมการสื่อสารต่างกัน กลุ่มตัวอย่างที่ให้คำวิพากย์แบบเผชิญหน้าให้คำวิพากย์จำนวนมากกว่า   แต่เมื่อเปรียบเทียบการนำคำวิพากย์ไปใช้จริงในการแก้ไขปรับปรุงงานเขียนพบว่ากลุ่มตัวอย่างที่ให้คำวิพากย์แบบอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ใช้คำวิพากย์ที่ได้รับในปริมาณที่มากกว่า แม้ว่าจำนวนคำวิพากย์จะน้อยกว่าก็ตาม ซึ่งหมายความว่า คำวิพากย์ดังกล่าวมีประโยชน์ต่อการแก้ไขปรับปรุงงานเขียน เมื่อเปรียบเทียบผลของการให้คำวิพากย์สองแบบพบว่า การให้คำวิพากย์แบบเผชิญหน้าช่วยทำให้งานเขียนมีคุณภาพดีขึ้นในแง่ของคำศัพท์และเนื้อหา ในขณะที่การให้คำวิพากย์แบบอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ช่วยทำให้งานเขียนมีคุณภาพดีขึ้นในแง่ของเนื้อหาและการเรียบเรียง   อย่างไรก็ตาม

เมื่อเปรียบเทียบคุณภาพของงานเขียน พบว่า งานเขียนของกลุ่มตัวอย่างทั้งสองกลุ่มไม่แตกต่างกัน
อย่างมีนัยสำคัญ

สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ   ลายมือชื่อนักศึกษา_____

ปีการศึกษา 2552   ลายมือชื่ออาจารย์ที่ปรึกษา_____

SONG WANG : EFFECTS OF ELECTRONIC PEER RESPONSE IN
COMPARISON WITH FACE-TO-FACE PEER RESPONSE ON CHINESE
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ADVISOR : ASST. PROF. SIRILUCK USAHA，PH.D., 247 PP.

ELECTRONIC PEER RESPONSE / FACE-TO-FACE PEER RESPONSE /
REVISION / EFL WRITING

Although a considerable number of studies on L2 students' compositions have shown that peer response has a profound and positive effect on the students' revision, few investigations have examined the results of electronic peer response in comparison with face-to-face peer response. The present study aimed to examine types of comments Chinese EFL university students made, functions that these comments served, roles that students' relevant cultural behaviors played in providing comments, how the students used the comments in revising their writing, and the final writing quality after revision.

40 Chinese EFL third year university students participated in the study. After a 2-hour training session on how to assess an argumentative essay, they were divided into two groups for an additional 2-hour training session on peer response techniques, one being trained on how to give face-to-face peer feedback, the other on electronic peer response. The students in both groups wrote three argumentative essays, each

followed by two revisions after receiving peer comments. Comments made and those actually used by the two groups were categorized, counted and analyzed, and the students' essays were rated by five trained raters.

The findings revealed that the students' preference in providing comments was different in both groups because of their apprehension in different communicative environments. More comments were produced by the face-to-face peer response group, resulting in more comments used in revisions. However, although fewer comments were made by the electronic peer response group, a higher percentage of the comments made were used in revisions. In other words, the electronic peer response group's comments were more revision-oriented. The use of face-to-face peer response significantly encouraged the students to outperform in the aspects of vocabulary and content, while the use of electronic peer response helped the students greatly improve their revisions at the levels of content and organization. In terms of final writing quality after the experiment, however, there was no significant difference in the two groups.

School of English   Student's signature _____

Academic year 2009   Advisor's signature _____

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CMC……………………………...……………...Computer-mediated Communication

EFL……………………………….…………...English as a Foreign Language

ESL……………………………….…………...English as a Second Language

EPR……………………………...…………….Electronic Peer Response

FPR……………………………….…………...Face-to-face Peer Response

L2……………………………………………...Second Language

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background

The needs for global communication nowadays have already promoted English from the national language to the international language. By the end of 2005, English is spoken as the first and second language by nearly eight hundred million people all over the world and has become "a lingua franca, the Latin of the modern world" (Schutz, 2005, On-line). This number clearly shows a fact that English language is recognized as undoubtedly the most important language for the increasingly international communication to learn. In its role as a global language, English has become one of the most important academic and business tools.

A rapid development of technology, particularly the computer technology, also extremely speeds up the pace that English is being integrated into almost all aspects of people's life. The role of English has been revealed not only in terms of academic and professional purposes, but from the people's daily communication through the media. Crystal (1997, online) states, "It is now fairly clear that before the twentieth century is over every community of the world will have learned how to communicate with all the rest of humanity. In this process of intercommunication the English language has already become the most important language on earth". Using

computer technology for communication needs a basic language skill—writing. Nowadays, it is estimated that 75% of all international communication in writing, 80 percent of all information in the world's computers, and 90 percent of Internet content are in English (Schutz, 2005, On-line). Therefore, as writing becomes the main means of communication between nations, it is crucial to ensure that it is taught accurately and efficiently all over the world so as to meet people's needs.

1.2   The Statement of the Problem

The ability to express one's ideas in a written form in a second or foreign language and to do so with reasonable accuracy and coherence is a major achievement (Olshtain, 1991). Compared to the receptive skills, writing, as a productive skill in a written form for many researchers, is viewed as a recursive process in which a written text is produced, aiming at exchanging each other's ideas, putting forward the new insights, even suiting the social context (Flower and Hayes, 1980,1981; Zamel, 1982; Raimes, 1983; Grabe and Kaplan, 1996). There is no doubt that the strong flow of computer technology use for communication purposes today in people's life gives more prominence to writing and causes this skill to become more significant than before. However, more importance it shows, more problems arise. Though the significance of writing ensures that it is crucial to be taught and learnt accurately and efficiently globally as mentioned above, the way of writing teaching and learning, particularly in EFL countries, does not enable the writing learners to be skilled and

proficient. China is an EFL country with the largest population in the world. Its huge developmental potential as well as communicative needs with other countries imply that English, particularly English writing, is playing a necessary role in this trend. A good writing should express a clear point, be tightly structured, grammatically and syntactically correct, substantive, and interesting. But, to quote Ji (2005) and Chen (2006), Chinese students do not write well in English because they pay more attention to the grammatical and syntactical correction. In their eyes, grammar rules, punctuation and spelling are the most primary elements in their written product. However, the accuracy in their language cannot make up for the weakness in the idea and structure. Vague content and unclear organization have been weak points for a large number of Chinese students in their writing process.

Teaching writing as a process of discovery aims to raise the student's awareness of the recursive nature of the composing process (Reid, 1993). Researchers in recent years have stressed the need for ESL and EFL writing instruction to move to process approach that would teach students not only how to compose multiple drafts but also revise their written work on all levels through teacher and peer collaboration and intervention as they negotiate the meaning (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996). Peer review has been burgeoning in both ESL and EFL writing classes since last decade (Min, 2006). The peer response activity is a process where the students form voluntarily or are assigned to a small group to exchange their essays in order to read and offer comments in written or oral form, and receive feedback from each other in return

(Grabe and Kaplan, 1996). To quote Tusi and Ng, (2000), it gives the opportunities for students to play a more active role in the writing learning and raises the writer's awareness. This feedback activity enables the students to identify the defects in the terms of grammar, mechanics and content in their writing in order to produce a good piece of written work (Storch, 2005). In short, this technique is a collaborative activity that may provide the opportunities to students to think how to improve their written product.

Research findings on peer response were generally positive. There was a considerable number of studies on L2 writing process showing the advantages of peer feedback in helping the students' writing and giving the implication that the teachers should realize the importance of peer response or combine both the teacher and peer response in feedback practice in the writing process in terms of cognitive, social, linguistic and collaborative benefits (Jacobs, 1989; Mittan, 1989; Mendonca and Johnson, 1994; Carson and Nelson, 1996,1998; Villamil and Guerrero, 1998; Tusi and Ng, 2000; Storch, 2005). Peer review brought a genuine sense of audience into the writing classroom (Mittan, 1989), enabled the students to see egocentrism in their writing (Keh, 1990), encouraged the students to focus on the intended meaning by discussing the alternative points of view that led to the development of ideas (Mendonca and Johnson, 1994; Villamil and Guerrero, 1998), motivated learners' attitudes towards writing with the help of the supportive peers (Paulus, 1999), fostered a sense of ownership of text (Tusi and Ng, 2000), enhanced the audience awareness

(Mendonca and Johnson, 1994; Tusi, 2000) and promoted more at the learner's level of development and interests by providing more informative messages in the collaboration (Storch, 2005).

However, despite of the support in the literature review for peer response, as a language teacher, the researcher of the present study often noticed that when he asked the students to work in peer groups on writing tasks which required the written output, they seemed reluctant to do so. They preferred to finish the writing tasks individually and seldom provided the comments to the peers. Even after receiving the feedback, they only incorporated a low ratio into the revision. Such observations were reported by other L2 researchers as well (Leki, 1990; Nelson and Murphy, 1993; Mendonca and Johnson, 1994; Nelson and Carson, 1996, 1998; Wu, 2006). Since the use of peer response in L2 writing classroom was generally supported as a valuable aid for its cognitive, social, linguistic and collaborative benefits, why were peer comments difficult to be produced by Chinese students and why did the majority of peer comments fail to be incorporated into Chinese students' subsequent revisions?

One of the problems in answering these questions rested on the students' lack for language proficiency comparing with native speakers. This led to their inability to give peers useful and informative comments (Leki, 1990; Mendonca and Johnson, 1994; Tusi and Ng, 2000). They were uncertain what to look for and how to respond to the written work. They might feel instinctively that only a better writer, or a native speaker, was qualified to comment on their written work (Rollinson, 2005).

Normally they did not trust the comments received from the peers whose English level was more or less the same as theirs and saw this kind of feedback as less valuable than teacher feedback (Nelson and Murphy, 1993; Nelson and Carson, 1998). As a result, these perceptions stopped the teacher from engaging the students in achieving benefits for their writing in peer review.

Another problem was the teacher's teaching method in class. Like in any EFL country, Chinese English learners rarely had a chance to use English outside the classroom, which resulted in the situation that the grammatical feature had always been a weak point in students' English learning and there was a difficulty in their expression. Hence, the teachers in China put more emphasis on the use of grammatical features instead of the expression of content according to Chen (2006). Inside the writing classroom, however, the traditional 'chalk and talk' approach still played a dominant role in Chinese writing teaching as well according to National Curriculum for College English Majors of Higher Education in P. R. C (2000). This teacher-centered model viewed the teacher as active and the student as fundamentally passive. The teacher was responsible for transmitting all of the information to the students. The teacher talked; the students listened and absorbed. In class, the students lacked collaboration and interaction for sharing their ideas and improvement. Similarly to Chen (2006), Wang (2006) pointed out grammar rules, punctuation and spelling had long been emphasized rather than the meaning in writing courses. While evaluating the students' first drafts, the teacher feedback that the students preferred to

receive often primarily focused on students' language accuracy and only corrected the language errors in the written feedback (Leki, 1991; Truscott, 1996). The feedback focusing on meaning was put beyond that focusing on form, which seldom drew students' attention to the importance of content. As a result, the students misunderstood that a grammatically accurate essay was an excellent composition and only underlined the surface errors while providing feedback. As discussed above, this kind of peer feedback was rarely utilized into the revision by students because they did not trust one another's language proficiency.

The third answer to these questions, as pointed out by some researchers who conducted the studies in EFL context, especially for Chinese students, lay in the students' cultural behaviors and experience (Carson and Nelson, 1996, 1998; Jin and Cortazzi, 1998; Tang and Tithecott, 1999; Hyland, 2000; Hyland, 2003; Wu, 2006). Owing to the influence of traditional Chinese culture, the student often got more benefits from the individual writer than the benefits from the peer response group. Carson and Nelson (1996) noted that when interacting with members of their groups, Chinese students would generally work toward keeping the group harmony and mutual face-saving to maintain a state of cohesion. During the peer response activity, it seemed to be difficult for Chinese students to respond to other students' written work in any manner other than being positive. Carson and Nelson's research finding was supported by Jin and Cortazzi (1998). Many students in their study explained their reluctances to criticize their peers' work and ask questions in terms of losing face

or showing off. Liu (2001) also characterized the Chinese sense of face less as concern for self and more as for others, noting the motivation behind their responses was likely to come from a need for a positive group climate rather than from a need to help an individual writer with his or her writing. Similarly, Hyland (2003) indicated Chinese students often provided their group members what they wanted to hear rather than what might be helpful in a traditional face-to-face classroom. They were reluctant to make negative comments on peers' drafts to lead to possible division, not cohesion, in a group. They perhaps suggested a small change sometimes, especially grammar mistakes. Despite of this attitude, the ideas that the students negotiated one another in the group were also different from the principles of 'good writing' in western writing classroom. Hyland (2003) stated that 'good writing' should involve the writer's individual creative ideas and critical thinking. When the writers commented on others' work, they should voice their judgments and give their opinions. However, Heath (1991) found that this concept might create problems in the context of the collectivist culture. Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999) also concluded that the students were less confident to express themselves than focus on the knowledge they received. They did not share their individual ideas but the opinions that were commonly agreed. In additional, Carson and Nelson (1996) also added that the traditional peer response activity required the group work where the students read their peers' drafts and gave comments to each other face-to-face. This kind of learning technique did not suit Chinese students' consistent 'individual' learning habit. Similar

to Carson and Nelson (1996), Wu (2006) found that while working in a group in a writing course, most of the students might feel unnatural and choose to keep silence because they often preferred to respond to an essay by themselves rather than drew a conclusion altogether. Besides, it might be possible that Chinese students from the traditional culture saw the teacher as the only source of authority in class and considered that their peers were not knowledgeable enough to make proper comments and thus did not incorporate these comments into their writing.

Therefore, how to overcome these drawbacks should be a key for Chinese teachers in the teaching of writing process because it would affect the effectiveness of peer response in great degree. Some researchers attributed the first problem to students' lack of skills for peer response and called for feedback training before commenting because they found the students who had been trained in peer review were quite capable of making useful suggestions about their peers' drafts, giving specific comments and advice on their peers' writing and pointing out problems with content and rhetoric (Stanley, 1992; Berg, 1999; Paulus, 1999; Min, 2005, 2006). However, the studies on the latter two problems were still few in the traditional classroom setting. It was likely as Chen (2000) pointed out, "in an Asian teacher-centered teaching and learning environment as well as cultural behaviors of learning, the learners are doomed to reticence because they have had a long learning experience in such an environment" (p. 442).

Nowadays, with the implementation of computer technology into writing classroom, peer response has shifted from a traditional face-to-face environment to a networking computer mediated environment called electronic (computer-mediated-communication) peer response in which the students do not have to sit around a table to give comments to each other face to face. They can exchange their own ideas and respond to each other through computers online, not knowing whom the students are talking to, considering which words they may type in hope of avoiding some 'so-called' trouble. Compared to traditional face-to-face peer response, the use of computer for peer feedback reduces the influence of teacher authority in traditional peer response and develops the students' autonomous learning (Kern, 1995), provides spaces for students to practice their writing skills in a non-threatening environment (Colomb and Stimutis, 1996), enhances opportunities and motivation for authentic interaction and meaningful negotiation (Warschauer, 1996), offers a stronger sense of the audience of peers beyond the instructor, which is better for helping foster awareness of audience (Ware and Warchauer, 2006), and improves linguistic proficiency and increase self-confidence (Ortega, 1997; Yuan, 2003). In such a non-threatening environment, when commenting other's work online, the students become more 'verbal' and honest to respond, which makes the papers more readily available for sharing and revising (Beauvois, 1997). It has a conversational maintenance and face-saving function (Hansen, 2005). The students may not be restricted by the traditional culture any more. Those who are not afraid of

'face-saving' might comment on other students' written drafts freely so as to improve the quality of their writing compared with those in the traditional setting. As it is proved in DiGiovanni and Nagaswami's (2001) research, the students' writing content is more focused than those in traditional classroom discussion when receiving feedback during electronic interaction.

However, of the research on the effects of CMC peer response revealing the positive findings, only a few empirical studies had examined a central question, that was, whether electronic peer response promoted a better improvement in students' writing quality than face-to-face peer response (Sullivan and Pratt, 1996; Braine, 1997, 2001; Liu and Sadler, 2003; Tusi, 2004). The results from these studies were contradictory. Braine (1997, 2001) criticized the efficacy of CMC peer response on promoting the improvement of students' writing when other researchers offered their praises to it. He concluded that the traditional setting was shown to promote more improvement in writing quality than online and saw the inappropriate electronic response medium as an obstacle to students' writing quality rather than a kind of assistance. Braine's point of view was supported by Liu and Sadler (2003), who also indicated that the effects of comments given electronically on student's writing quality was influenced a lot due to the restrictions of software programs, though the findings in their research were positive.

Another important issue, but fewer studies touched, was how the students were able to incorporate peer comments online into their revisions and how electronic

peer response impacted students' revisions. There was no definite answer to this question. Though some research indicated that students in electronic peer groups utilized a larger percentage of their peers' comments in revision than face-to-face peer groups (e.g. 46.8% verse 7.2% in Liu and Sadler, 2003), few research examined the factors that influenced the students to provide comments or incorporate the given feedback into the revisions. Information on this issue might contribution to what extent the cultural behaviors and learning experience might promote or hinder the use of comments into revisions in comparison with traditional and electronic peer response.

Despite of many studies attempting to investigate effects of electronic (computer-mediated) peer feedback in improving students' English writing quality in comparison with traditional face-to-face, not all of them touched the issues mentioned above. The literature available still called for further investigation.

1.3 The Preliminary Study and Purposes of the Present Study

1.3.1 The Preliminary Study

The present study is motivated by a preliminary study in August, 2007 with English Writing III (Advanced English Writing) students, in School of English, College of Foreign Language, Guizhou University. Rather disappointed with the students' poor writing in their diagnostic essays at the beginning of this course after their English learning for nine years, the researcher decided to conduct a preliminary

study to identify their writing problems, their experience with traditional face-to-face peer response as well as their understanding of electronic (CMC) peer response. This study lasted two weeks. Twice a week the students met, altogether four meetings and one hour each time.

In the first week, an argumentative essay was assigned to the students in the first meeting. The purpose of this assignment was to investigate the students' writing problems and collect their first drafts for the subsequent revisions. The findings were as follows:

(1) Contrary to the fact that a good writing emphasizes to express a clear point so that the reader should be able to grasp the writer's purpose, most of the students stressed the accuracy of words and sentences more than the expression of the content. The content of their English writing was often unclear and redundant, which made it difficult for the reader to get the theme.

(2) Most of the students' writing was poorly organized. How to make a start, how to bring about an end in a composition and how to link up the paragraphs coherently were the main obstacles affecting their English expressions in their writing. The logical or associative connections and transitions which clearly express the relationship of the ideas described were not structured reasonably.

No feedback given after the analysis, the essays were returned to the students for peer feedback for revision and stimulating their awareness of audience in the second meeting. Before this preliminary study, the students were trained to work in small peer groups with four members each and respond to one another' written draft. When they completed the discussion, the students incorporated the comments they received into the revisions to develop the final drafts outside of the classroom and handed in both the first and final drafts as well as the peer comments. The analysis of students' revisions, written comments, and classroom observation revealed the following findings:

(1) It seemed that some students 'treasured' their pens and paper too much. Their comments were with only a few words, which was not clear or valuable enough to help their peers understand the defects that needed to be improved.

(2) Most of the feedback focused on the surface errors, such as spelling, vocabulary and the basic grammar rules. Such responding could not help the students make great progress in their overall writing quality efficiently.

(3) Of all the peer comments given, only about 20% was used, while about 80% of comments were ignored.

In the second week, an interview was conducted followed by a semi-structured questionnaire to investigate their writing and peer response

experience in the third meeting. After that, all the students were asked to write the reflective essays to express their attitudes towards and experience with peer response. The following results were found:

(1) Their previous teachers often only underlined the errors without explaining the types and how to correct them. Many comments were unclear and vague. Meanwhile, due to the lack of the opportunities to think and revise their written drafts, the teacher's comments disappeared from their memory in a short term. As a result, the deficiency in their language accuracy was difficult to solve.

(2) The majority of the students just saw the writing as an assignment given by the teacher. They had no more interests in doing it, and did not care whom their audience was.

(3) Most importantly, most of the students would not like to provide negative comments even though their peers written drafts did not satisfy them. The peer feedback practice did not play an important role as it could be.

An interview with two teachers who had used peer response with these students in the previous writing course revealed quite similar findings, with three 'new' results added: 1) most of the students would not like to voice their comments. Most of the time they kept silent even if they were observed by the teachers; 2) when giving comments on their peers' drafts, they rarely shared them with the other group

members. Their main focus was on language, pointing out which parts needed to be improved; 3) the teachers also admitted that they had never trained the students or taught them how to respond to an essay, believing that there was no need to do so.

Based on the interviews with both the students and the teachers, the following causative factors were generated:

(1) The students were not familiar with the use of peer response activity. They did not know how to give a worthwhile, meaningful peer comments, only vague responses or empty compliments.

(2) Due to their poor English, some of the students had trouble in providing qualified peer feedback. Their comments were even questioned by their fellow students.

(3) The students would not like to provide negative suggestions for fear that their comments would harm their peer's face. They were afraid that doing so would do harm to the friendship among the classmates.

(4) The students did not feel free to make comments because they were being observed by the teacher in the classroom.

(5) Although peer feedback might reduce the teachers' workload assuming that most students could give suitable comments, the peer review procedures took up a lot of the classroom time.

With the aforementioned problems taken into consideration, it appeared reasonable to believe that traditional face to face peer response did not play its

important role in improving writing quality in students' writing process at Guizhou University. Despite of the students' weaknesses in providing and using peer comments, the finding coincided with Carson and Nelson' s (1996) study which stated that the culture of collectivist behavior involved in peer response group was still an inevitable interfering factor that was difficult to overcome.

In the fourth meeting during the second week, a semi-structured questionnaire with 12 items prepared earlier was given to the students, followed by a structured interview to investigate their experience with the use of computer networked applications and their understanding on electronic peer feedback. The findings included the following:

(1) All of the students had certain computer skills. Most of them had experiences in searching information on the Internet and in posting their messages online in some kinds of networked mediums (e.g. blog).

(2) The students commonly felt that the discussion online had the advantages of time independence and place independence. They had the access to respond to the messages other people left on the Internet everywhere at any time in a natural manner.

(3) When negotiating online, a number of students believed they had enough time to consider and organize their comments so as to make sure their comments were really meaningful and logical, no pressure to quickly respond any more.

(4) More than 90% of the students did not actually comment on their classmates' writing electronically. However, more than half of them showed their interests in doing so.

In summary, the results of the preliminary study revealed that in general the students' poor language proficiency, the influence of their intrinsic cultural background as well as their strategies of providing and using comments led to a less effective use of face-to-face peer response in helping them improve their writing, similar to the problems found in the studies conducted in China earlier cited. The students would be less interested in peer response if it continued being done in a traditional classroom environment with pressure and anxiety. Despite the negative findings, the students in the preliminary study also presented their positive attitudes towards computer-mediated communication with the advantages of anxiety reduction, non-threatening environment, informative interaction, and stronger sense of real audience, which led one to believe that electronic peer response could be worth trying and investigating. With no definite answers to the true effects of electronic peer response on writing quality and how electronic peer response is actually used in the students' revision in details, especially in a real EFL context like China, a further investigation was needed.

1.3.2 The Purposes of the Present Study

As mentioned earlier, the use of electronic for peer response is becoming a crucial mode in the teaching of ESL and EFL writing. With the main goal of

developing Chinese university students' English writing, the purpose of this study was to investigate effects of electronic peer response in comparison with face-to-face peer response on Chinese university students' writing revision. In other words, it was intended to:

    (1) compare the types of peer response comments given through face-to-face and electronic peer response when the students provided and those actually used in revision

    (2) investigate whether the students' cultural behaviors affected the ways they provided feedback on their peers' writing

    (3) examine why certain types of comments were used or ignored in their revision

    (4) compare how the comments given through both modes of peer response impacted the students' revision

    (5) compare the impact of both modes of peer response on the students' writing after the treatment.

1.4   Research Questions and Hypotheses

To achieve the aforementioned purpose, the present study addressed the following research questions:

1. How are peer comments on the students' written work provided by the electronic peer response group in comparison with the face-to-face peer response

group? In other words,

    a) What types of peer comments are provided by the students?

    b) What functions do peer comments serve?

    2. What roles do the students' cultural behaviors play in providing peer comments in the electronic and face-to-face peer response groups?

    3. How are peer comments on the students' written work used in the revision by the electronic peer response group in comparison with the face-to-face peer response group? In other words,

    a) What types of peer comments are actually used or ignored by the students?

    b) Why do the students use or ignore certain types of peer comments?

    4. How does electronic peer response impact the students' revision in comparison with face-to-face peer response?

    5. Does electronic peer response promote more improvement in students' writing quality than traditional face-to-face peer response?

    Taking a suggestion made by Creswell (1994) that in experimental studies, particularly doctoral dissertations, that hypotheses are usually recommended because "they represent the traditional or classical form of raising questions" (p. 72), a set of five null hypotheses that there was no significant difference in effects of electronic peer response in comparison with face-to-face peer response on Chinese university students' final writing was formulated as follows to answer Research Question 5:

(1) There is no significant difference in the content of students' final writing between two modes of peer response groups.

(2) There is no significant difference in the organization of students' final writing between two modes of peer response groups.

(3) There is no significant difference in the grammar of students' final writing between two modes of peer response groups.

(4) There is no significant difference in the vocabulary of students' final writing between two modes of peer response groups.

(5) There is no significant difference in the mechanics of students' final writing between two modes of peer response groups.

1.5 The Significance of the Study

As mentioned above, the present study was conducted in School of English, College of Foreign Languages, Guizhou University, People's Republic of China, aiming at investigating the role of electronic peer response in improving students' writing abilities. In most of universities in China, especially in Guizhou University, the teaching and learning method used in the writing course is traditional 'teacher-centered' approach. In the classroom, the students listen to what the teacher says, receive the information transferred from the only authority, hand in their drafts after the lecture and wait for the teacher's comments on their work, primarily focusing on linguistic features and mechanics. In this way, the students rely heavily on the

teacher and their interests in the writing are reduced to a low level because they do not know how to improve the content of their English writing. In order to promote autonomous learning, some teachers apply peer response in class in the hope of improving students' writing quality. However, due to a lack of understanding on peer response as well as the fact of Chinese 'face-saving' culture, most students feel that it is a waste of time and therefore have no interests in it. As a result, peer response has not yet served its purpose. The present study, with an electronic peer response training package systematically and theoretically-sound constructed and appropriately implemented, should contribute to L2 writing instruction in a real EFL context in many aspects. It was expected the results of the study should:

(1) help writing teachers learn which peer response setting promoted more improvement in students' writing quality. There was no definite answer for this question in the previous studies, especially in a real EFL context.

(2) help writing teachers learn the roles of Chinese students' cultural background played in both modes of peer response and whether its influence was likely to be reduced in electronic peer response when the students provided comments and incorporated their peers' feedback into their revision.

(3) give writing teachers a better understanding of the process of the students' revision. It should describe a clearer picture of how peer comments could be used in revision and whether the use of peer

comments would improve the students' writing in aspects of content, organization, vocabulary, and language use.

(4) provide some insights into how face-to-face and electronic peer response could be effectively used to promote learning autonomy among Chinese students, which was in line with the goal of the new Chinese education system, shifting from examination to quality education, implemented by National Education Department since 2000.

1.6 Definition of Terms

Writing Process Approach

Writing process approach sees writing as a process of developing organization as well as meaning, within which the teacher and students' collaboration and intervention can work through the process as they negotiate meaning. This approach consists of the steps of pre-planning, drafting, feedback, revising and editing.

Revision

Revision is the last stage of the writing process with the aim of doing some textual changes, modifications and alterations that appear on the subsequent drafts while comparing with the first draft. It requires various types of activities responding to students' written work including teacher feedback, peer feedback and self-evaluation.

Peer Response

Peer response refers to a process in which the students provide comments on each other's written drafts. The students can improve their own written drafts based on the comments they receive. This activity is normally done in pairs or small groups.

Face-to-face Peer Response

Face-to-face peer response is an activity that the students give feedback on others' written products through face-to-face oral and / or written comments in the classroom setting. In the present study, the students working in small groups read peers' drafts first, then wrote their comments, and finally discussed them orally with one another.

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)

CMC is a process of human communication via computers. The communication may be carried out in synchronous (e.g. "real-time" chat) or asynchronous form (e.g. e-mail and electronic program). This study used Moodle's Forum in an asynchronous form.

Electronic Peer Response

Electronic peer response is an activity in which the learners take on the role of teachers in providing information on each other's writing through a computer-mediated mode instead of traditional face-to-face peer response. In this study, the students asynchronously responded to peers' writing and received their feedback in return based on written on-line networked discussion conducted out of class.

Moodle

Moodle is a course management system for online teaching and learning. It is used to create a Web-site course that includes various learning materials, such as schedules of class activities, guidelines, task descriptions, and links, particularly for those non-skilled computer writers. Moodle supports the students' collaboration and interaction which are highly required in the process of face-to-face and electronic peer response.

Cultural Behavior

Culture is defined entirely as mental rules guiding people's behaviors, which involve three components: what people think, what they do, and the material products they produce. In this study, cultural behavior referred to Chinese collectivist that students were responsible for maintaining group harmony. It was reasonable to assume that students' cultural behaviors contributed to the context of peer response and the effectiveness of peer response groups.

Improvement

Improvement was defined in the present study as a significant increase in terms of content, organization, grammar, vocabulary or mechanics in students' writing revision with the use of two modes of peer response.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter presents a critical review of related theoretical arguments and previous empirical studies about both traditional face-to-face and electronic (Computer-Mediated Communication) peer response in L2 learning setting of this present study. It contains three parts. The first part presents an overview of the theoretical and realistic support for feedback, focusing on the writing process theory, including the nature of writing, the writing process as well as the principles, approach and characteristics of writing process, and the present situation of Chinese university students' writing. The second part describes the role of traditional face-to-face peer response in L2 learning, its implication used in classroom setting and the main findings of research on L2 peer response. The third part discusses the theory and role of electronic peer response in L2 writing process, describes the ways in which computers are used in the writing classrooms for peer feedback purposes, and the empirical findings of studies on computer-mediated peer response in L2 settings.

2.1   Nature of Writing

It is known that listening, speaking, reading and writing are the four basic skills in the traditional language teaching and testing. Writing, as one of them, has

been defined by a number of researchers, but difficult to be described comprehensibly because the cognition towards it is various from different perspectives. Nowadays, in the modern societies, the need for writing is much more extensive than its general realization. From a perspective of people's routine life, the writing activity is composed of different ways in terms of functions including writing to remember, to identify, to communicate, to create or to satisfy the requirements (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996). From the perspective of cognitive process, the act of writing is mainly thought as the result of the effort of the individual writer (Weigle, 2002). It focuses on the composing process that "contains surface features which connect the discourse and an underlying logic of organization which is more than simply the sum of the meanings of the individual sentences" (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996: 4). In this perspective, writing is seen as a recursive process including planning, transforming and revising (Hayes and Flower, 1980). Planning involves "the complex juxtaposition of many pieces of information as well as the weighing of various rhetorical options and constraints" (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996: 5), and transforming refers to the writer writes the information generated in the mind down, then develops it to the final product after revisions. According to the social perspective, writing is "an act that takes place within a context, that accomplishes a particular purpose, and that is shaped for its intended audience" (Hamp-Lyons and Kroll, 1997: 8). Sperling (1996:55) also notes that 'writing, like language in general, is a meaning making activity that is

socially and culturally shaped and individually and socially purposeful'. Therefore, the notion of social perspective regards writing as a composing process that is much more comprehensive than the idea of drafting. According to Grabe and Kaplan (1996), it "constitutes a heuristic process through which an information-transfer problem is solved both for the author and for his or her intended audience"(p. 5).

In brief, writing is a complicated process that involves the cognitive process, the social context and the need for people's routine life. However, the writing ability is not acquired naturally, but it requires the learner to be taught and practiced in the form of the academic environment. The present study attempted to help the students improve their writing ability to fit the needs of social context, modern society and cognitive process with the assistance of electronic peer response activity in the context of the academic writing classroom.

2.2   Writing Process: The Theories

There is no doubt that the developments in L2 composition have been influenced, to a certain extent, by the purposes of teaching to the native speakers of English in writing (Silva, 1990). During the history of L2 composition, at the beginning of 1945, it experienced the three most influential stages: controlled composition approach, current-traditional rhetoric approach and the writing process approach. Compared with the other two approaches, in the 1980s, with the importance attached in L2 composition shifting from the formal accuracy and discourse to the

meaning negotiation, the writing process approach was introduced into second language writing, thus resulting in the emergence of empirical studies into L2 composition processes. In attempting to explore and understand the learner's writing process, this approach sees the writing as a process, focusing on the expressive, the cognitive and the social-and discourse context aspects in this process.

2.2.1 Characteristics of the Writing Process

As mentioned above, the writing process approach is to see the writing as a composing process. From a process perspective, then, "writing is a complex, recursive and creative process or set of behaviors that is very similar in its broad outlines for second language writers" (Kroll, 1990: 15). It emphasizes the view of writing as a process of developing organization as well as meaning, and aims to raise the writer's awareness of the recursive nature of the composing process (Flower and Hayes, 1980; Hairston, 1982; Zamel, 1982, 1983; Raimes, 1983). In order to help the writers understand this process better, this approach calls for providing a positive, encouraging workshop environment within which the teacher and students' collaboration and intervention can work through the process as they negotiate meaning (Zamel, 1983; Raimes, 1983; Silva, 1990; Grabe and Kaplan, 1996). The teacher's role is to help students develop strategies for getting started (pre-planning), such as finding topics, generating ideas and information, and planning structure and procedure; for drafting (multiple drafts); for revising (modifying and rearranging ideas according to the formative feedback provided by both the teachers and peers); for editing (attending to

vocabulary, sentence structure, grammar and mechanics). These steps are important parts of writing instruction in this composing process during which the teacher and students can read and respond to the writing as it develops into the final product.

2.2.2   Approaches to Writing Process

Faigley (1986) states that the writing process approaches can be divided into three branches: the expressive stage, the cognitive stage, and the social context stage. Each stage represents a new insight and responds the difficulties reflected in the preceding stage. However, it is necessary to note that these stages do not represent the historical transition and not mean the former one is replaced by the latter one. Nowadays, the three approaches are still used in writing instruction based on various teaching purposes, writers' needs and social contexts.

The expressive approach is to produce writing that is fresh and spontaneous. Writers should say what they really think, be creative, and take chances. They should let their natural voices speak out (Faigley, 1986; Berlin, 1987). However, in this approach, there is no guiding theoretical foundation that points out when and how pragmatic advice is given on writing instruction. The major problem with this approach is that it assumes that the writer has already the sufficient intellectual resources for expression in writing. That is to say, some essential factors in real world, such as writing and social context in which writing is performed well, are ignored.

The expressive approach, with its weak theoretical foundation and serious problems, at least opens a door for further developmental approaches in the writing

process. In order to fill this gap, a competing process approach, the cognitive approach, arises out on the basis of the bulk research findings which attempt to provide a coherent framework. This approach is the psychologically-based approach in which the writers are seen as developing the writing process from the view of composing writer-based, rather than reader-based (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996). According to Flower and Hayes (1981) and Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987), two representative researchers who develop the two dominant cognitive models of the writing process strongly influencing the writing process approach during this period, the writing process is a composing process which is interactive, intermingling and potentially simulataneous. Composing is a goal-directed activity and less-skilled writers compose differently than skilled writers in this process. Less-skilled writers use the knowledge-telling model to provide a set of procedures which allow them to consider information generation and ordering, audience expectations and logical patterns argument organization. Skilled writers are knowledge transforming, focusing more on the task complexity involved in the advanced writing demands. They are required to solve the new problems of content, genre and linguistics created by the components of writing at any time, and change their original goals according to these sudden problems.

The cognitive approach is a new development in writing process approach compared with the expressive approach. It emphasizes the writer's meaning negotiation and composing process from writer-based rather than reader-based. The

theory in cognitive approach represents a major advance in understanding what writers do when they write and why different writers write in different ways. Meanwhile, it also gives an explanation why writing differs from person to person. This approach still plays an important role in current writing instruction and classroom.

The social context approach is put forward in recent years. As some essential factors in real world are ignored in the expressive approach, a number of researchers state that the cognitive approach is a notion which is applicable in writing classroom. It has little meaning outside of the social context (Faigley, 1986; Witte, 1992; Flower, 1994). The essential point in this approach is that writing cannot only be regarded as a product of a single individual, but also understood from the perspective of a social context. However, as a product of recent years, this approach has not formed the consistent theory of the writing process yet. More research and explorations are needed in this trend.

In short, the three approaches do not represent the historical transition and which approach is used relies on the researcher and the instructor's needs and purposes. The present study aimed to investigate the difference between traditional and electronic peer response in the writing process under the condition of the classroom setting. The student's composing process and the difference between skilled and less-skilled students were the two focuses in this study. Therefore, the cognitive approach of the writing process was applied and three representative

composing models involved in this approach were used as a part of theory in this study as well as presented below.

2.2.3 Three Models of Writing Process

In attempting to capture the differences between skilled and less-skilled writers and to describe various influences in the writing process, a number of researchers have proposed models of the writing process. These models point out where the individual differences between the expert and novice writers may be found, thus providing the useful information in order to solve these differences, find out other influences that may affect the writing quality but not related to the skills assessed, and try to describe the writing process as clearly and accurately as possible, which makes it understood. According to the purposes of the present study, the following three representative composing models are involved.

2.2.3.1 The Hayes and Flower Model

The Hayes and Flower model (1980) is an early and influential model of the writing process. This model divides the writing process into three principal parts: the task environment, which includes the text produced and the writing assignment; the writer's long-term memory, including the knowledge of topic, the knowledge of audience and the stored writing plans; and the composing processor, which comprises the three major stages: planning, translating thought into text, and revising (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996; Weigle, 2002). At the planning stage, there are three subcomponents: generating ideas, organizing information and setting goals.

During this process, the writers collect the information related to the task environment in their long-term memory. Then, the information is organized well based on the setting goal. After that, at the second stage, translating, the ideas generated in planning stage are translated into written language on the paper. Finally, at the last stage, the paper is evaluated and revised. When the writer is going to produce a final draft, this procedure may influence his / her writing process at any time in the act of writing. In the writing classroom, one important insight brought out from the Hayes and Flower model is that writing has been seen as a recursive, not a linear process. Therefore, the teaching and learning approach may be more effective than teaching students the particular rhetorical forms and asking them to follow these forms while writing. Figure 2.1 shows the procedure of Hayes and Flower Model (cited in Grabe and Kaplan, 1996: 92).

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                    TASK ENVIRONMENT                          │
│  ┌──────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐             │
│  │ WRITING          │      │                  │             │
│  │ ASSIGNMENT       │      │    TEXT          │             │
│  │ TOPIC            │      │    PRODUCED SO    │             │
│  │ AUDIENCE         │      │    FAR           │             │
│  │ MOTIVATING       │      │                  │             │
│  └──────────────────┘      └──────────────────┘             │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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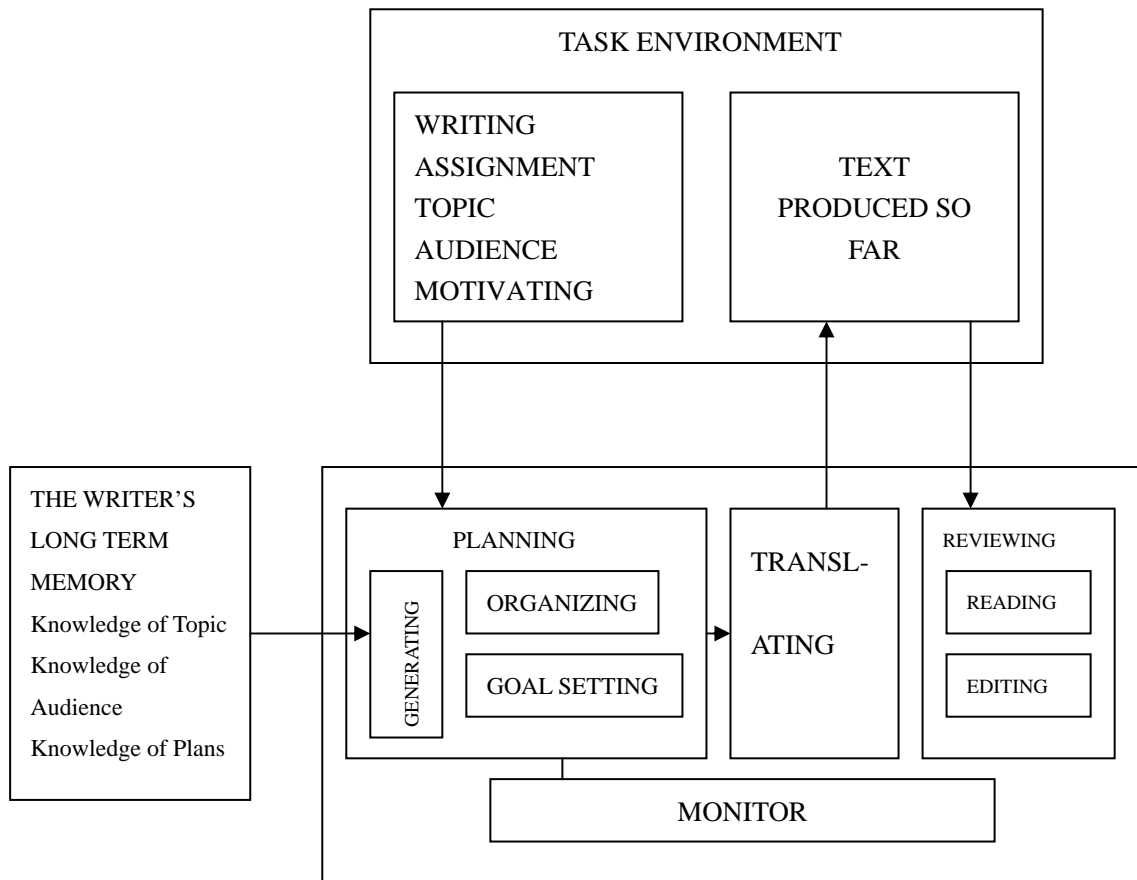
Figure 2.1 The Hayes and Flower Model (1980)

2.2.3.2   The Bereiter and Scardamalia Model

Though the Hayes and Flower model, as a representative model of

the writing process, describes the features and stages of writer's writing process and

brings some important insights into the writing classroom, it also confronts with some

criticisms (Dorbin, 1986; North, 1987; Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987; Grabe and

Kaplan, 1996). One of these criticisms from Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987)

questions   that   the   writing   process   cannot   only   be   a   single   process

(planning--translating--revising). It should consider different composing processes when writers' knowledge and language proficiency are different. They argue that the writing process between a skilled writer and a less-skilled writer should not be the same. The skilled writer may perform a different and more effective writing process which a less-skilled writer cannot do. Therefore, focusing on describing the differences between the skilled and less-skilled writers while composing rather than generating some common features of all writers, Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) put forward a theory proposing two models of writing process.

The two models of the writing process contain the knowledge-telling model and the knowledge-transforming model, which describe the different ways of writing for different levels of writers. The knowledge-telling model is for the less-skilled writers. It involves very little planning and revising. This model accounts for solving the fundamental problem in the writing, how the beginning writers generate information from the assignment, the topic and the genre easily and effectively in their minds. If the information collected is appropriate to the topic, it should be written down and used. The purpose of this model is just simply to tell the writers what they should know about a particular topic, not shedding light on any writing task which demands the complex composing process.

In contrast to the knowledge-telling process, the knowledge-transforming model, involving much more complicated skills and composing process, is for the skilled writers to use in the writing process. In this process of writing, not only more

complex writing tasks are involved, but also the writers themselves are required to solve the new problems created by the components of writing at any time, such as the problems of content generation, audience expectation, genre form and linguistic style. Thus, the writers should change their original goal setting according to the sudden new problem.

The two writing processes models represent two different ways of writing while writers are composing. Although Garbe and Kaplan (1996) state that the Bereiter and Scardamalia model does not make it clear for how to make the transition from the knowledge-telling to knowledge-transforming, it points out the differences between the skilled and less-skilled writers when they are writing, that is, why the skilled writers use different strategies from less-skilled writers, why they write in different ways, and what different levels of writers do in various writing tasks which differ in difficulty. It provides a useful notion in the instruction for writing pedagogy and assessment. The theory of this model is also helpful in designing the complexity of the writing tasks to be used based on the student's individual difference in the present study.

2.2.3.3   The Hayes Model

Since the Hayes Flower model was first introduced, a number of researchers have proposed various models of the writing process on the basis of the criticisms on the previous models and their own notions. In the 1990s, with the trend of technology flow, computer use has been merged into all kinds of research work and

takes an important part. In the study of writing process, the appearance of different kinds of mediums, processors, synchronous and asynchronous programs stimulate the writers' motivation and interests greatly. Thus, the research of writing process has shifted from the traditional pen-and-paper environment to electronic setting. Based on the developmental trend and the criticisms on the original Hayes and Flower model (1980), Hayes (1996) proposes a new updated version shedding light on various influences on the writing process, called the Hayes Model on the basis of the old one.

The Hayes model of writing process sees this process as two main parts: the writing task environment and the individual. The former part comprises two components. The first is the social environment which consists of real or imagined audience on the written product and the collaborators in the writer's writing process. The second is the physical environment including the written text as well as different technological mediums which has different impacts on the writing compared with the traditional pen-and-paper writing. Some studies have concluded some differences in the stages of planning, revising in the writing process, as well as the final writing quality on the condition that the writer uses pen-and-paper form versus technological medium (Sullivan and Pratt, 1996; Warschauer, 1996; Braine, 1997, 2001; Schultz, 2000).

Another main part of this model emphasizes that the individual consists of four components: working memory, motivation and affect, cognitive processes, and the long-tem memory. In contrast to the Hayes and Flower model, working memory,

and motivation and affect are two new concepts involved. The Hayes model recognizes that the factor of working memory refers to the information the writing task itself implies, such as the information generated from the speech, written words, and some conceptual information. Motivation and affect influences the writer's understanding to the writing task and how much effort he or she will put into a lot. As a result, this factor will affect the quality of writing directly because the success of writing relies on the effort the writer has made. This process is shown in Figure 2.2 (cited in Weigle, 2002: 26).

In short, the Hayes model sees the writing process as an environment where the writer motivates his or her interests on a writing task with the assistance of technology and audience's expectation, generating ideas from the long-term memory and the working memory provided and then produces a final draft through the composing process (planning, translating and revising). This writing process was used in the present investigation in students' act of writing.

THE TASK ENVIRONMENT

The Social Environment

The Audience

Collaborators

The Physical Environment

The Text So Far

The Composing Medium

THE INDIVIDUAL

MOTIVATION AND AFFECT

Goals

Predispositions

Beliefs and Attitudes

Cost/Benefit Estimates

WORKING MEMORY

Phonological Memory

Visual/Spatial Sketchpad

Semantic Memory

COGNITIVE PROCESSES

Text Interpretation

Reflection

Text Production

LONG-TERM MEMORY

Task Schemes

Topic Knowledge

Audience Knowledge

Linguistic Knowledge

Genre Knowledge

Figure 2.2   The Hayes Model (1996)

2.3   Present Situation of Chinese University Students' Writing

As mentioned above, writing is an important means of language in English communication through the application of language, expressing minds and conveying message. With the full promotion of new National English Curriculum Standard in 2000, English writing is becoming more and more important in L2 teaching and learning. In order to achieve the requirement of writing pedagogy based on the new National English Curriculum (2000), the writing process approach has gained increasing attention.

2.3.1   Requirement of Students' Writing

National Curriculum for College English Majors of Higher Education in People's Republic of China (2000) pointed out that the teachers should help the students to broaden their minds, develop their writing content and organization skills, improve their overall writing abilities, and enhance their evaluative skills for peer's essays. The graduation level must achieve the goal to use information meaningfully, logically, and accurately. In the writing course, therefore, the teachers should first encourage and help students to get information through various ways. Once with rich information, could the students express their ideas freely and skillfully. Second, the teachers should make sure students have good foundations of language. Only with good foundation, could the students write correct beautiful sentences and have the ability to organize the passage well. Third, in the writing process, the students sometimes think of the Chinese words first and translate them into English, and often

they cannot find the correct words to express themselves. In this case, the teachers should make an effort to help them to avoid this pattern of thinking and to follow the English writing convention. According to Zhao (2005), the teachers' role in class was to set the appropriate environment for guiding and facilitating the learning, while students must be at the heart of the curriculum. The teachers were responsible to create a student-centered learning environment where the students could develop autonomous and collaborative learning, and carry out self-assessment.

2.3.2 Problems

In reality, however, Chinese university students are generally poor in writing. Most of them are leaving anything to train their writing and give up practicing their writing ability. According to the results of TEM (Test for English Major) and CET (College English Test) in recent years, the ability of students' English writing still had been a weak one of four basic skills and did not achieve the request of new national curriculum, which implied that writing process approach did not play the role as it could be. In fact, of three stages (planning, drafting and revising) in writing process approach, the students' lower writing level primarily laid in their inability to make good use of revision based on the previous research findings (Zhao, 2005; Chen, 2006; Wang, 2006; Wu, 2006).

In a long time, writing instruction was teacher-centered not student-centered in China. This teacher-centered model viewed the teacher as active and the student as fundamentally passive. The teachers were responsible for transmitting all of the

information to the students who just acted as the mechanical passive receivers. In the students' writing process, what most teachers had done was merely to play the recorder and check their writing exercises as the only authorized source (Zhao, 2005; Chen, 2006). However, as an EFL country, the grammatical features had always been a weak point in Chinese students' writing. The teachers in China put more emphasis on the use of grammatical features instead of the expression of content and essay organization according to Chen (2006). Therefore, when the teachers were evaluating the students' essays, grammar rules, punctuation and spelling had long been emphasized rather than the meaning and organization, and the teacher feedback focusing on meaning was put beyond that focusing on form. The students' writing revision understandably lacked logic and meaningful ideas, which led to the students' writing ability was generally at a lower level (Wang, 2006; Wu, 2006). As a result, Chinese university students' writing ability was hard to fit the requirement of the new national curriculum.

In order to help Chinese university students to improve their writing ability, the present study attempted to investigate the effects of face-to-face and electronic peer response only on the stage of revision in the writing process.

2.4   Revision

As indicated above on the concepts and theories of writing process approaches, it is known that the writing process is composed of three main stages: planning, drafting and revision. Of all the stages, revision is considered the most

important stage in the writing process and is found very helpful for writing by many researchers. Stallard (1974) defines revision as correcting, changing, adding to or deleting text from the original written draft. Murray (1978) views revision as the process that allows student writers to review carefully and rewrite their written draft so that it is comprehensible regarding the purpose of writing. Sommer (1980) sees revision as changes in a piece of paper which are initiated by cues and occur recursively throughout the writing process. Chandrasegaran (1986) states that revision is the activity that reviews a written text with the aim of modifying and correcting it in order to produce grammatical, acceptable and coherent discourse. According to Lunsford and Connors (1989), revision involves reviewing a draft in order to ensure that 1) the thesis is clearly stated and is developed persuasively; 2) the organization is logical; 3) the sentences are produced variedly; and 4) word choice is appropriate and memorable. Goldstein and Conrad (1990) conclude that revision stage helps learners in revising and improving the quality of their writing. Therefore, of all the stages of writing process, revision is considered the most important stage in which the written draft is improved to be a better one than the original. It is the heart of the writing process.

2.5   Peer Response

This section introduces the definition together with the forms of the peer response activity, its significance to the ESL / EFL writing, its merits and demerits, and the studies related to the area of peer response.

2.5.1   Definition of Peer Response

Peer response is a pedagogical cooperative learning technique commonly associated with the process approach to the teaching of writing, in which students provide comments on their peers' written drafts, waiting for the feedback to their own writing in return, and the students improve their drafts according to these comments (1992; Nelson and Murphy, 1993; Villamil and Guerrero, 1998; Paulus, 1999). This kind of activity is also compatible with different approaches to SLA that emphasize the dialogic nature of language. These approaches view dialogue in a broad sense, meaning not only direct face-to-face vocalized verbal communication between persons, but also verbal communication of any type.

2.5.2   Forms of Peer Response Activity

A variety of procedures are employed in traditional peer feedback sessions including pair or small group oral discussion, reading aloud, checklists and reflection on key-stroke logged writing sessions. However, this activity normally appears in the form of pair and small group discussions. The use of small and pair group work in L2 classroom rests on strong theoretical and pedagogical bases. From a theoretical perspective, the use of small group or pairs accords with a social constructivist view of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Storch (2005) also states through the form of group and pairs work, the expert provides the appropriate assistance to the novices, helping them stretch beyond their current level of language proficiency towards their potential level of development. Thus, the learners should be encouraged to participate in this group

activity to foster the interaction and co-construction of knowledge. From a pedagogical perspective, the use of small group and pairs work is supported by the communicative approach in L2 teaching and learning and it lays stress on providing the opportunities to the learners to use their English.

In an L2 writing classroom, the small group and pairs work is commonly used in the writing process, particularly in the last stage (reviewing). In this stage, the students review their peers' written texts and give the suggestions on how their written product could be improved. In the pair peer response process, two students, on a voluntary basis, assigned by the teacher, give comments on each other's written work. In contrast to pairs work, peer response group activity is a process where the students form voluntarily or are assigned to a small group to exchange their essays in order to read and offer comments in written or oral form, and receive their peers' feedback from each other in return. It allows them to learn from each other and facilitates their motivation on writing learning because they may feel they have the real audiences read what they have written and respond to it. In this activity, the students exchange written drafts and give comments to one another, then revise the drafts accordingly. It is a way of raising students' awareness of real audience's consideration and is said to be useful to students' writing and their abilities.

2.5.3 Face-to-face Peer Response and Second Language Writing

Since the writing process approach was introduced in L2 writing, peer response has become popular in ESL instruction in association with the writing

process pedagogy. At first, as in L1 settings, researchers of the writing process claimed that L2 composing was a "non-linear, exploratory, and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning" (Zamel, 1983, p. 170). Later, with the increasing focus on the research of L2 writing, a number of studies demonstrated that although the composing process patterns in English as a first and as a second language were similar, composing in ESL was more difficult and less effective (Silva, 2001). In terms of revision, it was found ESL involved more revision, and revision was more difficult and more of a preoccupation. To alleviate these difficulties, the teachers of the process writing encouraged students to collaborate by reading and evaluating other students' texts to develop their own texts and processes (Krapels, 1990). Peer response was thought to help build ESL students' skills to revise their writing and reduce their apprehension, and to develop their linguistic skills during the writing process. Much research had been developed in the area of peer response in L2 writing process classrooms (Leki, 1991; Mendonça & Johnson, 1994; Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Lockhart & Ng, 1995; Villamil & Guerrero, 1998; Tang & Tithecott, 1999; Paulus, 1999; Tusi and Ng, 2000; Storch, 2005).

2.5.4 Merits and Demerits of Face-to-face Peer Response

The beneficial effects of peer response have been investigated by a number of researchers in L2 writing since the 1990s. The advantages of using peer feedback were that it brought a genuine sense of audience into the writing classroom, thus

enhancing students' audience awareness and enabling the students to see egocentrism in their writing (Mittan, 1989; Keh, 1990; Tusi and Ng, 2000). It also helped students critical reading and analysis skills (Keh, 1990), encouraged the students to focus on the intended meaning by discussing the alternative points of view that led to the development of ideas (Mendonca and Johnson, 1994; Villamil and Guerrero, 1998; Porto, 2001), and promoted more at the learner's level of development and interests by providing more informative messages than teacher feedback (Hedgcock and Lefkowitz, 1992; Lockhart and Ng, 1993; Mendonca and Johnson, 1994). Moreover, through this method, learners' attitudes towards writing could be enhanced with the help of the supportive peers and they assumed to be more responsible for the writing as well (Paulus, 1999). Finally, to quote Tusi and Ng (2000), writers could learn more about the writing by reading their peers' written drafts, and their awareness of what made writing effective could be enhanced.

However, as every coin has two sides, there are a number of criticisms questioning the effectiveness of peer response activities in improving students' overall writing quality. In the L2 writing context, because L2 students are in the process of learning the language, they may not find the right words to express their ideas or negotiate with their peers. Furthermore, they may mistrust other learners' responses to their writing and, therefore, may not incorporate peer suggestions while revising. Leki (1990) identified that students tended to respond to the surface errors instead of semantic errors or the content. They had difficulty in providing useful suggestions that

facilitated the revisions and in deciding whether the comments they received was valid. Nelson and Murphy (1993) also stated that L2 students seldom incorporated their peers' comments into their writing because they thought that the teacher was the only authority in the classroom, which made them consider their peers not knowledgeable enough to provide them valuable comments. In short, they did not trust their peers. Nelson and Carson's (1998) interview results showed that students made few revisions as a result of peer response. They favored teacher comments and incorporated teacher feedback in their revisions more frequently than peer response.

Besides, there has been some discussion of whether the particular groups of students with different cultural experiences and backgrounds deal with peer response equally well. Allaei and Connor (1990) pointed out that students' culture had a significant impact on the effectiveness of peer response groups. Based on this notion, in the context of Chinese students, Nelson and Murphy (1993) found that Chinese students were less likely to accept the right of other students to judge their writing. Furthermore, Carson and Nelson (1996) stated that "Chinese students will generally work towards maintaining group harmony and mutual face-saving to maintain a state of cohesion" (p. 2). They would not like to give negative views of feedback to their group members. Wu (2006) found that while working in a group in a writing course, most of the students might feel unnatural and choose to keep silent because they often preferred to respond to an essay by themselves rather than draw a conclusion altogether. Though not all commentators accepted this point of view (Gieve and Clark,

2005), at least, the results of these studies raised a question of how Chinese students worked in the process of the traditional face-to-face peer response activity.

To sum up, both the advantages and disadvantages of traditional peer response activity were rather obvious. Peer response provided a technique for the teachers to help students develop their writing quality and raise the awareness of their writing. However, if not applied properly, ignoring its weaknesses appearing probably in students' writing process, peer response would play less effectively. On the basis of the two views, the factor of culture could also be a potential influence that should be carefully taken into consideration.

2.5.5   The Studies on Traditional Face-to-face Peer Response

According to the studies reviewed so far, the studies on traditional face-to-face peer response can be categorized into three main fuci.

The first strand of research on face-to-face peer response focuses on the impact of peer response on the revision of the writing process (Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1992; Mendonça & Johnson, 1994; Nelson & Murphy, 1993; Villamil and Guerrero, 1998; Paulus, 1999; Berg, 1999; Tusi and Ng, 2000; Porto, 2001). Revision is a complex process that depends not only on the writer's competence but also, and very importantly, on the feedback or response received. Researchers have explored what goes on during peer response tasks and how response influences revision activities and writing.

Nelson and Murphy (1993) collected data from 4 intermediate ESL students in 6 peer response sessions in order to investigate the procedure of students' peer response activity. This study utilized the transcripts of the peer response sessions and the drafts produced by the students as data sources. They found that when writers interacted with their peers in a cooperative manner, they were more likely to use the peers' suggestions in revising. On a contrary, when students interacted in a defensive manner or did not interact at all, the writers were less likely to use the peer's comments.

Since peer review does play its role in the writing process if the writers treat it with the appropriate attitude, how does it improve students' writing, what does it focus on, what is the role of peer feedback in writing class and how much feedback could be used in the revisions are a series of questions that stimulate researchers to devote themselves into. Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1992), using an experimental design, compared the two French products of 14 English-speaking students writers from the experimental group who received only peer feedback and a control group who received only teacher's written feedback. Both groups received a two-step procedure whereby the first drafts received the comments on content and organizations and the second on grammatical accuracy. The findings showed the peer group performed on a level equal to that of the control group. The teacher feedback group improved the grammatical performance while the peer feedback group improved content, organization, and vocabulary.

Mendonca and Johnson (1994) described the negotiations that occurred during ESL students' peer reviews and the ways these negotiations shaped students' revision activities. L2 advanced nonnative speakers of English enrolled in a writing class for international students at a large university participated in this study. The study utilized three sources of data: transcriptions of peer review sessions, written texts, and post-interviews with the students. The finding showed the peer review activities were beneficial. The results indicated that in 53% of the instances of revision, students incorporated their peers' comments that had been discussed with peers; and in 37% of the instances of revision, students revised parts of their essays that had not been discussed with a peer. The findings supported the need to include peer reviews in L2 writing instruction and underscored their value in providing peer feedback on students' essays.

Villamil and Guerrero (1998) investigated the impact of peer revisions on writers' final text in two rhetorical modes, narration and persuasion. 14 intermediate ESL students in two peer response sessions were tape-recorded as they interacted on drafts for each of the modes. Writers read their texts aloud, and readers focused on content and organization first and then on the language use and mechanics. Tape-recording, drafts, and final versions were analyzed. The results showed that 74% of the comments made by peers were incorporated into the final draft and the students focused equally on grammar and content when revising in the narrative mode, and predominantly on grammar in the persuasive mode. It was concluded that the peer

assistance could help L2 intermediate learners realize their potential for effective revision, to the extent their linguistic abilities permitted. This study confirmed that many students did use their peer comments when they did not have the teacher's feedback as an alternative.

Paulus (1999) was interested in identifying changes that either affected meaning or did not affect meaning, the source of these changes, and the extent to which revision improved the quality of writing. She focused on the types, sources, and reasons for revisions and improvement of writing quality of 11 undergraduate international students enrolled in a pre-freshman composition course in a public university in the United States. The sequence of data collection procedures consisted of students (1) writing a first draft, (2) participating in one peer response session, (3) revising the first draft based on their peers' comments, (4) turning-in the second draft to receive written comments from the teacher, and (5) revising the second draft based on the teacher's comments. Additionally, data were collected through two think-aloud protocols per student, one as they revised their essays based on the peer review discussion, and the other as they revised based on the teacher feedback. The purpose was to identify the sources of and reasons for the revisions made. Lastly, the first and the third drafts were scored using the Essay Scoring Rubric to determine whether the overall quality of the essays improved as a result of the feedback and the revision processes. It was found that teacher and peer feedback contributed to the revision process, with peer feedback influencing more meaning-level changes and teacher

feedback being prioritized more by students because of the student's belief in the teacher's authority. The findings also suggested that revision significantly improved the essay scores of the class.

Yang, Yu and Badger (2006) examined the role of peer feedback in a Chinese EFL writing class in a comparative study of teacher feedback and peer feedback. They investigated 41 students' performances in two writing classes that were involved in three rounds of multi-draft composition writing for the same argumentative writing task in a Chinese university. The interview, questionnaire, audio recording as well as students' drafts and feedback were collected from both classes. The researchers found that although teacher feedback was more likely to be adopted by the students and led to a greater improvement in writing quality, peer feedback was shown to lead to a greater improvement in autonomous learning. There was a role for peer feedback even in the Chinese culture in which the teacher was given more authority in class.

However, while a number of researchers believed that peer response could be of use and value in L2 writing, it must be pointed out not all findings were applicable to all contexts and some defects were also found in the process of peer response (Leki, 1990; Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Carson and Nelson, 1998; Paulus, 1999; Tsui & Ng, 2000). Carson and Nelson (1998) explored students' perceptions of the effectiveness of peer response groups. 11 Chinese and Spanish-speaking students in an American university were involved in this study. The results indicated that peer

response might not be as effective as its role. The analysis showed that both the Chinese and Spanish-speaking students preferred negative comments that identified problems in their drafts. They also preferred the teacher's comments over those of other students and viewed grammar and sentence-level comments as relatively ineffective.

Tang and Tithecott (1999) analyzed the language, revision behaviors and perceptions of 12 participants from different Asian countries studying English in Canada. The students' proficiency ranged from upper intermediate to lower advanced, with an average TOEFL score of 520. The researchers focused on the activities students engaged in, the linguistic functions used, the percentages of suggestions adopted, and the percentage of positive and negative attitudes toward peer response. It was found that students concentrated mainly on reading, evaluating, pointing to trouble sources, writing comments and discussing task procedures. They used a variety of language functions (instructing, announcing, justifying, requesting, giving directives, requesting clarification, clarifying, eliciting, responding to elicitation and reacting) and used their peer comments in 58% of the instances of revision. Their main concerns were that it was difficult for them to understand their peers' pronunciation and meaning and that they felt inadequate giving feedback, which suggested training was needed.

Tusi and Ng (2000) investigated the roles of teacher and peer response in revisions of secondary ESL students in Hong Kong. The findings revealed that some

learners incorporated high percentages of both teacher and peer comments (83% vs 78%; 100% vs 75%), some incorporated higher percentages of teacher comments than peer comments (57% vs 54%), and others incorporated very low percentages of peer comments (20%; 26%; 35%). The students benefited more from reading their peers' writing than written comments. Peer response enhanced a sense of audience, raised the students' awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses, fostered cooperative learning and promoted text ownership. But, on the whole, the findings showed teacher comments facilitated more revisions than peer comments.

From the previous research findings on peer response, it could be concluded that there was no question that peer response is part of the process approach to teaching and is widely used in both L1 and L2 context as a means to improve writers' drafts and raise awareness of readers' needs. However, with the aspect that L2 students generally lack the language competence of native speakers who can often react intuitively to their classmates' papers, a number of disadvantages are shown in the process of peer response mentioned above. Many researchers argue that peer response practices are not effective if the students are not taught and trained how to make comments before responding to others and have examined the performance of training students in peer response activity (Moore, 1986; Chenoweth, 1987; Stanley, 1992; Nelson and Murphy, 1993; Zhu, 1995; Berg 1999; Min, 2005, 2006;). In the early studies on peer feedback, Moore (1986) stressed the necessity of training students to become peer responders and outlined her method of preparing ESL

students for peer response. Chenoweth (1987) suggested that because unskilled ESL writers differ in their revision strategies from the skilled ESL writers, they needed to be taught how to attend to be more global issues of their writing when revising, as skilled writers do. Nelson and Murphy (1993) emphasized the importance of training students in the specific skill of responding to each other's papers. Hence, the second strand of research shed a light on the importance of training session for L2 students before providing peer comments in their writing quality.

Stanley's (1992) research was the first related literature available that actually investigated the effects of training on peer response interaction and their influence on revision. She gave differential training to 31 ESL students with a mean TOEFL score of 548. The peer response sessions were audio taped, transcribed and coded in terms of language functions, including seven categories for the evaluator (pointing, advising, collaborating, announcing, reacting, eliciting and questioning) and four categories for the writer (responding, eliciting, announcing, and clarifying). The final drafts, written after the peer response sessions, were examined to determine the extent to which students responded to their peers' comments, by making changes in their work. The results showed that the groups that received more extensive training produced more comments, provided more specific responses, were more assertive in getting advice, and revised more than the groups that received less elaborate training. Responses that produced more revisions were pointing, advising, collaborating and questioning. It was also revealed that the preparation resulted in a

greater level of students' engagement in the task of evaluation and clearer guidelines for the revision of drafts.

In an attempt to address Stanley's research, Berg (1999) investigated whether trained peer response shaped ESL students' revision types and writing quality. The researcher divided 46 ESL students from 19 countries into two groups, one trained in how to participate in peer response to writing and the other not trained. All students wrote a first draft, participated in one peer response session and were instructed to revise according to the comments received during the session. Berg focused on the written products to count the frequency of meaning changes. The frequency of meaning changes in students' revised drafts revealed statistically significant effects for training. The results showed that trained peer response positively affected the quality of the students' texts. Peer response training led to significantly more meaning changes and higher marks on L2 writers' second drafts regardless of proficiency levels. Therefore, based on the studies in the literature, it could be concluded that the appropriate responding came from the students' clearer understanding for the genre, content, and context of a written draft in the early stage. The students also needed the strategies for reading and responding: knowing what to look for and how to comment on it. Although it was insightful on the importance of peer response training to improve revision and writing, the study did not give account of what happened in the sessions for which the students were trained and how it was related to the process of revising.

In light of the previous research findings on peer response training that were conducted in the context of ESL setting, Min's research (2005) was the first study to actually investigate the effect of peer response training in an EFL context. She gave the 18 Chinese intermediate university students in Taiwan a 4-hour in-class demonstration and 1-hour after-class teacher-student conference training to coach the students to generate more specific comments. Four types of comments were used as guidelines during the training to facilitate the students' revisions: clarifying the students' intentions, identifying problems, explaining the nature of problems, and making specific suggestions. The results showed that after the training the students generated more comments significantly and produced more relevant and specific comments on global issues. As reviewers, they benefited from training in skill improvement, language proficiency and confidence build-up. As writers, they increased their vocabulary and approached the topic from multiple perspectives. However, this study did not explore how the students provided the comments and how these comments provided were used in their revisions. Thus, it could not be concluded that whether students' cultural background played an important role during peer review.

As a follow-up study, Min (2006) examined the impact of trained responders' feedback on EFL college students' revisions in terms of writing quality and revision types. She gave the 18 Chinese students in Taiwan who had passed GEPT (General English Proficiency Test) with the score 540 a 4-hour in-class

demonstration and 1-hour after-class reviewer-teacher conference training. The students' first drafts, revisions as well as reviewers' written feedback after the peer review training were collected to compare them with those before the training. The results showed that the students incorporated a significantly number of reviewers' feedback into revisions post peer review training. The number of peer-triggered revisions comprised 90% of the total revisions, and the number of revisions with enhanced quality was significantly higher than that before peer review training. It could be concluded that with extensive training inside and outside of the class, trained peer review feedback could positively impact EFL students' revision types and quality of texts directly. However, it should be pointed out that though the researcher concluded the percentage of types of peer comments incorporated quantitatively after training, she did not investigate the types of peer comments provided and why the students gave these comments.

As mentioned above, there is no doubt that training is an effective way to solve the problems in peer response and improve the writing quality. However, the previous research findings are mainly concluded on the basis of ESL students. Recently, many studies on the performance of EFL students in peer response, particularly the Chinese students, have found that their different cultural behaviors influence the effectiveness of the peer review activity. Though Berg (1999) presents a well-modeled peer response training session could significantly enhance the effect of peer review on fellow students' revised drafts, the cultural factor involved in peer

response group is still an inevitable interfering factor that is difficult to be overcome through training (Carson and Nelson, 1996). In the L2 context, cultural factors, commonly referred to cultural experiences and background, are likely to have the impact on peer feedback. Whether the learners would like to praise or criticize others' written drafts, provide positive or negative comments on group members' writing are influenced by their cultural experience and background (Hyland, 2006). "…these help establish cohesion and coordinate understanding through mutual expectations, but cultural variations in these assumptions can intrude into classrooms through the expectations that teachers and students have about instruction and the meaning they attach to the feedback they are given" (p. 11).

Therefore, in this context, the students from different cultural backgrounds often have varying expectations towards the small group or pairs work and the role of the teacher. If they are defensive, uncooperative or distrustful to each other, the peer response activity often cannot play its role as it could be (Carson and Nelson, 1996, 1998; Jin and Cortazzi, 1998; Tang and Tithecott, 1999; Hyland, 2000). In peer response groups, the students share drafts with each other to get feedback on their writing as their drafts are developing. It is assumed that feedback will result in improved essays. But what happens if the students are more interested in being polite and maintaining positive group relationships than in making suggestions about peers' drafts? What happens if few suggestions are given during the group interaction in this way? Therefore, the strand of research on the influence of L2 students'

different cultural background in face-to-face peer response has become a heat recently.

Carson and Nelson (1996) investigated 11 students in an advanced ESL writing class at a large urban university in order to know about the interaction styles of Chinese students in peer response groups and explored their perceptions of how peer response group relationships were negotiated and maintained. The findings showed that Chinese writers were reluctant to criticize their peers' drafts, disagree with peers, and claim authority because they thought it was a hurt to the students and made the group unpleasant. As a result, they concerned more with the group's social dimension than with providing their peers with suggestions to improve their essays.

In supporting their findings, Carson and Nelson (1998) further explored another 11 Chinese and Spanish-speaking students' perceptions of the effectiveness of peer response groups with the views of their social reality. The research found that if any Chinese student in the group agreed with somebody's opinion, the others would do so. The researchers interpreted this need as part of the Chinese students' perceived need for harmonious group relations. The students appeared reluctant to speak because of not wanting to embarrass the writer and wanting to create and maintain harmonious group relationships. In turn, they seemed reluctant to use their peers' comments unless there was group consensus.

Jin and Cortazzi (1998) investigated the perceptions of native English-speaking teachers (from Australia, Britain, New Zealand and North America)

about Chinese students' behaviors and ways of learning, and Chinese students' perceptions about native English-speaking teachers' behaviors and ways of teaching through the methods of classroom observation, interviews, questionnaires and analyzing the students' essays. The results indicated that the native English-speaking teachers perceived the students as unwilling to work in groups but willing to work as a whole class or to do individual work, while the Chinese students perceived the teachers' use of group work as a waste of time and dangerous because it was likely that they learned errors from others. The findings also proposed that 'face-saving' was one of Chinese cultures of learning. The students explained that they were reluctant to ask questions in group discussions for fear that they lost face by asking a stupid question, or that they were showing off by asking a good question.

Tang and Tithecott's (1999) research which demonstrated the language, revision behaviors, and perceptions of L2 participants from different Asian countries studying English in Canada also noted that Asian students often commented their worries about criticizing peers' work. It was difficult for them to give negative comments on others' essays because they did not want to hurt their peers' faces.

Hyland (2000) also found the similar patterns of behaviors with Chinese students in peer response groups. Chinese students seldom commented on peers' work and made a criticism to their classmates. They usually suggested a small change, especially grammar mistakes. The researcher attributed the lack of negative comments among Chinese students to cultural issues.

Given the emphasis on groups in Chinese culture, it seemed reasonable to assume that Chinese students would function well in peer response groups. However, as Nelson and Carson (2006) stated, peer response groups functioned in a way that might be antithetical to the values of many Chinese because they more often functioned to the benefits of the individual writer than for benefits of the group. Giving other students negative feedback on their drafts during a peer response interaction might be difficult for a Chinese student who was accustomed to attending the feelings of others and obtaining correction from the teacher.

2.5.6   Implications for the Present Study

Based on the studies on L2 traditional peer response cited, several insights were provided into how to implement peer response technique in the present study, which helped to construct an effective and practical peer response model that stimulated the autonomous learning.

First, while a number of researchers argued that to some extent which peer review was less effective as it could be due to L2 students' weaknesses in their language use, their preference to teacher's authority as well as their misunderstanding to peer response in different contexts, the central question of studies on peer response was how the researchers and instructors were able to reduce the effects of such variables in order to make the students feel their improvement in writing through the peer review activity. In this case, a training program for students was suggested a necessary technique before responding to each other's written product (Stanley, 1992; Berg, 1999; Min, 2005, 2006).

Second, these studies also had limitations. The role of peer response had been extensively investigated and discussed in L2 writing in past years. Today, there is no question that peer response has a significantly impact on L2 writing. Although the relevant studies had made many insightful discoveries, there were still unsolved questions pertaining to the specific effects of peer response in a particular context.

One important but unsolved question was that the factor of cultural background was a potential influence that needed more attention in peer feedback. The students' different cultural experience and background in Asia, especially for Chinese students, may lead to different results when deciding what and how to comment on other's writing. For example, when the value of collectivism was embodied by maintaining cohesion and harmony within the group, it also influenced the efficacy of peer review at the same time (Triandis, 1995; Carson and Nelson, 1996, 1998). It was then reasonable to assume that a shared pattern of culture among students participating in peer response groups may contribute to the context of peer review and culture may be a factor in the effectiveness of peer group. Though some researchers had shed a new light on this factor in peer group, no studies gave the solution in traditional peer response. Chen (2000) further indicated that "in a traditional teacher-centered and teaching and learning environment, the learners are doomed to reticence because they have a long learning experience in such an environment" (p. 442).

Another problem needed to be solved was that few studies had examined the extent to which the students' comments were incorporated or ignored into the

revisions quantitatively (Nelson and Murphy, 1993; Mendonca and Johnson, 1994; Vilamil and Guerrero, 1998; Paulus, 1999; Tang and Tithecott, 1999; Tusi and Ng, 2000), in comparison to a number of research focusing on the cognitive, social and linguistic benefits. The results did not show a high ratio: less than 50% (Paulus, 1999; Tusi and Ng, 2000); to a little above 50% (Mendonca and Johnson, 1994; Tang and Tithecott, 1999); and 74% (Vilamil and Guerrero, 1998). If peer feedback was helpful to students' writing as literature presented, there was a question why did around a half of peer comments fail to be incorporated into students' revisions. The previous studies did not explore why these comments were or mere not incorporated into the revisions, and how this incorporation was made through the revision process as a supplement qualitatively. The points of this perceptive may help to understand the students' preference and ignorance in the use of peer reviews, and the effects of peer response on their textual levels of the revision.

2.6 Electronic (Computer-Mediated Communication) Peer Response

With the developmental type of peer response, electronic peer response, implemented in the writing classroom as a new approach to help the students revise their work, many researchers have shed a new light on this area. Hansen (2005), in his overview of peer response research, has recognized the use of electronic peer response as a fairly common technique in L2 writing. How electronic peer response

impacts the students' revision and writing, however, has not been sufficiently investigated, though it has been touched upon in some studies and its significance gradually recognized. This section discusses the role of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and computer-mediated peer response in L2 writing teaching and learning, and overviews the studies on CMC peer response.

2.6.1　What is Computer-Mediated Communication?

Kern and Warschauer (2000) note "the way in which shifts in perspectives on language teaching and learning (structural, cognitive, and socio-cognitive) have paralleled developments in technology from the mainframe, to the personal, and to the networked computer" (p. 7). It is the fact that computer has been associated with L1 and L2 language pedagogy. Within this shifting context, a number of researchers have been examining the changes in how computers have been used in language teaching, especially the role of computer networking-based in language teaching nowadays. Computer networking allows a powerful extension of the computer-as-tool where it facilitates access to information as well as data for the people inside and outside of the classroom (Kern and Warschauer, 2000). Computer networking in the language teaching is applied in the forms of two important technological developments: computer-mediated communication (CMC) and globally linked hypertext.

According to Hansen (2005), CMC refers to the use of computer networks to create opportunities for learners to interact with each other through a real time discussion, a delayed response time frame, or some computer software and programs.

It mainly focuses on the social effect of different computer-supported communication technologies. It permits not only one-to-one communication, but also one-to-many communication. Therefore, it could allow a teacher or students to negotiate the meanings within a small group, the whole class, or even a community involving hundreds or thousands people in the list. In this way, people's collaborative reading and writing can be facilitated through reading or responding to the messages.

2.6.2   Computer-Mediated Peer Response

Just as we have seen with the introduction of process approaches to writing in the 1980s, technologies also can be implemented in the writing classrooms in different ways in the 1990s. Warschauer and Ware (2006) note "the rapid pace at which educational technologies are growing creates a broad spectrum of ways in which technology can be integrated into classroom instruction. These multiplying points of contact between technology and second language writing converge on the concept of electronic feedback" (p. 105). Under the influence of computer technology in L2 writing, some researchers claim that the technological developments can motivate the students and make the writing classroom more creative, autonomous, and collaborative (Chun, 1994, 1996; Kern, 1995; Warschauer, 1996; Warschauer and Ware, 2000).

Nowadays the writers who are linked to the screen are connected as well to receive the reply in the forms of e-mail note, an automated essay processing software or the comments from a classmate peer helping make final revisions on an academic

essay in asynchronous or synchronous mode on-line. In such a computer-mediated communicative environment, the students are allowed to play an active role in providing feedback because they may comment one another when they want an online discussion. It enhances the sense of student-centered and increases the interaction among students (Warschauer, 2002). Therefore, the peer response, as an autonomous technique in writing process, inevitably, also shifts from the traditional face-to-face activity in which students provide information through pen-and-paper, and written or oral format to the use of technology-enhanced peer response and writing instruction. It refers to the means by which human feedback can be provided via technology. For the instructors, this electronic activity comes to appear in the way of computer-mediated communication (CMC) for commenting and discussion.

Computer-mediated peer feedback favors the use of networked computers to extend the possibility of communication in asynchronous or synchronous form, facilitating the sharing of documents and discussion about texts (Hyland, 2006). In the mode of asynchronous, one advantage was found that the students could think and respond to their peers' papers at their convenience (Thompson, 1993). It encouraged the students to generate more specific comments, developed the deeper documents based on peers' suggestions (Schultz, 2000), engaged the students in the writing text as a real audience (Warschauer, 1996), and created a conservational maintenance and face-saving function (Liu and Sadler, 2003). The students' writing quality could be improved (Sullivan and Pratt, 1996), and the comments generated in asynchronous

CMC setting had a greater impact on the revisions than those in traditional classroom (Tusi, 2004). However, despite its advantages, the asynchronous mode has its own problems. For example, as a delayed response mode, the features of different software programs influenced students' writing differently. Hewett (2000) questioned that most research on electronic peer response was done with technology that was not designed for writing and responding, in this way it might influence the quality of the students' revision because a part of comments given would be ignored by the students due to some special features of different software. His research finding was proved by Liu and Sadler (2003). In their study, the researchers found that the oral group used more comments in the revision than the CMC group due to the nature of 'inset comment' feature in Word. Some comments were usually not visible to causal observation. Meanwhile, they also found no differences on the number of content and organization comments, but a large number of differences on evaluative, alternative and suggestive comments between the traditional group and electronic group due to the features of MOO they used. Bloch and BruttGriffler (2001) also indicated that students using CommonSpace were found to give more grammatical than rhetorical feedback which was not perceived to be useful by their peers.

Another group of studies on CMC peer response shed light on the synchronous mode, which mainly focused the classroom atmosphere, students' real discussion, and the amount of comments produced. It was viewed as increasing students' participation (Warschauer, 1996), facilitating a group discussion (Sullivan

and Pratt, 1996), and providing a greatly rich environment for collaborative learning (Honeycutt, 2001). Braine (1997) found that the students in synchronous CMC peer response sessions generated more than twice of the number of comments than those in traditional classroom based on a comparative experiment with 69 students in both traditional and networking setting. Liu and Sadler (2003) found CMC group had a greater number of turns overall, thus resulting in a positive impact on writing quality. However, some research also pointed out the problems in synchronous CMC peer response. For example, Thompson (1993) found the students lacked focus, were not always on the task, and engaged in social interactions. Sullivan and Pratt (1996) stated that students' comments were more focused and repetitive when they were sending comments at the same time. Braine (2001) suggested that the comments generated in synchronous mode were less organized and structured. Liu and Sadler (2003) found the slow typing speed also made trouble in keeping up with the online discussion.

2.6.3   The Empirical Studies on Computer-Mediated Peer Response

Because the electronic peer response is a new insight in feedback of L2 writing, the studies on this perspective is still a few. The role of electronic peer response it plays has been touched upon in several studies. The available research conducted so far on electronic peer response has mainly focused on two aspects: 1) effects of CMC peer response on the students' participation; 2) effects of CMC peer response on the number and types of comments generated during the peer response task; and 3) effects of CMC peer response on students' writing quality and revision.

For most instructors, the central question of CMC peer response was how computer-mediated peer response may improve the students' revision and writing quality.

Owing to the influence of traditional face-to-face peer response, the early studies on electronic peer response aimed to examine whether computer-mediated peer response may mimic or even enhance the positive outcomes cited by research on face-to-face peer review. The researchers during this period designed the comparative studies focusing on the efficacy of CMC and traditional face-to-face peer response on the types and quality of comments generated from the both kinds of peer response activities, and whether CMC peer response promoted increasing students' participation and facilitating the small group discussion. These studies mainly attempted to examine whether CMC peer response may outweigh the disadvantage because of insufficient comments in face-to-face peer groups, and to compare which setting promoted a better improvement in students' writing quality. Another central question on the use of the comments generated electronically in students' revisions has not been concerned about yet.

Chun (1994) investigated 15 first-year German students who used a real-time networking program in computer-assisted class discussion. Students interacted directly with each other instead of interacting mainly with the teacher as usual. As a result, she found technology-enhanced peer review promoted students collaboration by making student papers more widely available and fostered a sense of community in the classroom.

Warschauer (1996) also examined whether computer-mediated communication resulted in more equal participation among students by comparing face-to-face and electronic discussion in a synchronous mode. Findings revealed the participants were more active with greater motivation when provided the opportunity to share their writing through online discussion. The students used more lexical and syntactical formal language in electronic than in face-to-face discussion.

Sullivan and Pratt (1996) attempted to investigate the nature of the participation and the differences in attitudes towards writing with computers, writing apprehension, and growth in writing discourse in the two modes of communication--traditional and computer-based classroom. 38 Spanish-speaking intermediate ESL students in their second year in a university were divided into two classes in the study. Through a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the transcripts of audio and video taped peer discussion and of four composition assignments included peer and teacher comments, the researcher drew a negative finding based on the results that writing environment had no effects on attitudes towards writing with computers or writing apprehension. However, writing quality did improve in the computer-assisted classroom. The types / patterns of discourse in the two writing environments were clearly different. The teacher's role was minimized in the computer-assisted classroom, while the opposite was found in the oral classroom. During peer response group sessions, the comments made in the computer-assisted classroom were more focused, whereas the comments in the oral classroom were more numerous.

Huang (1998) investigated the interactive nature of networked computers to facilitate students' writing by comparing face-to-face and computer-mediated peer response. He examined the oral and synchronous comments of 17 ESL university students enrolled in a two-semester ESL composition class in Taiwan. The discourse produced by the students was classified into 18 types of discourse functions. The researcher found that in the computer-mediated context the participants spent a greater proportion of the types of problem statement and suggestive feedback and a smaller proportion of types of explaining, giving reasons or reacting.

However, not everything was perfect. Some researchers also questioned the effects of electronic peer response. Braine (1997) compared the performance of 69 ESL university students in the United States in a networked computer classroom and a traditional face-to-face classroom. The aim was to determine which setting promoted better writing, more improvement in writing, and more peer and teacher feedback. Through analyzing the data collected from the first and final drafts written on the same topic, and comments written in the traditional classroom and on-line, the researcher found that the networked setting was shown to promote better writing and more peer and teacher feedback. However, the traditional setting was shown to promote more improvement in writing quality. Electronic peer feedback was less effective than it could be. The researcher attributed this finding to two reasons: (1) the students' first drafts in the networked classroom were closer to their maximal performances because the anxiety in their learning was reduced in a less threatening

environment; (2) the networking medium used in the study was inappropriate for students' writing and responding, which was seen as an obstacle to develop students' writing. The results suggested that an appropriate technological medium or program should be taken into considerations and the students would have been trained to be familiar with the software and hardware before commenting.

To further determine which setting (LANs or traditional writing classes) produced better writing and more improvement in writing in the EFL context, Braine (2001) described 87 undergraduates' writing on a LAN and in traditional writing classes at a Hong Kong university. Like the procedures presented in the researcher's earlier study (Braine, 1997), he compared the holistic scores of first drafts and final versions of students' papers, and their comments done in the traditional classroom and real discussions in a synchronous mode. He found that although the quality of the students' first drafts in the LAN classes was higher than that of the traditional classes because LANs eliminated the students' anxiety, removing a prime obstacle in their writing, the final drafts in the traditional classes showed a higher quality. Further, the students in the traditional classes demonstrated more improvement in writing. The comments generated from the synchronous mode were less structured and organized, and the students did not make best use of them in limited time available. These findings led the researcher to conclude that CMC was no more effective than traditional peer response. However, Braine also stated that the disjointed nature of LAN discussions was seen as the biggest obstacle to the enhancement of EFL students' writing on-line.

DiGiovanni and Nagaswami (2001) explored the types of negotiation the students used in face-to-face and online peer review and their attitudes towards both kinds of feedback based on an investigation of 32 ESL university students in a comparative study between face-to-face peer response and online peer review. The researchers firstly used a training session in electronic peer response and mentioned its importance. This study began with offering a traditional step-by-step training model to guide the students how to practice commenting on peers' work from face-to-face to online peer response. Then the researchers analyzed the students' negotiations and summarized their opinions on online peer review training and both modes of peer review activities from three sources of data: transcripts of students' audio-taped face-to-face interaction, printouts of their online interaction, and their responses to a questionnaire about two types of peer review. The results showed that the number of negotiation was higher in face-to-face than online because of the students' unfamiliarity to hardware, software, and the process of online peer review. Although the students were trained to be familiar with the networked program, the traditional face-to-face training model did not suffice for online peer response in a networked setting. Besides, despite of the investigation of what the students required for online training, the researcher did not incorporate students' comments into the construction of a more effective and practical training model. However, the students' attitudes towards online peer review were positive.

When the benefits of CMC on students' participation, interaction, comments and writing quality were confirmed in the earlier studies, the researchers began to

focus on how CMC peer feedback given was used in students' subsequent revisions and impacted the revisions in the last several years. This strand of research interest in the influence of computer-mediated peer response on the revisions began with Huang's (1999) study whose purpose was to investigate the extent to which students used ideas provided by their peers and the quality of the peers' comments. He asked 17 ESL students to mark the comments they might incorporate into their final drafts on the transcripts of two computer-mediated peer response interactions. Huang found that students did not use peers ideas often, although the quality of the comments used was good; almost half of the ideas used were concerned with macro-level composition issues or content, and about one fourth were related to paragraph level issues. The study, however, only examined the readers' comments through the interaction transcripts, and the writers' views on the readers' comments through the interviews. The researcher did not examine how these comments were really used in students' actual revisions.

Schultz (2000) examined the revisions that intermediate and upper intermediated French students made across their writing with a process-oriented approach in traditional and computer-mediated peer feedback settings. 54 students were required to write their essays and comments in a real time interaction mode. The students' first and final drafts, transcripts of synchronous comments, and transcripts of oral comments were collected and the researcher examined the number and types of changes (content, organization, style, and grammar) made by the students between the

first drafts and final essays, and made a qualitative analysis of the face-to-face and the computer-mediated peer response transcripts. The results indicated that face-to-face interaction produced quantitatively and qualitatively more changes in content among the less advanced students. Face-to face peer response focused on content, whereas computer-mediated peer response focused on content and organization. The results also showed students made more specific, local changes in computer-mediated mode because they were able to follow the detailed suggestions made and saved in CMC mode, while students made more global changes in the traditional mode. However, this study did not provide information on how students provided face-to-face and electronic peer response and how two modes of peer response impacted the students' revisions.

Hewett (2000) actually investigated the impact of computer-mediated and face-to-face peer response on revision qualitatively. She used the technology that was designed specially for writing and responding, whereas the earlier research did not. The researcher examined oral comments, transcripts of synchronous and asynchronous comments, initial and final drafts for three tasks, students' journals, transcripts of interviews, and observation notes collected in two sections of a college composition class. As to revision changes, Hewett used the coding system developed by Faigley and Witte (1981), which included 6 categories (addition, deletion, substitution, rearrangement, distribution, and consolidation). She followed a repeated procedure to determine revision patterns, identifying three main types: direct,

inter-textual, and self-generated. The results revealed that revisions from oral talk included more frequent inter-textual and self-generated idea use, while revision from computer-mediated talk induced more frequent use of peers' ideas. Two groups focused more on content than on form. The researcher concluded that speculating about writing in progress might be more challenging in an online than in an oral environment; however, for suggesting concrete revisions on content or form, both environments worked well. It was important to mention that although this study was conducted in L1 context, some points of view in the researchers' methodology, such as the choice of the networked medium and the procedure of the revision analysis, seemed likely to be conducted in L2 research.

Inspired by Hewett (2000), Liu and Sadler (2003) investigated whether differences in modes of commenting and interaction (i.e. technology-enhanced versus traditional) resulted in differences in the area (global versus local), the types (evaluation, clarification, suggestion, and alteration), the nature (revision-oriented versus non-revision-oriented) of comments produced by peer reviewers in L2 writing, and what impact the observed differences had on students' revisions. 48 ESL second semester freshmen at a large southwestern university in the United States were divided into two groups, traditional group and technology-enhanced group. The findings showed that the overall number of comments made by the technology-enhanced peer review group was larger, and the percentage of revision-oriented comments was larger for this group as well, thus resulting in a larger

number of revisions overall. Besides, the largest difference was the number of alternation and evaluation comments. 46.8% of comments were alternation in the CMC group, while 7.2% in the traditional group, for the students in traditional group were unwilling to spend a lot of time to rewrite large sections of the paper. 60% of comments were evaluation in the traditional group, while 25% in the CMC group, for the students would like to give specific comments online. The CMC students had a much larger percentage of editing and grammatical comments than the traditional group. However, in the study, the researchers also found that the majority of the interaction of the CMC group was not focused on their peers' papers but on some irrelevant issues in this environment, which resulted in the comments generated in the CMC mode being less effective for revision. The oral groups had more revision-oriented comments in their discussions due to the features of the software (for example, due to the nature of 'inset comment' feature in Word, the comments were usually not visible to causal observations).

Tuzi (2004) examined how e-peer feedback impacted the revisions that the first-year university students made to their academic essays. 20 L2 writers wrote, responded, and revised four writing tasks on a database-driven web site specifically designed for writing and responding. Each writing task consisted of producing an essay and up to five revisions that they posted on the web site. He found that e-feedback had a greater impact on revision than oral feedback. Moreover, e-feedback had a greater impact on macro-level changes than on micro-level changes. It had great

impact on revisions at the clause, sentence, and paragraph levels. Writers may use e-feedback to create macro revisions. He also found that the e-feedback did play an important part in the revisions made especially when the students focused on adding new information or on increasing the impact of a section of a paper. However, the researcher only examined the effects of electronic peer feedback on the students' revision instead of comparing the students' performance in both electronic and face-to-face peer response groups. It could not be concluded which setting was more effective.

2.6.4 Implications for the Present Study

The research into the use of electronic peer response in L2 writing cited has brought a new perspective on the study of nature of peer response. The discoveries also shed new lights on an understanding of the effects of electronic peer response on improving L2 writing teaching and learning in general. However, more research in this area is still needed. The overview of the above-mentioned studies on computer-mediated peer response, which from now onwards is referred to as 'electronic peer response', suggests the following considerations for further research in the field.

First of all, the previous research suggested that the mode chosen for writing task should be taken into consideration carefully because both modes showed obvious advantages and disadvantages. It needed to be connected to the objectives of the study. The purpose of this present study was to investigate the effects of electronic peer

response on improving students' revisions and writing quality, the quality of students' comments being the focus. Hence, the asynchronous mode seemed to be better for commenting than the synchronous mode since it gave the writer more time to think about and organize the responding, encouraged more informative, comprehensive and reflective feedback, and processed the students' written drafts deeper (Hewett, 2000; Bloch and BruttGriffler, 2001; Liu and Sadler, 2003; Sliva and Brice, 2004).

Second, training was seen as a necessary step to reduce the problems shown in the process of face-to-face peer feedback. In the networking community, with the change of strategies the students used in commenting and different focus in feedback (Sullivan and Pratt, 1996; Schultz, 2000; Liu and Sadler, 2003), it assumed that the traditional training session not be applied completely in the electronic peer review activity. DiGiovanni and Nagaswami (2001) concluded that the traditional classroom showed higher frequency of their peers' comments to be used than the networked classroom because the traditional training model caused the students' unfamiliarity with software and hardware. Therefore, a training session for electronic peer response group was needed to ensure electronic peer response played its effectiveness, but should be modified to meet the students' requirements on the basis of face-to-face training guideline.

Third, whether electronic peer response significantly improved L2 students' writing quality was inadequately addressed. Although more studies with positive findings on computer-mediated peer response in L2 writing had focused on the aspects of the students' participation, the efficacy of electronic peer review on facilitating the small

group discussion, and the comparison for the types, quality and the amount of numbers of feedback generated from both modes of peer review (Chun, 1994; Warschauer, 1996; Sullivan and Pratt, 1996; Huang, 1998; DiGiovanni and Nagaswami, 2001), only a few studies (Sullivan and Pratt, 1996, Braine, 1997, 2001; Liu and Sadler, 2003; Tusi, 2004) reported this issue, but the findings were still contradictory. In contrast to other three researchers' positive results, Braine (1997, 2001) twice criticized the effects of electronic peer response on this aspect in ESL and EFL contexts respectively and argued the use of CMC peer feedback had not been shown to promote more improvement in the quality of students' final essays than face-to-face. Liu and Sadler (2003) also indicated the restrictions of features of computer mediums sometimes made peer response less effective to be used. Moreover, it was important to mention that nearly all of these studies were conducted in a real ESL context, only one in a real EFL context. Whether the literature was available to all contexts was needed to be explored.

Fourth, how electronic peer response impacted L2 students' revision awaited an answer as well. As the most important stage in writing process, the effects of peer response on revision had been investigated by a number of researchers in face-to-face writing classrooms and the results had shown its significance quantitatively and qualitatively (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1992; Nelson & Murphy, 1993; Connor and Asevanage, 1994; Mendonça & Johnson, 1994; Villamil & Guerrero, 1998; Berg, 1999; Paulus, 1999; Tang & Tithecott, 1999; Tsui & Ng, 2000). However, in contrast to the studies in the traditional classroom, fewer studies had been conducted in

computer-mediated setting (Huang, 1999; Hewett, 2000; Liu and Sadler, 2003; Tusi, 2004). Though Hewett's research (2000) presented a qualitative process how peer comments given online impacted the students' revisions in details, it was conducted in an L1 context. In an L2 context, however, the researchers mainly investigated this issue quantitatively by generating the types of comments incorporated into revisions. The qualitative analysis of the changes revealed in revision in levels of content, organization, and language use was seldom discussed. Answers to this question may provide a better knowledge of nature of electronic peer review to this issue.

Finally, in relation to the area of electronic peer response, though most of studies generated the frequency of types of comments incorporated into the students' revision, very few examined the factors that influenced the students to provide comments or incorporate the given feedback into the revisions. Compared to the influence of cultural behaviors in face-to-face peer response, information on these issues would contribute to the knowledge about how Chinese students' cultural backgrounds and experience might promote or hinder the students' comments and revision behaviors in face-to-face and computer-mediated peer response.

2.7   Summary

This chapter reviewed the theories of the writing process approach, the present situation of Chinese students' writing, and the studies on traditional face-to-face peer response and CMC peer response in L2 writing. It first presented a

brief survey of theories and models in the writing process approach, providing a theoretical framework for peer feedback, followed by an overview of research on traditional face-to-face peer response. It showed that a majority of studies on face-to-face peer response stressed its significant achievements on L2 students' writing, whereas only a small number addressed the weaknesses. As one of the unique problems in peer response, the influence of the students' cultural backgrounds and experience on peer review had received some, but not enough attention. There was still no solution in a traditional learning environment. Therefore, based on this problem, this chapter presented a new peer response environment, electronic peer response, to seek a better way to reduce the cultural influence. However, as a new area in the last decade, the studies on this issue were still a lack. Compared to the research on traditional peer review, it was largely unknown how CMC peer response could impact L2 students' writing quality and revisions and how L2 students could provide their comments and incorporate their peers' feedback into their subsequent revisions. The investigation into these questions would enrich the knowledge of the distinct nature of CMC peer response and enhance the understanding of cultural influences on L2 students' writing in a CMC peer response environment.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter first presents the research design of the pilot study and discusses the implications and limitations that the pilot study reflected. Second, based on the implications obtained from the pilot study, it is to discuss the framework of the research design as well as some relevant theories applied in the main study, which begins with the nature of research, followed by research methods, then describes the research design of the present study, including the participants, the instruments, data collection procedure, and how the data obtained are reported, analyzed and interpreted in details.

3.1   Pilot Study

Making the pilot study is necessary before the main experiment. It can help the researcher to find the weakness in the main study and make modifications according to students' feedback. Evans (1978) points out three necessities for a pilot study:

> "In the first place, it gives a chance to practice administering the tests or making the observations. In this way, facility is gained, and the chance of making a mistake which would spoil the whole investigation is decreased. Secondly, it may bring to light any weakness in the procedure of administration. Instructions to the subjects can be amended if they are found

light any weakness in the procedure of administration. Instructions to the subjects can be amended if they are found to be ambiguous or incomprehensible. The time needed for the experiment can be checked. Unsatisfactory methods of recording information can be improved, and generally, the process of testing can be made as simple and foolproof as possible. Thirdly, the statistical procedures can be tried out to make sure they can be applied to the material gathered. Working out the results of the pilot experiment will show whether all the necessary information has been gathered, and they will give some indication of the result to be expected from the main investigation" (p52).

This pilot study was conducted on December 10th, 2007, and ended on January 4th, 2008, lasting four weeks. The purpose was to check whether there was any weakness in each procedure of the methodology and the instruments suited for the main study or not.

3.1.1 Research Questions

To achieve the implications for the main study, the present study addressed the following research questions:

1. What types and frequency of peer comments on the students' written work are provided by the electronic peer response group in comparison with the face-to-face peer response group?

2. What functions do both of modes of peer response serve?

3. Do the students in electronic peer response group write better than those in face-to-face peer response?

4. Whether the students' cultural behaviors play a role in providing peer comments in the electronic and face-to-face peer response groups?

3.1.2 Participants

Altogether 20 third-year English majors, 16 female and 4 male, with the average age being 20 were invited to participate in the pilot study from School of English, College of Foreign Languages, Guizhou University. They were selected on the basis of convenience and availability. The 20 students, who would not take part in the main study, were randomly assigned to face-to-face peer response (FPR) group and electronic peer response (EPR) group, 10 students for each group based on the results of a national comprehensive test (Test for English Majors 4), which was held a month before the end of the second semester in their second year. In each group, according to the previous research findings on group size in peer response, the students worked in small groups of five each. All of them showed their interests and agreed to participate it when the researcher introduced the pilot study to them.

3.1.3 Instruments

Three main instruments were used to collect data in the pilot study: the writing task, the questionnaire, and the interview.

The writing task consisted of one argumentative essay and the subsequent peer response sessions and revisions. The topic of argumentative essay was selected from previous national examinations (Test for English Majors 8), which particularly tested the advanced English majors. The researcher firstly selected four topics, and then discussed with five experienced teachers in charge of English Writing course in School of English, who were invited to participate in the present study as raters, in

order to choose the most appropriate one. Finally the second topic was selected because the researcher and the raters felt it was close to students' daily life and more helpful to enhance students' participation. The following was the list of topics:

1. **Should Mobile Phone be Turned off at Certain Place? Please state your reasons.**

2. **Should a University Student Do a Part-time Job? Please state your reasons.**

3. **Should a Student be Allowed to Choose a Course's Teacher? Please state your reasons.**

4. **Should Chinese Parents Send Their Child to College Abroad? Please state your reasons.**

The questionnaire consisting of three parts was used to investigate the students' perceptions of writing difficulty, training session, and two modes of peer response techniques. The items in the questionnaire were first evaluated by five experts with at least 10 years' teaching experience in School of English, in order to decide whether they were appropriate, then piloted with the 20 third-year students to see whether the questionnaire needed to be modified and improved in the main study.

A semi-structured with open-ended questions interview was used to further elicit the students' feelings when providing and using certain types of comments in both FPR and EPR groups. The questions in the interview were also examined by the five experts before the implementation to see whether the language and the content needed to be improved in order to ensure they were clear and easy to understand for the students.

3.1.4   Procedures

There are two major steps in collecting data. First, a training session was given to the participants to familiarize them with the way of how to provide face-to-face and electronic peer feedback. Second, following the first step, a writing task was given to the students where they could provide face-to-face or electronic peer response to the peers' essays.

The pilot study began with the training session lasting two weeks, two hours each week. The face-to-face peer response and electronic peer response groups were treated separately on the actual use of their peer response mode. During the first week, all the students in both groups were explained how to write an argumentative essay with the guideline of writing process approach, which engaged them in a four-step task cycle: pre-planning, organizing, drafting, and revising. They were instructed on which step their feedback should focus on in this pilot study and what they should look for, what questions they should ask, and how to give their comments. Then a list of types of comments, praise, criticism, explanations, suggestions, evaluations, questions, clarifications and restatements, was introduced to the students, followed by a response sheet showing samples and explaining its purpose was given to help them focus on these important areas of the writing assessment.

During the second week, the students in the EPR group were trained how to use Moodle's Forum to respond to their peers' essays online. Based on the previous studies (Braine, 1997, 2001; DiGiovanni and Nagaswami, 2001; Liu and Sadler,

2003), the students' unfamiliarity with the computer technology often caused negative influences on the effects of electronic peer response on writing. According to the results of the preliminary study, none of the students had known or ever used Moodle's Forum in their previous learning experiences. Therefore, in the pilot study, the students first were instructed on the use of Moddle's Forum, an Internet program for online teaching and learning. Moddle is used to create a Web-site course that includes learning materials (e.g. schedules of class activities, guidelines, task descriptions, and links). Forum is one of the operational platforms in Moddel and is also the heart of it. The students can post essays, summaries, and critical and evaluative comments on the Forum and receive feedback to revise. All the drafts can be saved on-line in order to make the modification and see the improvements. Students may use Forum either at home or in the classroom, where they have the access to Internet. Second, after the instruction, the students practiced giving electronic peer feedback with computer. They posted their written drafts that were prepared previously and meanwhile provided the responses to their peers' essays with the help of the guideline on the web site. During this period, the researcher played a role as a classroom observer in helping the students if they encountered any technical problems or had difficulty in providing electronic comments on Forum.

Two weeks later, the instruction of a writing task began. Due to the time limitation, only one writing task was employed which lasted two weeks. The students in both groups wrote a 300-word argumentative essay within one hour based on the

given topic, experienced with face-to-face or electronic peer response sessions, and

revised their essays according to the peer comments they received. Table 3.1

summarizes the instruction time and the procedures.

Table 3.1   Writing task procedures for the FPR and EPR groups

Procedures	FPR	EPR
First Draft	1) Students wrote an argumentative essay 2) Students took their essays to peer response session	1) The teacher posted the topic on Forum 2) Students wrote an argumentative essay with computer and posted their essays on their group space on Forum
Peer Response I (First Meeting)	1) Students met in the classroom and worked in small groups 2) Students gave their essays to each group member 3) Each student read the essays he / she had received carefully and wrote the comments on the essays 4) Students gave oral comments on the essays and shared ideas with one another 5) Students returned the essays with written comments	1) Students in each group read their group members' essays posted on Forum and gave comments online within 3 days 2) Students posted their written comments to each member's essay
Revision I (Second Draft)	1) Students read the given written comments and thought about their discussion in peer response session 2) Students revised their essays based on the oral and written peer comments	1) Students read and thought about the given written comments 2) Students revised their essays based on the comments received 3) Students posted their revision on Forum again within 3 days
Peer Response II (Second	1) The same as Peer Response I 2) The same as Peer Response I 3) Each student read the peers'	1) Students in each group read their group members' revisions

Procedures	FPR	EPR
Meeting)	4) revision he or she received carefully and gave comments for further improvement 5) The same as Peer Response I The same as Peer Response I	2) and gave comments for further improvement online within 3 days The same as Peer Response I
Revision II (Final Draft)	The same as Revision I	The same as Revision I

Following the aforementioned procedures, several days later, a questionnaire about the writing difficulty and their attitudes towards face-to-face or electronic peer response was administrated with the 20 students. They were asked to comment on their mode of peer response sessions and the training session. The purpose was to check the validity of the treatment, and whether it was appropriate to be conducted in the main study or where should be improved. Two days later 10 students, five from the FPR group and another five from the EPR group, were interviewed for more information.

3.1.5 Procedures for Reliable Scoring

According to White's (1984) recommendations, an essay should be graded so that the score represents a writer's real level and the judgment reliability based on the following procedures (cited in Weigle, 2002: 129):

(1) Each script must be scored independently by at least two raters, with a third rater adjudicating in cases of discrepancy.
(2) Scoring should be done in a controlled reading, by which is meant that a group of readers meet together to grade the scripts at the same place and time.

(3) Checks on the reading in progress by reading leaders help to ensure that individual readers are maintaining the agreed-upon standards for grading.

(4) Evaluation and recording keeping are essential for an ongoing assessment program so that reliable readers are kept and unreliable readers are retained or dropped if necessary.

Based on White's procedures for reliable scoring, five experienced teachers in charge of English Writing courses in School of English, College of Foreign Languages, Guizhou University, were invited as the raters to grade students' essays in this study. As mentioned earlier, the topic of argumentative essay used in pilot study was selected by the researcher and the five raters. With the students' final drafts collected, the raters were confirmed of the date and location for scoring the essays. On February 8th, the researcher met the five raters for rating training. To save time, one essay was given a single score based on the rater's overall impression of it. Hence, beginning with the introduction for scoring criteria, three essays, one excellent, one medium, and one low from students' final drafts were used as samples for rating training. After that, the raters graded the essays independently.

3.1.6 Data Analysis

As introduced at the beginning of this chapter, the purpose of pilot study attempted to check the students' perceptions of both modes of peer response and whether the instruments and procedures were appropriate for the main study. Hence, the results obtained from this present study would be used to improve research design of the main study.

3.1.6.1 Quantitative Analysis

This section discussed the students' peer comments, the functions that the comments served, the writing quality, and the raters' inter-rater reliability.

3.1.6.1.1 Students' Peer Comments

After all the students finished providing their feedback on the received written work, the data on the types of peer comments given and the functions that these comments served were initially collected and then analyzed. Table 3.2 shows the frequency of types of peer comments on the students' written work.

Table 3.2 The frequency of types of peer comments on the students' written work

Types	FPR	EPR	Percentage %	
			FPR	EPR
Praise	103	48	37.3	20.9
Criticism	13	30	4.7	13.0
Explanation	9	12	3.3	5.2
Suggestion	34	23	12.3	10.0
Evaluation	29	42	10.5	18.3
Question	66	53	23.9	23.1
Clarification	0	4	0	1.7
Restatement	22	18	8.0	7.8
Total	276	230	100	100

From this table, it was apparent that certain types of comments were preferred to others. In the FPR group, the students preferred to praise others' work (37.3%) and question the points that they did not understand (23.9%). Compared to the FPR group, the students in EPR laid more importance on question, praise, and evaluation (23.1% / 20.9% / 18.3%). Therefore, in order to ensure more reliable results, this problem should be addressed in students' training in the main study.

With regard to the functions the comments served, Table 3.3 reveals that the most frequent function occurred at the level of idea in both modes of peer response groups (41.3% / 51.7%). In the FPR group, vocabulary was closely followed by (31.2%) in contrast to organization in the EPR group (25.2%). It was revealed that the students in different peer response group laid different importance on the particular aspect in the process of responding to their peers' written work, which probably resulted in significant difference in their writing quality. Besides, it was also noticed that the function of mechanics was completely ignored by all the students. This phenomenon should also be drawn attention in the main study.

Table 3.3   The functions the comments served

Functions	FPR	EPR	Percentage %	
			FPR	EPR
Content	114	119	41.3	51.7
Organization	35	58	12.7	25.2
Grammar	41	34	14.8	14.8
Vocabulary	86	19	31.2	8.3
Mechanics	0	0	0	0
Total	276	230	100	100

3.1.6.1.2   Students' Writing Performance

After the raters finished scoring the students' final drafts, all the essays were returned to the researcher. As shown in Table 3.4, it states that the students in the EPR group had better writing performance than those in the FPR group after the treatment with a slightly higher mean score. However, it did not mean there was the significant difference between both groups because p value was much higher than 0.05 ($p = 0.192$). Therefore, this result indicated that a longer period of time

should be allocated to get more writing samples in the main study in order to ensure

more reliable experimental achievements.

Table 3.4   The difference of students' essay scores between the FPR and the

FPR groups

Group	N	Mean	M. D	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
FPR / EPR	10	75.10 / 77.30	-2.20	-1.356	.192

The negative mean difference and t-value refers to the scores of the FPR group are lower than those of the EPR group.

3.1.6.1.3   Inter-rater Reliability

As mentioned earlier, five raters were invited to score students'

essays in the pilot study. Therefore, it was very necessary to evaluate their grading so

as to ensure inter-rater reliability. The scores given by the five raters were processed

through SPSS. The correlations among them were made to measure the rater

reliability. The results were shown in Table 3.5 below.

Table 3.5   Correlations among raters

Raters		A	B	C	D	E
A	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.814**	.880**	.886**	.713*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.004	.001	.001	.021
B	Pearson Correlation	.814**	1.000	.694*	.799**	.899**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.	.026	.006	.000
C	Pearson Correlation	.880**	.694*	1.000	.623	.650*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.026	.	.054	.042
D	Pearson Correlation	.886**	.799**	.623	1.000	.737*

Raters		A	B	C	D	E
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.006	.054	.	.015
E	Pearson Correlation	.713*	.899**	.650*	.737*	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.021	.000	.042	.015	.

$* p < 0.05$ $** p < 0.01$

Through the analysis by SPSS, it could be found that the correlations coefficient among the raters was not consistent to one another. For example, although the inter-rater reliability between A and B, A and C, and A and D was more than 0.75 (0.814, 0.880, 0.886), showing its significant reliability, that between A and E was less than 0.75 (0.713). Besides, rater reliability among C, D, E was all low, indicating that each rater's scoring criterion was different from one another, which would not guarantee the validity of the main study. It was likely that the problem of low level of inter-rater reliability resulted from the inappropriate scoring method or the lack of efficient and systematic rater training. To prevent this problem in the main study, the rater training should be improved.

3.1.6.2 Qualitative Analysis

This section deals with the students' reactions to and suggestions on writing difficulty, peer response training, and peer response session.

3.1.6.2.1 Students' Reactions to Writing Difficulty

Most of students reflected the given argumentative essay suited for their writing abilities. The topic was fairly open-ended and related to their daily experience where they had sufficient ideas to be expressed. As one student said

in the questionnaire:

> *This topic was quite nice because I got more information from my life. I*
>
> *was usually afraid of the topic I had nothing to say. But this time I did*
>
> *not feel that when I looked at it.*

Some students felt the time allocation for the essay was a rather limited. If more time had been given, they could have done better.

> *The time was not enough, I thought. Why didn't he give us more time? I*
>
> *could write more.*

Almost a half of the students thought the restriction of the words prevented them from expressing freely. They indicated that some peers pointed out their paragraphs were not fully developed due to word restriction.

> *When I got the comments, I found they said the development of my*
>
> *paragraphs were not good. But that was not my fault. I was just asked to*
>
> *write about 300 words.*

3.1.6.2 Students' Suggestions on Training

As indicated in Tables 3.2 and 3.3, the students failed to provide sufficient and efficient peer comments probably resulted from an unsuccessful training. When interviewed after the treatment, some of them in the FPR group said the two-hour training, which only comprised of the demonstration of peer response and the types of peer feedback, was not adequate for a good grasp of how to give effective peer comments. In most cases, they just responded to the peers' drafts

based on their own understanding and experience, which could explain why the students preferred to praise and question the essays. Therefore, it was suggested that more time was no doubt allocated to the training in the main study, particularly for giving students more chances to practice responding to written drafts, and how to give each type of peer comment after the demonstration so that they could gain more personal experience with actual use of peer response and would not feel uneasy when they really responded to the peers' essays.

Meanwhile, some students in the EPR group with lower computer proficiency suggested that the researcher should slow down the instruction on how to comment on others' essays on Moodle and give more explanations on each step because they needed more time than others to fully understand the instruction. Given more practices to familiarize with Moodle's features, they thought they could have achieved better results.

Besides, a majority of students also mentioned they often felt confused while they were providing comments. They were not clear what they should look for and which aspects their comments should generate in. Sometimes they were unwilling to give feedback because they were less-confident in judging whether their feedback was valuable or not. It was hoped that with clearer understanding of effective peer response during the training, the students' confidence would be increased.

3.1.6.2.3　Students' Perceptions of Peer Response

Although most of the students in both face-to-face and electronic peer response groups, highly praised peer response in that it not only

developed their consciousness in revision, but also enhanced their awareness of audience, they also pointed out some disadvantages that they hoped to be improved.

First, almost all the students felt a small group of five members was too big. They admitted that the time constraints and fatigue from regular courses each day usually led to their unconcentration on peers' work when they thought there were still four essays waiting to be read. As a result, they could not read all essays carefully and only gave comments on the types they were more familiar with. Hence, they suggested the group size be smaller if possible.

It was the third composition I had commented on, but there was still the

fourth ahead. I was too tired today. I did not want to work any more. I

would finish that one in five minutes and stopped to have a rest.

Second, students in the FPR group mentioned the problem of working atmosphere. They felt uneasy to discuss one another's essay particularly when the researcher or another group was working in the same classroom. It seemed they were being observed in the process of peer response. As a result, they could not concentrate on group work and were anxious to finish the discussion as soon as possible.

You know, it was really a strange feeling for me when I found many

people were watching me to evaluate my classmate's draft. I felt nervous.

I just wanted to finish it soon.

Third, some students in the EPR group felt the three days for reading essays and commenting on was a little bit limited because they did not have a personal

computer in their dorms. If they wished to use a computer, they had to walk a long way to an Internet bar to rent one. Moreover, the service of Moodle used in the study was established abroad, resulting in a slow speed at opening web-pages at Guizhou University. Hence, each time the students would spend much more time than expected on response and revision.

> *Three days was actually a little short. I did not have much extra time each day because I had classes from morning to afternoon, sometimes, till evening. Normally it took me half an hour on the way and one hour to finish commenting on one essay. So the time was not enough.*

3.1.6.2.4 Students' Cultural Behaviors in Providing Peer Comments

Cultural seemed to affect how the students provided comments on their peers' writing. An examination of the written peer comments revealed that the students in the EPR group gave more negative feedback in contrast to the preference for positive ones in the FPR group. Holding the possibility of different group interactions and behaviors between two modes of peer response, some students were interviewed in order to find the answers.

Although all the students in FPR thought that face-to-face peer response was quite a good way for group work, they also admitted at the same time that they were reluctant to speak and exchange one another's ideas for the scruple that their comments might be unconsciously hurtful to other group members. They found it

difficult to maintain the balance between what they should speak out and what their group members could accept. As a result, they often kept silent.

> *Sometimes, I know my response is helpful to them, but I still keep my comments. Why I do so is just because it is group work and they are my friends. I don't want to embarrass them and make them unhappy. So silence is a good choice, I think.*

Some students in FPR also mentioned that the primary goal of group work was to maintain group atmosphere and harmony in which they allowed themselves to participate in group discussions. According to their understanding, group climate was the first and pedagogical achievement was the second in peer response session. Therefore, they tried to avoid any comments which could probably arouse the arguments.

> *For me, I don't want to work in an uncooperative group. So group atmosphere is the most important. If everyone is friendly and cooperative, I believe we can do a better job. Though sometimes I really don't appreciate the essay, I still give the writer good words.*

Besides, some students reflected that traditional Chinese culture created a deep sense in their minds that it was impolite to disagree with a peer. A direct statement of disagreement was likely to create a conflict within a group, which they wanted to avoid. Hence, if one group member first stated an argumentative idea, the others often kept their disagreement to minimize the possible conflict.

It is very hard for me to disagree with others. I often keep my questions

because I don't want to hurt others.

Different from the FPR group, the students in electronic environment did not feel much influence from the social behaviors that the students expressed in face-to-face peer response discussion in providing electronic peer feedback to other group members. Most of them felt it worked, but did not play an important role.

Actually, hurting other peers is a big problem in group work. I believe nobody likes

that. But when I am working, I don't warn myself at any time. You know, what I face is

just a computer, not a real person. So most of the time I type what I really want to say.

In brief, the students' cultural behaviors seemed to constrain them in responding to their peers' essays. However, due to time limitation in the pilot study, only some students were interviewed and the obtained results were not reliable. Also, what roles cultural behaviors played in providing comments for both modes of peer response groups still remained and challenged further investigation in the main study.

3.1.7 Implications for the Main Study

Taking all above data analysis into consideration, the following implications were obtained to be improved in the main study.

First, the students should be encouraged to express their ideas freely without being restricted by the limited words and time.

Second, the topics to be used in the main study should be closely related to the participants' daily life for the purpose of encouraging them to speak their minds without reticence.

Third, a more complete and successful training should be redesigned. More time would be allocated and the real practice would be laid much more importance on in the training. All of the students should have a clear understanding on the types of peer comments and of how to provide peer comments and what comments should be generated in after the training. For the students in the EPR group, to familiarize them with the features of Moodle and to know how to evaluate peers' essays on Moodle were of necessity.

Fourth, an effective training program should be designed for the five raters in order to ensure inter-rater reliability in the main study.

Fifth, when grouping the students in the main study, the small group size needed to be reconsidered as it was appropriate for the students' feedback and revision quality.

Sixth, for the FPR group, it also seemed better to assign only one small group in one classroom. The students might feel less nervous when not being watched by the researcher and other groups. Though it was time-consuming, it might lead to better results.

Last, the students in the EPR group should be given more time for their peer response and revision in order to ease their pressure, fatigue and anxiety.

3.2   Main Study

This section discusses the nature of research, the research methods and the research design in details.

3.2.1   Nature of Research

Robson (1993) suggests that any research work can be classified in terms of its purpose as well as research strategy used. The purpose of any research work can be explanatory, descriptive, or exploratory. A study may be concerned with more than one purpose, possibly the combination of two or three, but one will predominate. Apart from the purpose of research work, the type of research is also classified into the case study, the survey study and the experimental study based on how the information or data is obtained (Cohen, 1989; Wen, 1998).

Since the present study aimed to examine the effects of electronic peer response in comparison with face-to-face peer response on Chinese EFL university students' writing revision, it was an exploratory and descriptive study. Also, because two important dependent variables (electronic and face-to-face peer response) and one principal independent variable (students' writing revision) were manipulated, the present research was a basically experimental study.

3.2.2   Research Methods

Selecting a method or methods is based on what kind of information is to be sought, from whom and under what circumstances (Moore, 2000). The rational choice of methods should be considered before the project, and it may precede the choice of research problems. As Walker (1985, cited in Cohen, 1989: 117) puts it:

> Just as an instrumentalist will not change from playing the clarinet to playing the trumpet because a particular piece demands it, but will usually turn to another piece of music, searching for pieces that suit both the instrument and the player, so researchers generally give a lot of time and thought to the

formulation of possible and potential research problems, looking those that appear to fit their interests and preferred methods.

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative data were needed to fit the requirements of above research purpose. On the one hand, to ensure the internal and external validity of this study, the quantitative research method was employed to gather information about the types of peer comments the students gave and used in both modes of groups, the functions that the comments served, and the students' revision and final writing quality, while the qualitative research method was used to investigate the roles of the students' cultural behaviors in providing comments in two modes of peer response groups and how the these comments impacted their revision. As a result, the two different methods were used across the whole experimental procedure, and the data gathered from the two methods would lead to a more comprehensible and reliable conclusion on the effects of face-to-face and electronic peer response on writing revision in the Chinese context. On the other hand, the previous research on electronic peer response mainly focused on its benefits in writing classroom but less on its impact on the students' revisions, which allowed the quantitative method to play a dominant role in those studies. To capture more understanding and increase the reliability, the present study employed a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods since "each method has philosophical foundations, characteristics, and techniques that make it ideally suitable for some research questions and inadequate for the investigation of other" (Borg and Gall, 1996:

380). Therefore, the results generated from the two sets of data would contribute more to the development of electronic peer response in writing course in the Chinese English teaching and learning context.

3.2.3 Research Design

3.2.3.1 Population and Participants

In conducting a research, it is impossible for a researcher to study the whole population. The common way is to select a sample from the whole population to study, hoping the findings achieved from the sample can be applied to the whole. Kane (1983) defines a sample as "a portion of the universe and ideally, it reflects with reasonable accuracy the opinions, attitudes or behaviors of the entire group" (cited in Cohen, 1989: 117). Further, the result from a sample cannot be expected to be precisely the same as the result obtained from studying the universe. Therefore, the sample size is very important in a study. The larger the sample is, the lower the likely error is in generalizing (Robson, 1993). If the sample does not accurately represent the population, the results obtained from the subjects may not be reliable for representing the population. Consequently, the study is not significant.

With a consideration that the sample size should not be too big, which might beyond the control and that it should, nevertheless, be adequate in order to ensure the validity of the results in the study, the present study was conducted in a third-year composition course, English Writing III (Advanced English Writing), at a state university in the southwest in China. Each year, approximately 200 English majors

were enrolled in English Writing III in the School of English, College of Foreign Languages. They came from a variety of regions which covered the east, the south, the west, the southeast, and the southwest of China, with the majority from the southwestern area. Their age varied from 19 to 21, and they had studied English for at least 8 years.

The participants in the investigation were 40 EFL full-time undergraduate English majors, drawn from a total of 192 students taking English Writing III, randomly assigned to be taught by the researcher. They were equally divided into two groups, one as face-to-face peer response group (FPR), the other as electronic peer response group (EPR), based on the results of two tests: a national comprehensive test (Test for English Majors 4) and a writing test. The first test was held a month before the end of the second semester in their second year, that is, while they were finishing English Writing II. It aimed to assess the three skills of listening, reading, and writing. The second test required the students to write a 300-word argumentative essay on a given topic within 60 minutes. The essays were assessed and marked according to a holistic scoring method. The scores of two tests were used to ensure that the two treatment groups were not significantly different in terms of their entering English proficiency levels. The students in both groups were taught by the researcher using the same course materials. The only difference was their mode of peer response activity, one face-to-face, the other electronic. The results of the two tests and the initial comparison between the two groups were presented in Tables 3.6 as follows:

Table 3.6   The mean scores of two tests between the FPR and the EPR groups

Group	N	Mean	M. D	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
FPR / EPR	20	71.15 / 72.00	-.85	-.415	.683

The negative mean difference and t-value refers to the scores of FPR group are lower than those of

EPR group in the two tests.

The third-year students were chosen as the subjects in this study for two reasons. First, they were at the advanced level according to the National Curriculum for College English Majors of Higher Education in People's Republic of China (2000), which ensured that they had gained certain language proficiency. Second, they had already finished English Writing I and II and acquired certain writing skills.

3.2.3.1.1   Electronic Peer Response Group

The teaching materials in the EPR group included the textbook, the model and guideline for writing and assessing the argumentative essay as well as relevant model essays. The students posted their written product on the web page, responded to the essays they received on-line, and revised their own drafts based on their peers' electronic comments through networked software in the writing process. The regular class met once a week, two hours for each time. The electronic peer response activity was assigned out of class because the computer medium used in this study was an asynchronous communicative form. That is, the students responded to others' papers at any time outside class.

3.2.3.1.2   Face-to-face Peer Response Group

Compared to the EPR group, the teacher and the teaching

materials provided in the FPR group were the same. The only difference was that the

students were exposed to take traditional face-to-face peer review activity while

commenting on their peers' drafts in the traditional classroom environment. Like the

electronic peer response group, the face-to-face peer response group also met once a

week, two hours each. The peer response activity was assigned out of class as well in

order to ensure the same class teaching and learning for the students in both groups.

3.2.3.2   The Pedagogical Context

As mentioned earlier, this study was conducted in an English

writing course, English Writing III, which is compulsory for all third-year English

majors and offered by School of English, College of Foreign Languages. The students

must have taken and passed English Writing II prior to taking it. According to the

National Curriculum for College English Majors of Higher Education in People's

Republic of China (2000), this course aims at helping the students to broaden their

minds, develop their writing content and organization skills, improve their overall

writing abilities, and enhance their evaluative skills for peers' drafts. The teaching in

this course is mainly content-based and grammar is approached from a general and

inductive perspective. The students in class learn how to read various sources and use

these sources to develop different types of writings, which engage them in the peer

feedback activities. The units covered in this course deal with the knowledge of

narrative, descriptive, expository and argumentative writing. The students are required to understand these genres and extend the knowledge on the topics of their interests by reading multiple materials outside the classroom or searching the information on-line. All the materials used in the course are in English.

When the students finish the first drafts on a topic, the evaluation for these drafts mainly relies on peer response activity. Peer response and revision are a necessary part of the course. They are used frequently and consistently throughout the course for helping students learn collaboration skills, develop their critical thinking, clarify the ideas they want to talk about, raise their audience awareness, share their knowledge about the form and content, and edit grammatical and mechanical aspects of their writing. All these are aimed at helping the students revise and, ultimately, improve their writing.

In the present study, peer response activity was applied in this course in the forms of traditional face-to-face peer response and electronic peer response. The former was carried out outside class where the students were assigned into small groups, giving face-to-face comments to the peers' written drafts. The latter was done in an Internet accessible classroom or any place where the students had the access to the Internet at any time. To make the research possible, a kind of specific asynchronous networking software, Moodle's Forum, was chosen in this study. Moodle, with its introduction in the late of 1990s, has rapidly become a popular learning and teaching aid in a writing class. It is a course management system and

much easier to be used compared to other traditional web creation software (e.g.,
Frontpage, *Dreamweaver*, etc), particularly for those non-skilled computer writers
(Wikipedia, 2002, online). Moodle's Forum supports the students' collaboration and
interaction which are highly required in the process of face-to-face and electronic peer
response. The model of Moodle used in the study was provided by an expert in New
Zealand and the content was developed by the researcher himself. The students in the
EPR group first posted their drafts, followed by responding to others' essays on the
forum, and then revised their own essays according to the feedback received on-line.
They negotiated with one another for clearer meanings or explanations through online
discussion.

3.2.3.3 Procedure

As discussed earlier, in English Writing III, how to write the
argumentative essay is a required part for all third-year English majors and peer
response is carried out throughout this course. Therefore, this experiment started
when the students began to learn the unit of the argumentative essay.

3.2.3.3.1 The Duration of the Experiment

The whole experiment commenced from March 31st to July
4th, 2008, covering a period of 14 weeks, during which one pre-test, one training
session, three writing tasks and one post-test were administered to the participants.
The working schedule of the whole experiment was described below:

Week 1 (March 31st – April 3rd): Pre-test

Week 2 (April 9th): Training session (first phase)

Week 3 (April 14th): Training session (second phase)

Week 4 (April 23rd): Training session (second phase)

Week 5 (April 28th – May 4th): First writing task

Week 6 (May 5th – 11th): First writing task

Week 7 (May 12th – 18th): First writing task

Week 8 (May 19th – 25th): Second writing task

Week 9 (May 26th – June 1st): Second writing task

Week 10 (June 2nd – 8th): Second writing task

Week 11 (June 9th – 15th): Third writing task

Week 12 (June 16th – 22nd): Third writing task

Week 13 (June 23rd – 29th): Third writing task

Week 14 (July 1st – 3rd): Post-test

3.2.3.3.2   Grouping the Students in Peer Response

It is well known what a group is and what a group means to people. According to Ehrman and Dornyei (1998: 71), a group is "three or more independent individuals who influence one another through focused social interaction". The group members often go through an exploratory process of tentative orientation, hesitant participation and a search for meaning (McCollom, 1990). A key characteristic of groups is the social interaction. The formation of a group is a very complex process in which numerous variables should be considered that may make group work or impede effective work functioning (Liu and Hansen, 2005). When forming groups in a peer response activity in the context of EFL learning, social attraction and group size are two important variables that need to be considered.

Social attraction is from perceived similarities, emotional ambience, backgrounds, attitudes or viewpoints (Liu and Hansen, 2005). It suggests a sense of

similarity when forming a peer response group in class. The students who know each other or have similar linguistic backgrounds will show a strong preference for peer support. Group size is another variable that may affect the group work. The research findings on the effect of size on the efficacy of group work are not conclusive. It depends on the nature of the task, the time allowed and the students' language proficiency (Liu and Hansen, 2005). However, based on the previous findings on peer response, a smaller size is preferable (Liu, 2001). The students in the groups with three or four can go through each other's papers and examine the issues of grammar, content and organization in a detailed and more careful manner.

In the present study, all the participants were divided into small groups to work in both modes of peer response. How to control the group size and assign the subjects relied on the following considerations. First, because all the participants were at an advanced level, the group size did not suit to be too small. Second, based on the students' feedback in the pilot study, the time allowed for peer response session in the FPR group should be reasonable and a small group of five students was too big. Third, there were respectively 20 students in both modes of peer response group and the students in each small group must keep the same number. Hence, a small group of four students was assigned in the present study, that is, altogether five small groups in each mode of peer response group. Furthermore, according to the previous research findings, in the FPR group, a small group was formed based on the principle of similar linguistics and closer friendship. By contrast, the factor of familiarization among students was not considered important when forming small groups in the EPR

group, because they did not need to communicate with each other face-to-face. The influence of face-saving was not so serious as that in face-to-face peer response group. Table 3.7 presents the mean scores of each small group in the FPR and EPR groups.

Table 3.7   The mean scores of each small group in the FPR and the EPR groups

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
FPR	73.25	69.50	69.50	72.00	71.50
EPR	72.50	73.50	71.75	71.00	71.25

3.2.3.3.3   The Pre-test

On March 31st, an argumentative essay was assigned to the students as the pre-test in this experiment. This essay required them to produce about 400-450 words on a given topic within three days at home. The results of this test were regarded as the students' initial performance of the present study and would be presented in next chapter in details.

3.2.3.3.4   The Training Session

Berg (1999) points out that the students should be trained to be familiar with peer feedback in order to produce more effective responding. The students receiving training can offer more specific and better quality comments than those untrained. Therefore, training the students to create the quality comments and use the networking software before the study could expect to receive more specific suggestions for revising their essays instead of the meaningless, vague, and empty responding and comments.

Hence, from the second to the fourth weeks of this study, a 6-hour training session consisting of two phases was conducted before the peer response treatment. It was very important to prevent the possible frustrations because they could have had the negative impact on the study if the subjects had not been familiar with how to give feedback.

The first phase was an in-class demonstration for peer review which lasted two hours. During this phase, all 40 participants were trained how to comment on peers' papers and produce effective suggestions. The training session in this study was supported by Berg's (1999) and Liu and Hansen's (2005) peer response guiding principles. It began with an introduction to the role and purpose of peer response in the writing process. Next, the students were explained how to write an argumentative essay with the guideline of writing process approach, which engaged them in a four-step task cycle: pre-planning, organizing, drafting, and revising. Then they were instructed on which step their feedback should focus on in this study, what they should look for, what questions they should ask, and how their comments should be generated in terms of content, organization, and language use (including vocabulary, grammar and mechanics) while responding to the peers' drafts. After that, all of the students were taught how to focus on the elements of both form and meaning in their comments (e.g. form first or content first), followed by the types of comments, praise, criticism, explanations, suggestions, clarifications, evaluations, questions and restatements. Finally, a response sheet showing samples and explaining its purpose was given to help them focus on these important areas of the writing assessment.

The second phase was an out-class practice for two modes of peer review sessions which lasted four hours, two hours for each week. During the first week, the students in the FPR group practiced producing comments in small groups in order to familiarize themselves with the procedure of peer review. The purpose was to enhance the efficacy of the instruction and make sure the students had had a clearer understanding on how to provide feedback. Some samples of the argumentative essay were given to each of them, and they were encouraged to comment on each group member's paper. When they finished their discussion, all the paper with peer comments was collected and some of them were displayed to instruct how the students revised the drafts. Meanwhile, the good points and value of the students' comments were pointed out to let them know what they exactly demanded. It was to help them become familiar with the procedure of peer response as soon as possible and ensure the quality of their feedback.

The second week was intended for the e-peer feedback training in a computer lab outside of class time. The students in the EPR group were trained how to use Moodle's Forum to respond to their peers' essays online. Based on the previous studies (Braine, 1997, 2001; DiGiovanni and Nagaswami, 2001; Liu and Sadler, 2003), the students' unfamiliarity with computer technology often caused negative influences on the effects of electronic peer response on writing. Therefore, during this period, the students learned to practice giving electronic peer feedback with computer on Moodle. Following the training procedure in the first phase, the students posted

their essays prepared before and provided the responses to the peers' essays with the help of guideline on the web site. The researcher played a role as a classroom observer and instructor in helping the students if they encountered any technical problems or had difficulties in providing e-feedback. The purpose was to help them become familiar with the features of Moodle. After that, some good samples were collected and displayed on a computer for further analysis and instruction. The role he played was to help the students find information and assist them in focusing their comments and writing.

3.2.3.3.5   Procedures of Writing Task

Following the training sessions, the actual writing task for this study took place in the fifth week of the working schedule. As recommended by the students in the pilot study, an argumentative essay of about 400-450 words on a given topic, two peer response sessions, and the subsequent revisions were assigned. Each writing task cycle lasted three weeks, and therefore altogether nine weeks for three tasks, from April 28th to June 29th. The topics of the argumentative essays were selected from previous national examinations particularly testing the advanced Chinese English majors, as shown in Appendices II, III, and IV. A modified Tusi and Ng's writing cycle (2000) was used in designing the writing task (see Figure 3.1)

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│             First Draft              │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│          Peer Response I            │
│ (focus on content, organization and │
│           language use)             │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│            Second Draft             │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│          Peer Response II           │
│ (focus on content, organization and │
│           language use)             │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│             Final Draft             │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
```
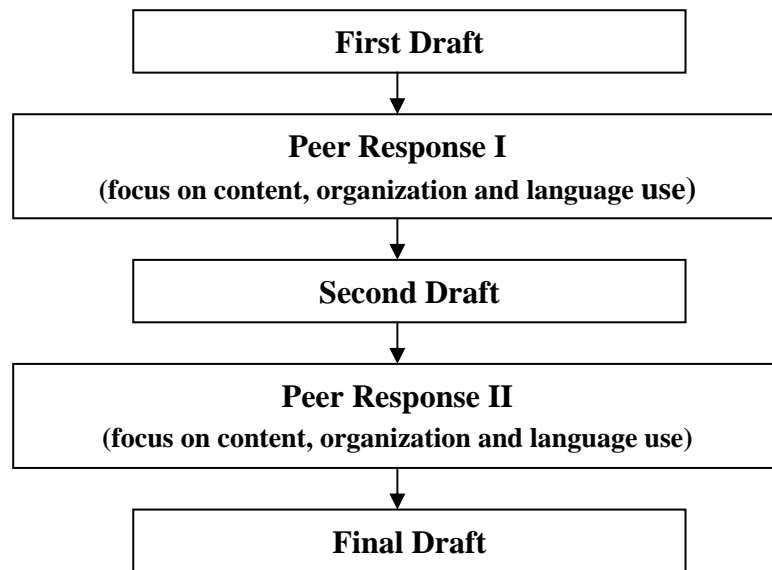
Figure 3.1   Students' Writing Cycle

Three drafts were required for each writing task. In the FPR group, each student was asked to finish writing the first draft at home within three days and brought it to the classroom for peer response. After they completed commenting on their peers' drafts, they were allowed one week to revise based on the oral and written feedback they had received. The following week, the students brought the revisions to the classroom for the second peer response, and then revised as final drafts within another week.

In contrast to the FPR group, the students in the EPR group handed in their first drafts on Moodle's Forum. All of them received electronic written comments from their peers on-line and used those comments to write their second drafts. After posting the revisions on their group space on Forum, the students commented on the peers' work again, negotiated with the other group members, and completed their third drafts. Table 3.8 shows a brief procedure of every step for each writing task.

Table 3.8   Writing Task Procedures for the FPR and the EPR groups

Procedures	FPR	EPR
First Draft	1) Students wrote an argumentative essay within 3 days 2) Students took their essays to peer response session	1) The teacher posted the topic on Forum 2) Students wrote an argumentative essay and posted their essays on their group space on Forum within 3 days
Peer Response I (First Meeting)	1) Students met in the classroom and worked in small groups 2) Students gave their essays to each group member 3) Each student read the essays he or she had received carefully and wrote the comments on the essays 4) Students gave oral comments on the essays and shared ideas with one another 5) Students returned the essays with written comments	1) Students in each group read their group members' essays and gave comments online within 4 days 2) Students posted their written comments to each member's essay
Revision I (Second Draft)	1) Students read the given written comments and thought about their discussion in peer response session 2) Students revised their essays based on the oral and given peer written comments within one week	1) Students read and thought about the given written comments 2) Students revised their essays with in 3 days 3) Students posted their revision on Forum again
Peer Response II (Second Meeting)	1) The same as Peer Response I 2) The same as Peer Response I 3) Each student read the peers' revision he or she received carefully and gave the comments for further improvement 4) The same as Peer Response I 5) The same as Peer Response I	1) Students in each group read their group members' revision and gave comments for further improvement online within 4 days 2) The same as Peer Response I
Revision II (Final Draft)	The same as Revision I	The same as Revision I

The students' oral discussion in the FPR group was tape-recorded and transcribed. When each writing task was done, all of the students' first, second and final drafts as well as their oral and written comments were collected for data analysis.

3.2.3.4   Assessment

This section discusses how the raters score the students' essays and how to ensure the reliability of scores. It describes the scoring method, procedures for reliable scoring, inter-rater reliability, raters' training, and the coding of types of peer comments.

3.2.3.4.1   Scoring Method

According to Weigle (2002), in the composition literature, two main types of rating scales are widely used: holistic scales and analytic scales. In holistic scoring, the script is rated a single score based on the overall impression of this script, whereas in analytic scoring scripts are rated on several aspects of writing or criteria rather than giving a single score, such as content, organization, cohesion, vocabulary, grammar and so on. Thus, analytic scoring provides more detailed information about a writer's performance in different aspects and is preferred over holistic scoring by many writing raters for this reason.

The present study aimed to investigate how the students improved their writing using peer feedback. The holistic scoring method cannot provide more useful information about the students' writing quality since a single score does not allow a

rater to distinguish different aspects of writing. Therefore, the analytic scoring method was employed to rate the students' essays in the present study.

The analytic scale chosen from analytic scoring method is modified Jacobs *et al*'s scale (1980), where scripts are rated on five aspects: content, organization, grammar, vocabulary and mechanics (Hamp-Lyons, 1991). The five aspects are weighed differently to emphasize first content (40 points), next organization (30 points), and 30 points for language use, which was composed of 15 points for grammar, 10 points for vocabulary, and 5 points for mechanics, as shown in Appendix XII. This scale has been adopted by numerous Chinese college and university writing courses and the students are also rather familiar with it. It helps to compare how the students improve their writing between the first and final drafts in the five aspects.

3.2.3.4.2   Inter-rater Reliability

According to Weigle (2002), once the scoring scale has been finalized, the next step normally is to select the raters and design a process for the operational rating of scripts. There are a number of ways to investigate the reliability of raters in the literature. Two important ways are intra-rater reliability and inter-rater reliability. Intra-rater reliability refers to the tendency of a rater to give the same score to the same script on different occasions, while inter-rater reliability refers to the tendency of different raters to give the same scores to the same scripts. In the present study, the inter-rating method was preferred because it required less time for scoring one essay than the intra-rating method and the way that different raters graded one easy might ensure more reliable scoring.

3.2.3.4.3 Procedures for Reliable Scoring

According to White's (1984) recommendations, an essay should be graded so that the score represents a writer's real level and the judgment reliability based on the following procedures (cited in Weigle, 2002: 129):

(1) Each script must be scored independently by at least two raters, with a third rater adjudicating in cases of discrepancy.

(2) Scoring should be done in a controlled reading, by which is meant that a group of readers meet together to grade the scripts at the same place and time.

(3) Checks on the reading in progress by reading leaders help to ensure that individual readers are maintaining the agreed-upon standards for grading.

(4) Evaluation and recording keeping are essential for an ongoing assessment program so that reliable readers are kept and unreliable readers are retained or dropped if necessary.

3.2.3.4.4 Rater Training

Based on White's procedures for reliable scoring, a rater training for writing assessment is recommended so as to ensure the inter-rater reliability of the scoring. After the pre-test, a training session for the five raters was conducted at the School of English, College of Foreign Language. The instruments used in the training included an analytic scoring guideline (Jacobs *et al*'s analytic scale), a model of the argumentative essay writing, and five sets of 10 representative essays, which were selected from the pre-test. In order to ensure there was no big scoring difference among all the five raters and help them keep the similar rating criteria, the 10 representative essays in each set were the same.

The training began with an explanation of the purpose and procedures of this training. According to Jacobs *et al* (1980), each essay was scored in terms of content, organization and language use (grammar, vocabulary and mechanics). Then the five raters discussed the model of the argumentative essay writing and the scoring guideline to reach the agreement on how the students' essays were graded based on this principle. With a clear understanding of the scoring scale, they practiced grading one set of essays individually. After that, the raters compared the scores they assigned to the essays with other four sets and adjusted their individual scoring criterion so as to keep the grading consistency.

In conclusion, the rater training achieved the following results: (1) the raters agreed to graded the essays based on the scoring guideline; (2) the raters agreed to read one essay more than once before scoring; (3) the raters showed high scoring correlations, as presented in Table 3.9:

Table 3.9   The raters' scoring correlations

Raters		A	B	C	E	D
A	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.937**	.963**	.961**	.952**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000	.000
B	Pearson Correlation	.937**	1.000	.986**	.942**	.950**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000	.000
C	Pearson Correlation	.963**	.986**	1.000	.968**	.980**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000	.000
E	Pearson Correlation	.961**	.942**	.968**	1.000	.966**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.	.000
D	Pearson Correlation	.952**	.950**	.980**	.966**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.

** $p < 0.01$.

3.2.3.4.5   Coding the Types of Peer Comments

Based on the literature (Stanley, 1992; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Tang & Tithecott, 1999; DiGiovanni & Nagaswami, 2001; Min, 2005), the types of peer comments given by the students were coded into the following:

(1)   Clarification: Reviewers try to get further explanations of what writers have said or what is not clear to them in the essays.

(2)   Explanation: Reviewers explain why they think a given term, idea, or organization is unclear or problematic, which should be or should not be used in the essays.

(3)   Suggestion: Reviewers suggest the ways to change the words, content, or organization of the essays

(4)   Restatement: Reviewers state (summarize or rephrase) what has been written or said to show understanding or reread sections of the essays.

(5)   Praise: Reviewers praise the good points of words, content, or organization of the essays.

(6)   Criticism: Reviewers criticize the defects of words, content, or organization of the essays.

(7)   Evaluation: Reviewers evaluate content, organizations, language use, or vocabulary in global or local area.

(8)   Question: Reviewers ask the writers if they do not understand a given term, ideas, words, or organization in the essays, or ask for additional ideas or words.

3.2.3.5   The Post-test

After the three writing tasks, a post-test was given to all the subjects on July 1st who were required to finish an argumentative essay about 400-450 words within three days. The test was very important because it not only examined the result of the subjects after the treatment, but also answered the research questions of which group produced better writing and demonstrated more improvement in students' writing quality in comparison with the pre-test.

3.2.3.6   Oral Interview

In investigating the students' perceptions of providing and incorporating peer feedback in both modes of peer response groups, one way to do this is to interview the students.

An interview is a two-person conversation which is conducted around a set of questions and topics for the specific purpose of obtaining research relevant information and focused on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, predication, or explanation (Cohen, 1989). To quote Robson (1993), interviews carried out for research or enquiry purposes are a very commonly used approach, possibly in part because the interview appears to be a quite straightforward and non-problematic way of finding things out. According to Nunan (1992), interviews can be characterized in terms of the degree of freedom and can be placed on a continuum ranging from unstructured through semi-structured to structured. Unstructured interviews are also called open interviews in which the interviewer has a

general area of interest and concern, but lets the conversation develop within this area. They provide the interviewers with a lot of freedom and questions are generated spontaneously in the natural flow of an interaction. The semi-structured interview is conducted based on an interview schedule which is prepared before the interview begins (Wen, 1998). Furthermore, Fontana and Frey (1998) also state that the interview questions need not be taken in any particular order, and the interviewer is free to modify the order based on the needs in the context of actual conversation. The structured interview is predetermined by a set of open-ended questions that are worded and arranged carefully with the same sequence, asking each interviewee the same questions with the same words. The flexibility in probing is limited in the conversation, calling for the interviewer's skills and experience.

In the present study, a semi-structured with open-ended questions interview was used to elicit the students' reactions when they provided and incorporated peer response. The questions designed were focused, providing no cues for the answers. The oral interview was given to 20 students, 10 students from each mode of peer response group, after they finished the post-test. The language used in the interview was Chinese for better understanding. All the students' interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and translated into English for data analysis.

3.2.3.7   Written Questionnaire

A written questionnaire is one of the most widely used techniques for collecting quantitative data. Like an oral interview, a written questionnaire is used to elicit learner responses to a set of questions or statements, and they require the

researcher to make choices regarding question format and research procedures (Cohen and Scott, 1996). It is also used as a general term to include all the techniques of data collection in which each person is asked to respond to the same set of questions in a predetermined order. The questions frequently ask for facts, opinions, attitudes or preferences of the respondents, and they can be closed-ended questions and open-ended questions.

In the present study, a post-writing written questionnaire was designed to collect the further information about all the 40 students, including their perceptions of and attitudes towards both modes of peer response techniques they employed, and their problems occurring in the use of them. In order to avoid the misunderstanding, the questionnaire was written in Chinese.

3.2.3.8 Data Collection

Both quantitative and qualitative data were involved in the present study. Table 3.10 shows the methods of how data were collected.

Table 3.10   The Format of Data Collection

Procedures	FPR	EPR
Pre-test	Students' argumentative essays	The same as FPR
Experiment	1) Students' first, second, and third drafts of each writing task 2) Students' written comments in peer response session 3) The transcripts of students' oral discussion in peer response session 4) Written questionnaire 5) Oral interview	1) Students' first, second, and third drafts of each writing task online 2) Students' written comments given online 3) Written questionnaire 4) Oral interview
Post-test	Students' argumentative essays	The same as FPR

3.2.3.9   Data Analysis

In this section, the methods for data analysis are presented and explained. The data analysis is based on the examination of the students' three drafts, their oral and written comments in both modes of peer response groups, questionnaires, and interviews.

3.2.3.9.1   Product-based Analysis

The product-based analysis included essay rating, peer comments analysis, and revision analysis.

Essay Rating

After the writing drafts were collected, they were given to the raters. The raters were only told the essays were written by third-year students, no more detailed information about the writers was released to them in case it might influence their rating. As mentioned earlier, these essays were graded analytically in terms of content, organization, and language use (including grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics). Rating was made on a 100-point scale, 40 points for content, 30 points for organization, and 30 points for language use. Language use was composed of 15 points for grammar, 10 points for vocabulary, and 5 points for mechanics. The scores of each element were then processed through SPSS, and an average was obtained as the final scores.

Peer Comments Analysis

Given to the peers or posted on Forum, the students' first drafts were revised

and developed to the revision based on peer comments received. The comments provided by the students and the changes made in revisions were analyzed. First, the students' comments were categorized into the types of praise, criticism, explanations, clarifications, suggestions, evaluations, questions, and restatements, and the numbers of each type and the functions that the comments served were then generated. After that, the numbers of the use of each type in the revision were counted and compared between the two groups. The data collected were processed through SPSS to get the percentage of feedback use in the revision.

Revision Analysis

To investigate how peer feedback affected the students' revisions, the students' revised essays were analyzed to see whether the use of peer comments improved their writing in terms of content, organization and language use differently in both FPR and EPR groups. The results achieved a better understanding on the influence of peer comments on revision quality.

3.2.3.9.2   Quantitative Data Analysis

The students' essays scores in each criterion and the types and functions of peer comments were quantitative data in this study. They were processed through SPSS to answer four research questions addressed earlier.

To answer Research Questions 1 and the first sub-question of Research Question 3, "How are peer comments on students' written work provided by the electronic peer response group in comparison with the face-to-face and electronic peer

response groups?" and "What types of peer comments are actually used or ignored by the students?", the descriptive statistical method was employed. The frequency and percentage could give a clear picture about the numbers of each type of peer comments provided and used by the students, and the numbers of each function that peer comments served.

To answer Research Question 4, "How does electronic peer response impact the students' revision in comparison with face-to-face peer response?", paired-sample and independent-sample t-test were used. Paired-sample t-test could tell one whether there was significant difference in terms of content, organization, and language use between the first essays and the revisions based on the use of face-to-face and electronic peer response. Independent-sample t-test was employed to compare which mode of peer response group produced better revised drafts.

To answer Research Question 5, "Does electronic peer response promote more improvement in students' writing quality than traditional face-to-face peer response?", paired-sample t-test and independent-sample t-test were applied. Paired-sample t-test was calculated to compare if there was significant difference in the students' writing quality between the pretest and the posttest. Independent t-test was used to see which peer response group performed better in final writing quality between the posttest, and to compare which peer response group did better performance at the levels of content, organization, and language use in writing after the experiment.

3.2.3.9.3 Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was on the basis of the students'

essays, revisions, and peer comments. Based on the procedures presented above, the

qualitative data were obtained to answer Research Question 4. The analysis revealed a

clearer picture of how the students improved their drafts according to peer comments

incorporated into the subsequent revisions. This part further supported the results of

quantitative data analysis and provided a better understanding on this issue.

3.2.3.9.4 Protocol-based Analysis

The analysis job in this part included the analysis of the

questionnaires and the interviews. The questionnaires were designed and developed

by the researcher and the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed by the

researcher as well. The purpose of this analysis was to gather the students'

retrospective information to answer the second sub-question of Research Question 3

and Research Question 2, "Why do the students use or ignore certain types of peer

comments?" and "What roles do the students' cultural behaviors play in providing

peer comments in electronic and face-to-face peer response groups?". The analysis

aimed to find out how the students considered or whether they had scruples in the

process of providing and using peer comments. The findings showed a general pattern

of Chinese students' opinions and attitudes towards peer response.

3.3   Summary

This chapter presented in details the pilot study and the framework of the research design for the main study, by describing the research nature, the research methods, the participant selection, the instruments, and the procedures for collecting and analyzing research data. The findings and discussion of the main study would be presented in next chapter.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter deals with the quantitative and qualitative data analysis to interpret the effects of electronic peer response in comparison with face-to-face peer response on Chinese university EFL students' writing revision. It begins with a description of student participants and then reports the findings of the five research questions in order.

4.1 Student Participants

To produce the reliable results in the experiment, the student attendance is one of the crucial factors. Throughout the whole experimental procedure, this variable was continuously monitored. Originally, this study included 40 students, 20 in each mode of peer response group, and four in each small group. However, two students in the FPR group withdrew from the experiment in the 11th week, the beginning of the writing task 3. The reason was that one student had no interest and motivation any more, and the other had to participate in a computer class for the remainder of the term. Therefore, from then on, there were only 18 students in the FPR group, three small groups with four students, and the other two small groups with three. This situation remained to the end of the experiment.

4.2   Research Findings

This section demonstrates the five research questions of the present study in details, respectively.

4.2.1   Research Question 1

To respond to the first research question "How are the students' peer comments provided by the electronic peer response group in comparison with the face-to-face peer response group?", the data concerning this aspect were examined through two sources: (1) the types and the numbers of comments given in both groups in three writing tasks; and (2) the functions of these comments that the students focused in responding to their peers' drafts. They were analyzed in quantitative term.

4.2.1.1   Numbers of Comments Produced

Quantitative information on the types and the numbers of peer comments produced by the students in two groups presented a clear understanding on how they provided peer feedback. Table 4.1 shows the descriptions and examples of all the types of comments the students produced.

Table 4.1   Descriptions and examples of the types of comments

Types	Descriptions	Examples
Praise	Reviewers praise the good points of words, content, organization of the essays.	Your essay has many good points. The content is good, and the organization is excellent.
Criticism	Reviewers criticize the defects of words, content, organization of the essays.	Personally, I think the supporting ideas of the body part is weak
Explanation	Reviewers explain why they think a given term, idea, or organization is unclear or problematic.	You write "there are many problems that appear in the city". I think "that appear" should be "appearing".
Suggestion	Reviewers suggest the ways to change the words, content, and organization of the essays.	Why don't you combine the two short sentences into one clause.
Evaluation	Reviewers evaluate the content, organization, language use and vocabulary in global or local area.	I think your language could be better if you were more careful
Question	Reviewers ask the writers if they do not understand a given term, ideas, words, or organization.	I don't understand what your topic sentence is in the second paragraph. Could you make it clear?
Clarification	Reviewers try to get further explanations of what the writers have said or what is not clear to them in the essays.	In the third paragraph you say "Beijing Olympic Games will not develop Chinese economy". Why? Could you give more reasons?
Restatement	Reviewers state (summarize or rephrase) what has been written or said to show understanding.	In the second paragraph, you support your topic with two strong supporting ideas.

In the present study, a total of 2,917 peer comments were produced by the students from three writing tasks. The face-to-face peer response group produced more comments (n = 1,660) than the electronic peer response group (n = 1,257). The comments provided by the FPR group were praise (22.7%), question (17.4%), suggestion (16.3%), clarification (10.7%), evaluation (9.2%), restatement (8.9%), explanation (8.1%) and criticism (6.7%) respectively, while question (18.1%), suggestion (18.1%), praise (14.9%), criticism (13.4%), clarification (10.9%), explanation (9.8%), evaluation (9.2%) and restatement (5.6%) by the EPR group, as presented in Table 4.2 as follows.

Table 4.2   A comparison of provided peer comments between the FPR and the EPR groups in three writing tasks

Types	FPR	EPR	Percentage %	
			FPR	EPR
Praise	376	187	22.7	14.9
Criticism	112	169	6.7	13.4
Explanation	134	123	8.1	9.8
Suggestion	270	227	16.3	18.1
Evaluation	153	116	9.2	9.2
Question	289	228	17.4	18.1
Clarification	178	137	10.7	10.9
Restatement	148	70	8.9	5.6
Total	1660	1257	100	100

However, the students' preference in providing peer comments was different in each writing task. Table 4.3 shows a general picture of the comparison of the peer comments provided by the FPR and the EPR groups in the first writing task. Clearly, the students produced more face-to-face comments (n = 507) than electronic

comments (n = 356). In the FPR group, the students preferred to praise others' work

(28.4%), followed by questioning where they did not understand (17.6%), and

providing their own suggestions (13.0%). Only a few of students criticized their

peers' essays, giving the negative comments (4.1%). Meanwhile, the EPR group

provided praise (18.8%), question (18.0%), suggestion (15.4%), criticism (14.9%),

and evaluation (13.5%), respectively. The type of restatement comments was paid the

least attention (4.5%). It was apparent that although this group also produced the

highest percentage of praise (18.8%), the number was much lower than those

provided by the FPR group (28.4%).

Table 4.3   A comparison of provided peer comments between the FPR and the

EPR groups in the first writing task

Types	FPR	EPR	Percentage %	
			FPR	EPR
Praise	144	67	28.4	18.8
Criticism	21	53	4.1	14.9
Explanation	45	31	8.9	8.7
Suggestion	66	55	13.0	15.4
Evaluation	43	48	8.5	13.5
Question	89	64	17.6	18.0
Clarification	46	22	9.1	6.2
Restatement	53	16	10.4	4.5
Total	507	356	100	100

Table 4.4 presents the comparison of the peer comments provided by the FPR

and the EPR groups in the second writing task. It was seen that the students still

produced more face-to-face comments (n = 566) than electronic comments (n = 429),

and the total numbers of comments in two groups were increased. However,

compared with the first writing task, the students' preference in providing feedback in this task was changed. In the FPR group, although the most frequent type of comments provided by the students was still praise, its percentage was reduced to 22.4%. Moreover, it was noticed that suggestive feedback got the largest increase (from 13.0% to 16.4%), and some students dared to criticize their peers' essays (from 4.1% to 6.9%). In the EPR group, the types of question (18.6%) and suggestion comments (17.9%) outstripped praise comments (14.5%), being the first and second frequent types. The largest increasing type was clarification, from 6.2% to 12.4%, while the largest decreasing one was evaluation, from 13.5% to 7.2%. Restatement still remained the last attention (6.7%).

Table 4.4   A comparison of provided peer comments between the FPR and the

EPR groups in the second writing task

Types	FPR	EPR	Percentage %	
			FPR	EPR
Praise	127	62	22.4	14.5
Criticism	39	53	6.9	12.4
Explanation	40	44	7.1	10.3
Suggestion	93	77	16.4	17.9
Evaluation	55	31	9.7	7.2
Question	98	80	17.3	18.6
Clarification	62	53	11.0	12.4
Restatement	52	29	9.2	6.7
Total	566	429	100	100

Table 4.5 indicates the comparison of the peer comments provided by the FPR and the EPR groups in the third writing task. The same with the first and the second ones, the total numbers of peer comments in two groups continued to increase,

and face-to-face comments (n = 587) were still larger than electronic comments (n = 472). In the FPR group, the students' suggestions (18.9%) on the peers' drafts exceeded their praise (17.9%) and questions (17.4%). More and more students began to give negative comments to their peers (8.9%), and shed the least importance on restatement (7.3%). In contrast to those in the FPR group, the students in the EPR group also showed their preference to suggestion (20.1%) and question (17.8%), contributed a rather balance to criticism (13.3%), clarification (13.1%), praise (12.3%), and explanation (10.2%), and paid the least attention to evaluation (7.8%) and restatement (5.3%)

Table 4.5   A comparison of provided peer comments between the FPR and the

EPR groups in the third writing task

Types	FPR	EPR	Percentage %	
			FPR	EPR
Praise	105	58	17.9	12.3
Criticism	52	63	8.9	13.3
Explanation	49	48	8.3	10.2
Suggestion	111	95	18.9	20.1
Evaluation	55	37	9.4	7.8
Question	102	84	17.4	17.8
Clarification	70	62	11.9	13.1
Restatement	43	25	7.3	5.3
Total	587	472	100	100

To sum up, it was found that the students' understanding and preference in how to provide effective peer feedback were gradually changing with the proceeding of three writing tasks. The students' main attention in the FPR group was shifted from the single type of praise comments to those of suggestion, praise and question

comments. Clarification kept a slow increase at all time and became another important source in the end. Providing proper negative feedback was gradually regarded more important by the students, while restatement was ignored. In the EPR group, the students' preferences to praise and question at the beginning were converted to suggestion and question in the end. The students often pointed out their peers' weak points and clarified the problems they found. On a contrary, evaluation and restatement were forgotten by more and more students.

4.2.1.2 Functions of Comments Served

To investigate whether the comments produced by the FPR group focused more on different levels of a text than those in the EPR group, all of the comments were examined to see what functions they served. Table 4.6 shows the categories for functions, descriptions, and examples of the comments coded.

Table 4.6   Categories for functions, descriptions and examples

Functions	Descriptions	Examples
Content	Focus on clarity of idea, relevance of ideas, and evidence.	I think that your main idea is very clear in your essay.
Organization	Focus on parts of the composition, connection of ideas, transition words, or overall structure.	It is even better to consider moving this paragraph to the end, before the conclusion.
Grammar	Focus on subject-verb agreement, verb tenses, verb forms, sentence structure, or word order.	You write "it sound good". I think "sound" should be "sounds".
Vocabulary	Focus on the accuracy of word choice.	China is a developing country, not developed.
Mechanics	Focus on punctuation and spelling	I think "compitition" should be "competition".

The categories for functions identified in the students' comments were then quantified. Table 4.7 reveals that the students' focus of attention in the FPR group was chiefly put on the levels of content (26.4%), vocabulary (24.6%) and grammar (21.5%), respectively. Organization (15.7%) and mechanics (11.8%) were paid less attention. The focus of attention in the EPR group was primarily on content (55.5%), and secondly on organization (17.5%). Other comments focused on vocabulary (11.9%), grammar (11.1%), and mechanics (4.0%), respectively.

Table 4.7   A comparison of functions that peer comments served between the

FPR and the EPR groups

Functions	FPR	EPR	Percentage %	
			FPR	EPR
Content	438	698	26.4	55.5
Organization	261	220	15.7	17.5
Grammar	357	139	21.5	11.1
Vocabulary	408	150	24.6	11.9
Mechanics	196	50	11.8	4.0
Total	1660	1257	100	100

Considering the students' different preference in providing feedback in each writing task, the categories for functions that comments served were also examined for each task, independently, in order to explore any possible differences in relation to the students' focus of attention in different levels of a text. Table 4.8 reveals the functions that peer comments served in the FPR group during three the writing tasks. It was clearly indicated that the students shed more important light on the levels of vocabulary (26.8% / 28.1% / 19.3%), content (24.7% / 23.7% / 30.5%), and grammar

(22.1% / 23.0% / 20.0%) in the three tasks, whereas less important light on

organization (14.0% / 15.5% / 17.4%) and mechanics (12.4% / 9.7% / 13.3%). This

result basically corresponded with the result of Table 5.7. However, it was worth

noting that although the function of vocabulary remained the most frequent in the first

two tasks, it was exceeded by content and grammar in the last task, which showed that

the students' focus of attention began to change.

Table 4.8   A comparison of functions that peer comments served in the FPR

group in three writing tasks

Functions	Task A		Task B		Task C	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Content	125	24.7	134	23.7	179	30.5
Organization	71	14.0	88	15.5	102	17.4
Grammar	112	22.1	130	23.0	115	20.0
Vocabulary	136	26.8	159	28.1	113	19.3
Mechanics	63	12.4	55	9.7	78	13.3
Total	507	100	566	100	587	100

Table 4.9 indicates the functions that peer comments served in the EPR group

during the three writing tasks. In contrast to the FPR group, the students in this group

kept the consistent focus of attention on providing comments. The function of content

was their first choice (60.4% / 51.7% / 55.3%) all the time, accounting for over 50%.

The other functions, as presented in Table 4.7, were emphasized in organization,

grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics in turn.

Table 4.9   A comparison of functions that peer comments served in the EPR

group in three writing tasks

Functions	Task A		Task B		Task C	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Content	215	60.4	222	51.7	261	55.3
Organization	53	14.9	87	20.3	80	17.0
Grammar	37	10.4	43	10.0	59	12.5
Vocabulary	34	9.5	62	14.5	54	11.4
Mechanics	17	4.8	15	3.5	18	3.8
Total	356	100	429	100	472	100

4.2.2   Research Question 2

With regards to the earlier quantitative analysis, results were further discussed and explained according to the students' preference in providing feedback and their focus of attention in the experiment for the purpose to answer the second research question "What roles do the students' cultural behaviors play in providing peer comments in the electronic and face-to-face peer response groups?".

4.2.2.1 Differences in the Numbers and Types of Comments Produced

4.2.2.1.1   The FPR group

The results clearly demonstrated that the numbers of comments produced in the FPR group (n = 1,660) was higher than those in the EPR group (n = 1,257) because the students in the FPR group gave a lot of positive comments and asked more questions if they felt difficulties in understanding the peers' essays. This phenomenon resulted in the preference in the types of comments

was different between the two groups. As mentioned above, the largest difference in the types of comments was that praise, question, and suggestion comments contributed more than a half of the feedback (56.4%), while criticism comments only accounted for 6.7% of the total in the FPR group.

A number of reasons could be attributed for this difference. Research had shown that anxiety had a negative effect in traditional peer response (Braine, 1997). The students felt uneasy to discuss peers' essays in classroom writing. They could not concentrate on group work and were eager to finish the discussion as soon as possible, as illustrated below in an interview of one student's perception of giving face-to-face peer feedback. As a result, the students often praised their peers' papers, only questioned the points they did not understand and gave the general suggestions, without carefully commenting on the drafts.

> *You know, it is really a strange feeling for me when I find many people*
>
> *are watching and waiting for me to evaluate my classmate's draft. I feel*
>
> *nervous. I just want to finish it soon.*

Other reasons for this issue might be Chinese students' cultural behaviors and learning experience (Carson and Nelson, 1996, 1998; Tang and Tithecott, 1999; Hyland, 2003; Wu, 2006). When interacting with members of their groups, the students preferred to provide positive feedback. Li, for example, in her interview of how she gave comments reported that she provided feedback by looking at the good things in her peer's paper. Her response was:

When you wrote back to their paper you tell them, ok, this was good,

and the reason I thought it was good. I only gave positive comment, not

negative comments, not bad comments. It could improve our group

cooperation.

When asked to describe her group work, she mentioned:

I thought we were very cooperative. Everyone was polite and the

atmosphere was good. It was helpful.

Li's words suggested that there was a perceived need for a positive group climate among the students in the face-to-face peer response session (Carson and Nelson, 1996). Chinese students generally worked towards keeping the group harmony and mutual face-saving to maintain a state of cohesion. The nature of their participation was constrained by the students' expressed sense of their social goal for the group, which affected the nature and types of peer response they allowed themselves in group discussion. As a result, they were reluctant to produce negative feedback to their peers' drafts to lead to possible division, not cohesion, in a group. The following typical characteristics were obtained according to the students' questionnaires and interviews.

The first characteristic of the students' peer response was their reluctance to criticize their group members' essays (Carson and Nelson, 1996). They often gave good comments, or withheld the comments they thought might be hurtful to the peers. In Li's interview, she mentioned her interests in making sure that her feedback did not hurt her peers' feelings.

I think it is important that you don't feel that you are going to offend

them. You should make them understand that you are writing to

encourage them, help them.

The students also indicated that sometimes they did not speak out of concern

for embarrassing the peers if they did not want to hear the criticism. Chen talked

about his experience in one peer response session:

I thought I found another problem in her essay. But she was very

nervous when we were talking about her essay. I thought she would be

more nervous if I pointed out that problem.

In addition, for the revision, the students did not want to give the comments

which might lead to the criticism, or imply the writer did not work hard. Xu talked

about one of her experiences in responding to her peer's revised essay.

I thought he needed to rewrite his essay again, though I knew he tried

his best to do it. But if I did so, that was really a hurt for him.

The second characteristic was that the students were reluctant to disagree with

their peers (Carson and Nelson, 1996). In the interviews, most of the students stated that

they would keep their disagreement even if they did not agree with other members'

comments. They maintained a thought that a direct statement of disagreement was

likely to create the conflict within the group, a result they tried to avoid.

Sometimes, I know my response is helpful to them, but it is very hard for

me to disagree with others. Though I say I agree with them, in fact I

really don't think so. I am afraid if I say "I don't agree with you", he or

she will be angry.

Therefore, the students often worked hard to minimize this potential factor in the peer response session. On one hand, they did not argue with their peers on the need of keeping a positive social relationship.

Even if I don't agree with somebody, I will not state my ideas. I don't

know whether it is right or not. I don't just want to lose one's face.

On the other hand, they avoided the arguments so as not to be defensive, being unwilling to put themselves into the conflict.

I don't want to say any bad comments to my friends because I don't want

to make trouble, or to be defensive. If there is a big argument in my

group, I will try to end it. That's too bad!

The third characteristic was that some students with low or medium language proficiency were less confident to raise their voices (Mendonca and Johnson, 1994; Tusi and Ng, 2000). Their comments tended to reflect their own self-protection within the group. They sometimes were afraid of giving any negative or suggestive feedback because they believed their ideas were not worthy of being discussed. As a result, the positive comments and simple questions became their preference in the peer response session.

Liu was such a student. When asked why her comments were filed with good comments, she said:

I like helping others and I know this way is good. But if someone is not

patient to listen to me, then I will not tell him anything. I listen to him

and agree with him.

Liu also admitted that she was sensitive to be defensive in the group negotiation. This sensitivity led her to observe the group discussion at times in case she should arouse unnecessary arguments.

Normally I wait for someone to give the comments, not me. Then I can

follow the comments, choose what I should say. If the writer likes to

accept the bad comments, I like to express myself as well.

In general, many students in the FPR group tended to reserve their true opinions in the group discussion. They preferred positive comments to negative comments because they did not want to hurt their peers' faces, generate a conflict by disagreeing with their peers, and to be defensive in the group. They attempted not to disturb the harmony of the group, which resulted in the largest difference in providing feedback between the two groups.

Furthermore, an examination of the peer feedback also suggested that some students gradually began to call for more effective comments, not complete praise comments, to help them revise their essays when they became more familiar with the face-to-face peer response activity. Xiao expressed her perception of what she had to do when providing feedback.

I don't want to say something bad. Sure, you can say this is good and

that is good, but that can't add to the paper at all. The good things are

already there and don't need to be improved. So if you want to help

someone improve the paper, you have to make negative or suggestive

comments.

In this case, during the second and the third writing tasks, some students tended to make the critical contributions to their peers. However, owing to the influence of traditional Chinese culture and the social context, a direct critical statement was rarely adopted in providing feedback. The students tried to use some strategies dealing with the difficult social situation of giving negative comments. One of the most frequent strategies was that they typically started with a general positive comment followed by the negative comments. For example:

Your essay was easy to understand but there was no clear thesis

sentence so I could not understand what you wanted to say in the

conclusion. Your explanation about the dialects was clear and

interesting but I can't see what you think about them.

Another most frequent strategy the students used for softening criticism was to give suggestions to the problems (Nelson and Carson, 1998). This strategy was accepted by a lot of students because it not only pointed out the group members' defects, providing the information they hoped to receive, but also did not make them so embarrassed. This led to the fact that suggestive comments became another

important source except praise in providing peer comments. The following was Yang's response to her peer.

> *Your essay is interesting and with much information about Olympic Games. I like the way you describe that. Your first paragraph is good but I think it would be better if the first phrase was put after the third phrase. I was also confused by phrase five of the first paragraph. Will you clarify that? Also in the same paragraph phrase seven needs clarification.*

Besides, the students also preferred the strategy of indirection to soften their critical feedback, particular the use of questions as opposed to direct statements. However, these questions sometimes did not have the desired effect on helping the students recognize their problems in the essay. Wang's feedback exactly reflected this phenomenon.

> *Although you have written a little, it seems that you have your reflections organized in three paragraphs, one for each aspect. Although your essay has good things, do you mind doing much more work?*

When other members failed to understand the criticism implied in these questions, the reviewers tended to use the clarification strategy available to them. In Wang's subsequent comments, she explained the problems she questioned in details:

> *I mean there are many good things in your essay. In general your essay is about the Olympic Games. You discussed the traffic system, road*

network, and the facilities. I think that you had a good essay, but you

needed more. I think you used good vocabulary. Also, you had a lot of

information about traffic system and road network, but little about

facilities. In addition, I think you asked a lot of questions in your

introduction. It is very interesting, but it made the introduction too long.

In short, the students' anxiety, cultural behaviors, learning experience, and the demand for effective autonomous learning led to their preferred types of praise, question, and suggestion when they responded to the peers' drafts, whereas the direct critical feedback was rejected by a majority of students in the FPR group.

4.2.2.1.2   The EPR group

As indicated earlier, the students in the EPR group preferred suggestion (18.1%), question (18.1%), praise (14.9%), criticism (13.4%), and clarification (10.9%) comments. Restatement was the most undesirable (5.6%).

According to Ware and Warchauer (2006), electronic writing classes provided a less-threatening environment and enhanced more opportunities and motivation than traditional classes. The students in such an environment became more verbal and honest to respond, which made their comments more readily available for sharing and revising. In the present study, when asked whether they were influenced by the previous social behaviors and learning experience in providing e-feedback, most of the students in the EPR group felt it did, but they were not constrained too much because they did not find themselves in a face-to-face social context. Normally

they did not feel so nervous, worried, or discouraged when providing critical comments since they did not know to whom they would send the feedback. As Wu explained in her interview.

> *I like the learning with technology because it is more interesting.*
>
> *Though it is group work, I feel I work individually. When I was in the*
>
> *group work before, I felt uncomfortable. Nobody would like to speak*
>
> *more; everyone was waiting. But this time I feel comfortable.*

Hence, in such an environment, the decreasing social pressure and sense of authority promoted the students' expression of true ideas. All of the students seemed to assume that the purpose of their peer response was to find the mistakes or the problems in each other's essays, and give help and encouragement to their peers by providing emotional support and serving as a source of content. Furthermore, longer responding time also supported them effectively to evaluate their peers' drafts in details overall. As a result, a supportive approach was adopted in providing peer feedback by most of students in the EPR group.

The first purpose of this approach attempted to provide initial positive comments that consisted of one or several sentences focusing on the good points and strength in the peers' essays because the students perceived the positive feedback as a part of a script which was used to ease other members to hear the problems. Wu explained why she gave the initial positive comments.

I think it gives somebody confidence and makes somebody feel good. I

remember once when I read the comments I received, the first sentence

was good, and the rest were bad things. But I still felt happy with the

first sentence.

Once the students provided positive comments on the essay, they moved their feedback to a mixture of purposes. These purposes identified were (1) giving suggestions to add things in the essay; (2) focusing on what was confusing; (3) focusing on the deficiencies of the essay; and (4) focusing on what needed further explanations in the essay. Figure 4.1 shows the characteristics of this approach.

Giving positive comments

Giving the suggestions

Questioning the confusion

Focusing on the deficiencies

Desiring further explanations
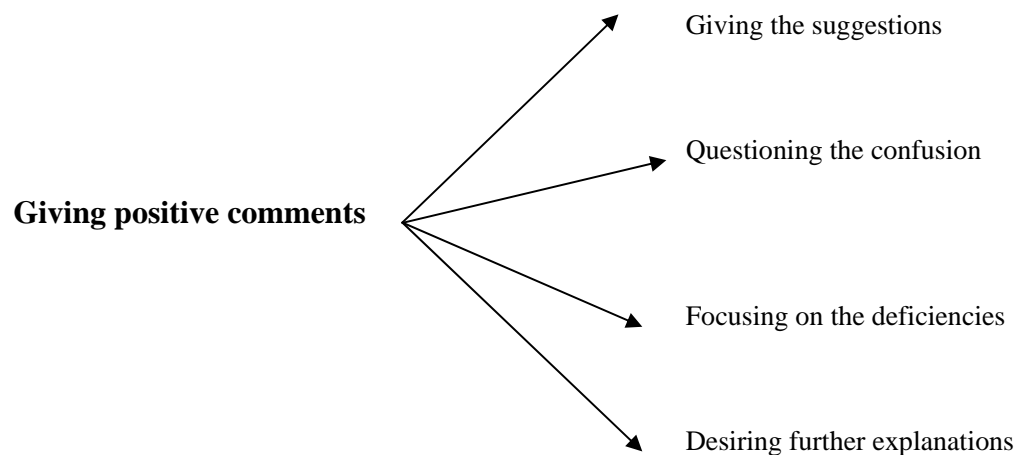
Figure 4.1   Supportive Approach to Provide Peer Feedback

The following feedback was a typical example to illustrate how Chen used the supportive approach in providing peer response to his peer. He first gave his praise to the language use, content, and the beginning part of the essay, followed by

criticizing the thesis statement because he did not understand what "globalization" meant in this text and sought more explanations to make it clear. Then he voiced the soft negative response to the body part while expressed his own suggestions of how to revise it. There was no doubt that his comments really gave a support to his peer by directing the parts to be improved in the revision, which was called the effective feedback.

> *I like your report on the major problems of urbanization very much. It is well written and it includes a lot of information about people's living condition and economy. The introduction is good and interesting as it says unexpected thing. But your thesis statement is too vague, I felt. What is "globalization"? I think globalization has a lot of meanings, so I want you to explain more detail. What's more, as a reader, it is a little difficult to read your body part. This is because your transitions and connectors are not apparent, and you put your three supporting ideas with many examples in one paragraph. It is a hard work for me. Why not separate them? I think you need more paragraphs.*

Hence, the less pressure from the social interaction and cultural behaviors ensured that the students were able to express their ideas more freely. Although, at times, the students still kept the wondering whether their words would hurt other group members, it could not prevent them making more efforts on the defects in the essays they read and producing more effective peer response.

4.2.2.2 Differences in the Functions that Comments Served

4.2.2.2.1 The FPR group

During the interviews, when asked what they focused on when providing feedback, the students in the two groups gave the different answers. Those in the FPR group focused on different levels of a text in their response. Some of them mentioned that they focused on content in the tasks because it could make the group members' senses and help the readers not to be confused about the writer's real purpose; some on vocabulary because they thought formal phrases and precise words made the text more professional; and others on grammar because they always found some problems on the tense, the sentence structure, and the Chinese-English expression in the essays they were reading. Li, for example, mentioned her focus of attention in the interview.

> *In my response, I like to give the suggestions to the content because I*
>
> *think it is the most important. What I read is the ideas the writer wants*
>
> *to express, not the language. I don't also think I can correct their*
>
> *language. Certainly, if there are obvious errors, I will help to correct.*

Xiao's opinions reflected her focus of attention was language use in her interview.

> *Content is important, I agree. But we are English majors. At least why I*
>
> *practice writing is to practice my English use, to make it better. I also*
>
> *hope my friends can tell me what's wrong in my language. Moreover,*
>
> *everyone thinks differently, I don't know if others understand me.*

A careful examination of the students' feedback also supported that the most frequent levels occurring in the FPR group were content (26.4%), vocabulary (24.6%), and grammar (21.5%), respectively. Vocabulary and grammar were surface changes, whereas content belonged to the text-based change, which suggested that these comments focused on both form and meaning. The reason why the level of organization (15.7%) was not shed important light on was likely that the concepts of how to organize a better argumentative essay had been emphasized inside class during the experiment, resulting in most of the students having a better understanding of it. As for the level of mechanics (11.8%), it was always ignored by a majority of students for its minor importance in writing.

4.2.2.2.2 The EPR group

The comments made in the EPR group primarily focused on meaning because the level of content constituted 55.5% of all the comments. Except for the students' similar preference for content described in the FPR group, another causal possibility was due to the features of Word and Moodle's Forum. When the students posted their drafts on Forum each time, the surface errors were automatically highlighted, which prompted self-correction before peer review on-line. Thus, the students in the EPR group gradually laid less emphasis on vocabulary (11.9%), grammar (11.1%) and mechanics (4.0%) comments. Further, their comments were excessively focused on content, then on organization.

> *Writing with computer is good. It will help you check the mistakes if you make. I don't worry about that in my writing. The same, the papers I read were also good-looking, and no need to correct more. What I can do is help them improve the meaning.*

To sum up, the functions that the comments served were different in the two groups. The FPR group produced the comments focusing on both form and meaning, while the EPR group primarily on meaning. This difference may cause unpredictable influences in the use of peer feedback and on the revision quality between the two groups.

4.2.3 Research Question 3

The third research question, "How are peer comments on the students' written work used in the revision by the electronic peer response group in comparison with the face-to-face peer response group?", concerned what types of the electronic and the face-to-face peer response were used or ignored by the students. To answer this question, it was important to know the numbers and types of comments incorporated by the students into revisions. The data were obtained in both quantitative and qualitative forms in terms of (1) the students' comments; (2) the students' first drafts and the subsequent revisions in three writing tasks; and (3) the questionnaires and interviews.

4.2.3.1 Quantitative Analysis

To investigate the students' use of feedback, the total numbers of comments they made in the revisions were examined to determine the general distribution of each type of used comments in the two modes of peer response groups. Then, the numbers of provided and used comments in both groups were compared to see the students' real preferences when incorporating peer feedback.

Table 4.10 provides a general picture of numbers of peer feedback the students used between the FPR and EPR groups. It was seen that the students

incorporated a total of 802 face-to-face comments and 713 electronic comments in three writing tasks. In both peer response groups, suggestion (25.2% / 26.3%) and question (24.3% / 23.3%) comments occupied the first and second highest percentage of the total revisions, which suggested that the students had the same preferences for the use of comments. Besides the two types of comments, however, their preferences on the rest were different. In the FPR group, the students showed their more interests in clarification (11.7%) and evaluation (10.0%), less interests in criticism (9.9%), explanation (7.6%) and restatement (6.6%), and the least in praise (4.7%). In the EPR group, criticism (16.5%), clarification (12.9%), and explanation (10.1%) comments were more excessively used by the students, while those of evaluation (5.6%), praise (3.2%), and restatement (2.1%) comments did not draw their attention.

Table 4.10   A comparison of numbers of used peer comments between the FPR and the EPR groups in three writing tasks

Types	FPR	EPR	Percentage %	
			FPR	EPR
Praise	38	23	4.7	3.2
Criticism	79	118	9.9	16.5
Explanation	61	72	7.6	10.1
Suggestion	201	187	25.2	26.3
Evaluation	80	40	10.0	5.6
Question	195	166	24.3	23.3
Clarification	94	92	11.7	12.9
Restatement	53	15	6.6	2.1
Total	802	713	100	100

However, the above analysis was only one side to reflect the students' use of peer feedback because the number of comments provided normally determined the

numbers of comments incorporated into revisions. For example, question and suggestion were two of the most frequently comments produced in the two modes of peer response groups, thus being likely to lead to a result that they still constituted the largest part of the total used comments. Therefore, the students' real preference or ignorance for the use of comments did not simply rest on the general distribution described above, but on the percentage of comments made in the revisions of the comments produced. Holding this consideration, the numbers of provided and used peer comments in both groups were compared.

The results shown in Table 4.11 indicated that of 1,660 peer comments produced in the FPR group, 48.3% of which (n = 802) actually resulted in the revisions, less than a half. 74.8% of suggestive comments were incorporated, revealing it was the students' first choice which was in accord with the result obtained above. However, it was surprising that although the students were reluctant to criticize their peers' drafts, it seemed that the peers preferred to use these comments, which occupied the second highest percentage (70.5%). Question comments were the students' third concern, and 68.5% of which was made in the revisions. The biggest difference was praise comments. Only 38 were used, comprising 10.1% of total 376 praise comments produced.

Table 4.11   A comparison of numbers of provided and used peer comments in

the FPR group in three writing tasks

Types	Provided Peer Comments	Used Peer Comments	Percentage %
Praise	376	38	10.1
Criticism	112	79	70.5
Explanation	134	61	45.5
Suggestion	270	202	74.8
Evaluation	153	80	52.3
Question	289	195	68.5
Clarification	178	94	52.8
Restatement	148	53	35.8
Total	1660	802	48.3

Table 4.12 clearly demonstrates that the students' preferences were

suggestion (82.4%), question (72.8%), criticism (69.8%), and clarification (67.2%)

comments in the EPR group, whose percentage of the use was more than 60% of the

provided comments. The students seldom incorporated restatement (21.4%) and

praise (12.3%) comments into the revisions.

Table 4.12   A comparison of numbers of provided and used peer comments in

the EPR group in three writing tasks

Types	Provided Peer Comments	Used Peer Comments	Percentage %
Praise	187	23	12.3
Criticism	169	118	69.8
Explanation	123	72	58.5
Suggestion	227	187	82.4
Evaluation	116	40	34.5
Question	228	166	72.8
Clarification	137	92	67.2
Restatement	70	15	21.4
Total	1257	713	56.7

4.2.3.2 Qualitative Analysis

The above quantitative analysis revealed the students' preference

and ignorance in the use of peer comments in two modes of peer response groups.

Why do the students use or ignore certain types of peer comments? This second

sub-question of Research Question 3 was addressed and discussed along with their

perceptions of using peer feedback in this section.

4.2.3.2.1   The FPR Group

As presented earlier, the students in this group preferred to

incorporate the types of suggestion, criticism, and question comments into their

revisions, whereas hardly used praise comments. From the questionnaires and

interviews on how they used the peers' feedback, a large number of students

expressed their positive experience for peer response (Tusi and Ng, 2000; Porto,

2001). They thought it was helpful to see different readers' reactions to their own

writing. As the anonymous reviewers, they were not biased to provide a great deal of

informative and suggestive feedback to others based on the deficiencies in the essays,

promoting their peers more conscious about writing. As the anonymous writers,

conversely, they first looked for the suggestions to improve their essays when reading

their peers' feedback. Otherwise, they felt disappointed. Such was the situation of

Qian, who in the interview said:

> *For me I hope they give me suggestions because I need to revise my*
>
> *paper. I think it is good for us and much better than other comments.*

Another student, Chen, expressed a clear preference for suggestive comments on the questionnaire.

> *I know my draft is not so good and I need to add more. Every time when*
>
> *I read the comments, I hope it says what types of things should be added,*
>
> *then I think it would have been more helpful. I would like to use this kind*
>
> *of feedback. It not only adds my content, but also corrects my language*
>
> *in my essay.*

When the peers gave few suggestive comments to her paper, Yang felt the group was not helpful.

> *My group is not working sometimes. When I want to change my essay, I*
>
> *don't know what I can do. I look at my paper, no bad points, no*
>
> *suggestions. It seemed quite good. But I know it isn't.*

In general, the students hoped to make changes suggested by their peers in the revisions since it gave them a sense of correction and revision, stimulating them to keep working.

The students' second focus on the use of peer feedback was embodied on their attitudes towards critical comments (Hyland, 2006). The early analysis had proved that the students, as readers in the FPR group, were reluctant to give negative response to the essays they received in order to maintain the harmony in the group discussion. As writers, however, it was contradictory that they did not feel uncomfortable or upset when receiving such critical feedback if their peers were

honest with their comments. Most of the students were willing to accept the direct and clear response where they knew how to improve their compositions. They agreed that negative response was desirable because it contributed to the writer's making changes. As Zhang put it:

> *My group members are a kind of persons who say directly. So it's good for me. Their words have strengthened my knowledge and confidence in English. This process through two or three drafts allowed me to learn grammar, spelling and structure in a relatively painless way. It's very useful!*

Li liked receiving criticism because her peers pointed out the mistakes and told her what to be corrected in her paper.

> *I learned a lot from the mistakes. If someone tells me where my mistakes are, I will pay more attention to. If they are right, I will correct them. I feel I am helped when I revise my paper.*

Criticism, or negative comments, thus came to be the students' another focus of using peer feedback. The students clearly and emphatically expressed that this input was an important criterion which was used to measure the effectiveness of peer response activity. Nevertheless, they also perceived this behavior helped to improve the essays for its direct and honest role in correcting the deficiencies in the essays.

The type of question comments was another important source for the students to make changes in their revisions. Once feeling that the peers were confused about

the content, organization, or words they produced in the comments, the students would make themselves understood immediately by correcting the wrong items or adding more information. For example, the following paragraph was an introduction cited from Zhong's first draft named "A major problem resulted from urbanization" in the first writing task.

> *With the development of the economy, more and more people begin to move to live in the city. Therefore, urbanization becomes a trend in the development of the modern society. However, this phenomenon also caused many social problems, such as housing, traffic and air pollution.*

When Liu, one of Zhong's group members, was reading this part, she seemed very confused about the purpose of this introduction because it did not make the theme "a major problem" clear. Hence, she asked a question about the theme subject of this beginning part.

> *Your beginning part introduces the background of urbanization well. I am very clear for it. But what I am confused is what your theme is. The title is "A major problem resulted from urbanization". What's your major problem? Not problems.*

After Zhong read this comment, he revised this paragraph as follows:

> *With the development of the economy, more and more people begin to move to live in the city. Therefore, urbanization becomes a trend in the development of the modern society. However, this phenomenon also*

caused many social problems, such as housing, traffic and air pollution.

In my opinion, I think the increasing pressure of the housing is the most

serious.

In fact, the student's primary purpose of emphasizing the type of question comments was due to its strong direction (Min, 2005). It not only clearly pointed out the items that needed to be revised, but also directly sent the information to the writer where the readers did not understand, asking for the explanation. If the writer ignored the peers' questions, it would make a sense that the peers' response was not important, which might lead to negative influence to the cohesion within the group. When Zhong was asked what he thought about his peers' questions, he answered:

Their questions are very important. They let me know their misunderstanding on my essay. So after I finish revising my essay, I often check whether I have answered these questions already. I don't want to make them feel their questions are not so important to answer.

Besides the students' preferences for the use of the types of suggestion, criticism and question comments, the comparison of the students' first and revised drafts also showed that most of them ignored praise comments and nearly made no revisions based on the fact that this type of comment lacked the effectiveness, defined by the students as making changes (Guardado and Shi, 2007). If the purpose of peer response was to improve the students' writing quality, then an effective peer response interaction should help the writers identify the problems occurring at the levels of

word, sentence, organization, or content in their essays. However, although the students produced a large amount of praise comments during the peer response sessions because of their cultural backgrounds or uncertainty about commenting, such feedback could not achieve the goal of effectiveness. The students were not able to make effective changes in their revisions according to the peers' response only filled with good points, thus resulting in a fact that a very low percentage of praise comments was incorporated. Wang told the researcher his perception of this type.

I remember when I got my friends' comments the first time, I was excited.

But later I found their opinions were just good, not any useful points.

Though I can understand them because I did the same thing, I can't

make my essay better. Then I found just say good was useless.

4.2.3.2.2 The EPR Group

The students in the EPR group preferred to use the types of suggestion, question, criticism, and clarification comments. Clarification was a new preference compared with those in the FPR group. The analysis of the interview data revealed that the students' choice for this type depended upon the nature of two modes of peer response groups. As discussed earlier, the nature of the FPR group determined that the students mostly would not disagree with their peers. Even if they were not clear about the comments their peers provided, they normally kept their own questions instead of positively clarifying some of them so as not to arouse the argument. The lack of a negotiated interaction between the writer and the readers might have created

misunderstandings and left those unclear comments unaddressed. As a result, the students in the FPR group did not use the type of clarification comment frequently.

Compared with the FPR group where students asked for clarification infrequently when in doubt, the students' interaction online was more active. Due to the sufficient responding time and lower social influence of offending others, the students as reviewers in the EPR group were honest and careful to comment on the peers' essays posted online, while as writers, they did not hesitate to utter their misunderstandings (Tuzi, 2004). For example, when responding to Sun's paper, Chen was a little confused about a word 'globalization'.

> *Original text: With the influence of globalization nowadays, the cooperation between China and other countries in the world is becoming more and more important.*

> *Comment: I don't understand 'globalization' here. What do you mean?*

After Sun received Chen's comment, she expressed her doubt.

> *'Globalization' is a popular word. I don't think I need to explain.*

Seeing Sun's reply, Chen found his comment was not very clear. He further clarified his meaning in time.

> *Yeah, 'globalization' is a word easy to understand. What I mean is that I think it has a lot of meanings, such as globalization in economy, culture, military and so on. Which aspect do you mean in your introduction? I want you to explain more details.*

Sun accepted Chen's idea through his clarification, and made this change in her revision as follows.

> *Nowadays, the world develops at a fast speed. The self-development has*
>
> *got behind the times. Any country has to cooperate with others. This is*
>
> *the so-called globalization. With the influence of globalization, therefore,*
>
> *the cooperation between China and other countries in the world is*
>
> *becoming more and more important*

In short, the above mutual communicative process effectively solved the potential misunderstanding and gave both the writer and the reader a better certainty on the comments. Therefore, the students' interests in the use of clarification comment were immensely increased.

As for the students' neglect of comments, an examination of the revisions revealed that the students lost the interests in the use of restatement and praise comments (Guardado and Shi, 2007). Despite of the reason for praise comments mentioned above, the students' ignorance for restatement comments mainly rested on its non-informative nature for the revision. As writers, a majority of students reflected they did not find more information being worthy of revising based on the summary that the peers stated to show their understanding. Like praise comments, the largest disadvantage of restatement comments was its low effectiveness for making changes.

To sum up, there was not a big difference in the students' strategies for the use of peer feedback in the FPR and EPR groups. No matter which mode of peer

response group the students were in, suggestion, question, and criticism comments were their first choices since they clearly showed a direction on how the writer should revise an essay. In the EPR group, the less-threatening group interaction and the adequate responding time supported the students to clarify more unclear points, thus resulting in more effective revisions. Furthermore, it also should be noticed that although praise accounted for the largest percentage of the total provided peer feedback, it played a minimal role in the revisions.

4.2.4   Research Question 4

The fourth research question, "How does electronic peer response impact the students' revision in comparison with face-to-face peer response?", addressed the issue of the impact of the students' peer response on the revisions. With regards to this question, the changes that the students made in terms of content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics between the students' first and revised essays were examined. The data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

4.2.4.1   Quantitative Analysis

4.2.4.1.1   Comparison of Students' Provided and Used Peer Response

As mentioned earlier, throughout three writing tasks, the FPR group produced a total of 1,660 peer comments, 801 of which were used by the students, while the EPR group provided 1,257 peer comments, 713 of which were incorporated. Table 4.13 presents a comparison of the mean differences in the number

of provided and used peer comments between both groups. It was found that although

the total comments produced by the FPR group were significantly higher than those

by the EPR group ($t = 4.964$, $p < .001$), there was no significant difference in the

number of comments that the students actually incorporated into revisions in the two

groups   ($t = 1.970$, $p > .05$).

Table 4.13   A comparison of provided peer comments and used peer comments

in the FPR and the EPR groups

FPR / EPR	M. D	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Provided peer comments	20.15	4.964	.000***
Used peer comments	4.45	1.970	.056

*** $p < 0.001$

Since the FPR group produced a significantly larger number of peer

comments than the EPR group, why was there no significant difference in the number

of students' revisions? An examination of students' provided and used peer comments

revealed that the revision-oriented comments could be attributed for this difference.

As shown in Table 4.14, of all the 1,660 comments provided by the FPR group, the

revision-oriented comments just accounted for 67.4% (n = 1119), which led to only

48.3% of the total comments being incorporated (n = 802) into subsequent revisions.

In contrast, of all the 1,257 comments by the EPR group, 56.7% of which were used

(n = 713) because the revision-oriented comments held 74.1% of the total provided

comments (n = 932).

Table 4.14   A comparison of numbers of provided, revision-oriented and used

peer comments in the FPR and the EPR groups

	FPR	EPR
Provided peer comments	1660	1257
Revision-oriented peer comments	1119 (67.4%)	932 (74.1%)
Used peer comments	802 (48.3%)	713 (56.7%)

4.2.4.1.2   Revision Functions

To better understand the actual use of peer comments in revisions, each comment was analyzed to see which function it served, as shown in Table 4.15. In the FPR group, the most frequent function of the revision was vocabulary (40.6%), followed by content (31.4%), and organization (12.7%) of all the comments. Only a few students made grammatical changes (8.9%) and mechanics (6.4%) in their revisions. Compared with the FPR group, the primary change in the EPR group was in content (52.6%). Organization (20.8%) and grammar (14.3%) were the second and third concerns. It was apparent that the nature of changes made in revisions was different in the two modes of the peer response groups.

Table 4.15   A comparison of functions changed in revisions between the FPR

and the EPR groups

Functions	FPR	EPR	Percentage %	
			FPR	EPR
Content	252	375	31.4	52.6
Organization	102	148	12.7	20.8
Grammar	71	102	8.9	14.3
Vocabulary	326	64	40.6	9.0
Mechanics	51	24	6.4	3.3
Total	802	713	100	100

4.2.4.1.3   Impact of Peer Response on Revision

The result of the revision functions allowed for further identification of the impact of peer response on the students' revisions to answer Research Question 4. On the modified Jacobs *et al*'s (1981) scale, the students' drafts were marked by the five raters in terms of content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. Since there were five raters judging each essay, all the raw scores of each essay given by them were transformed to the mean scores for better comparison and analysis. The procedure for the analysis was as follows:

(1) The raw scores of each essay were calculated into the mean scores.

(2) The mean scores obtained in the FPR and the EPR groups were processed with the help of the SPSS statistical analysis.

(3) The measure of t-test was used to compare the difference between two groups. The significance level in this study was set at 5% (p < 0.05).

Therefore, according to the above procedure, the results of the student's essays in the two groups were below.

As shown in Table 4.16, the data collected from the first writing task indicated that the use of face-to-face peer response had a significant effect at the levels of vocabulary ($t = 5.146$, $p = .000$) and mechanics ($t = 3.577$, $p = .002$), which led to the quality of the students' revisions being significantly enhanced ($t = 7.130$, $p = .000$). In contrast, the use of electronic peer response significantly improved the aspects of content ($t = 8.865$, $p = .000$), organization ($t = 4,467$, $p = .000$), and

mechanics ($t = 2.517$, $p = .021$), thus resulting in a better revised essay ($t = 10.086$, $p = .000$).

Table 4.16   A comparison of first drafts and final drafts in the FPR and the EPR

groups in the first writing task

First draft / Final draft	FPR			EPR		
	M. D	t	Sig.	M. D	t	Sig.
Content	-.30	-1.552	.137	-3.70	-8.865	.000***
Organization	-.10	-1.453	.163	-1.25	-4.467	.000***
Grammar	-.20	-1.453	.163	-.15	-1.143	.267
Vocabulary	-.95	-5.146	.000***	-.10	-.809	.428
Mechanics	-.65	-3.577	.002**	-.25	-2.517	.021*
Quality	-2.15	-7.130	.000***	-5.45	-10.086	.000***

The negative mean difference and t-value refers to the scores of first drafts are lower than those of final drafts.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4.17 presents a comparison of first and final drafts in the FPR and the EPR groups in the second task. During this phase, the FPR group demonstrated the significant difference in content ($t = 5.082$, $p = .000$), vocabulary ($t = 5.253$, $p = .000$), and mechanics ($t = 2.517$, $p = .021$), while the EPR group in content ($t = 8.721$, $p = .000$) and organization ($t = 3.688$, $p = .002$). The students in both groups wrote significantly better revisions at the level of p value less than 0.001 ($t = 7.976$, $p = .000$ / $t = 11.668$, $p = .000$). Compared with the first task, it was apparent that the students in the FPR group during this period incorporated more comments at the level of content.

Table 4.17   A comparison of first drafts and final drafts in the FPR and the EPR groups in the second writing task

First draft / Final draft	FPR			EPR		
	M. D	t	Sig.	M. D	t	Sig.
Content	-.220	-5.082	.000***	-4.35	-8.721	.000***
Organization	-.10	-1.000	.330	-1.10	-3.688	.002**
Grammar	-.15	-.484	.634	-.40	-1.674	.110
Vocabulary	-1.45	-5.253	.000***	-.25	-1.561	.135
Mechanics	-.25	-2.517	.021*	-.10	-1.453	.163
Quality	-3.85	-7.976	.000***	-6.35	-11.668	.000***

The negative mean difference and t-value refers to the scores of first drafts are lower than those of final drafts.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

The students' performance in the last writing task between the two modes of peer response groups was shown in Table 4.18. The comparison conducted in this period revealed that the face-to-face feedback was significantly more effective in encouraging changes in terms of content ($t = 5.713$, $p = .000$), vocabulary ($t = 4.507$, $p = .000$), and mechanics ($t = 3.289$, $p = .002$). By contrast, the e-feedback still greatly affected the students' revisions at the levels of content ($t = 8.542$, $p = .000$) and organization ($t = 4.498$, $p = .000$).

Table 4.18   A comparison of first drafts and final drafts in the FPR and the EPR groups in the third writing task

First draft / Final draft	FPR			EPR		
	M. D	t	Sig.	M. D	t	Sig.
Content	-2.11	-5.713	.000***	-3.80	-8.542	.000***
Organization	-.22	-2.204	.052	-.95	-4.498	.000***
Grammar	-.11	-.809	.430	-.20	-1.453	.163
Vocabulary	-.78	-4.507	.000***	-.05	-.438	.666
Mechanics	-.39	-3.289	.004**	-.15	-1.831	.083
Quality	-3.61	-7.050	.000***	-.5.20	-10.500	.000***

The negative mean difference and t-value refers to the scores of first drafts are lower than those of final drafts.

** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

4.2.4.1.4 Revision Quality

The impact of two modes of peer response also caused a distinct difference in the students' revision quality. The data clearly proved that the students in the EPR group revised better essays than those in the FPR group at a significant level of 0.05 in each writing task (p = .024, .021 and .023) according to their different focus of the use of peer feedback, the answer to Research Question 4. Table 4.19 presents such a comparison.

Table 4.19   A comparison of the revision quality between the FPR and the EPR groups in the three writing tasks

Revision Quality	Mean		M. D	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
	FPR	EPR			
First writing task	72.65	76.10	-3.45	-2.360	.024*
Second writing task	76.45	79.95	-3.50	-2.415	.021*
Third writing task	76.94	80.40	-3.46	-2.382	.023*

The negative mean difference and t-value refers to the scores of the FPR group are lower than those of the EPR group.

* $p < 0.05$

In general, both modes of peer response had a greater impact on the students' revisions, whose quality was significantly improved compared with the first drafts. The face-to-face peer response effectively encouraged the students to outperform at the levels of vocabulary, content, and mechanics, while the electronic peer response had a significant effect on content and organization at all time. This fundamental difference probably proved that the EPR group had better quality revisions than the

FPR group, which also suggested that the impact of peer response on the students'

revisions called for more qualitative analysis.

4.2.4.2   Qualitative Analysis

To examine the possible explanations on how face-to-face and

electronic peer response impacted the revisions, the students' revised essays were

analyzed and their reactions to peer response were investigated during the interviews.

The following sections described the results on these two aspects.

4.2.4.2.1   Students' Revised Essays

As discussed earlier, the essays scored by the raters indicated

there was a significant difference in revision quality between the two groups. The

revisions written in the EPR group were better. Since the FPR group provided and

used a larger number of comments, why did the EPR group perform significantly

better? How did these comments result in quality essays?

To explain this doubt, the issue of the number of provided and used peer response was

first examined. The results showed that although the students gave more face-to-face comments

than electronic comments at a significant level, there were no significant differences in the

number of used comments between the two groups. The comments incorporated into revisions

in the FPR group were only slightly higher than those in the EPR group.

One possible answer to this result was that not all the comments produced

were revision-oriented, which had already been presented in the quantitative part. For

example, the FPR group made 376 praise comments overall, which occupied the

largest percentage of all, but only 38 comments actually resulted in revisions. Therefore, it led to the fact that a comparatively low percentage (48.3%) of peer feedback was incorporated into the students' revisions, which corresponded with the studies by Mendonca and Johnson (1994), Tang and Tithecott (1999), and Tusi and Ng (2000). In the EPR group, on the other hand, students' similar focus on each type of comments resulted in a majority of comments (74.1%) being revision-oriented and 56.7% of those led to revisions.

Despite the effect of revision-oriented peer comments, another answer resting on the students' lack of language proficiency compared with native and ESL speakers led to their inability to give peers useful and accurate grammar comments, which also caused them to distrust this kind of comments received from the peers whose English level was more or less the same as theirs (Leki, 1990; Nelson and Carson, 1998; Rollinson, 2005). For this reason, even if the FPR group provided 357 comments focusing on grammar (21.5%), only 71 grammatical comments were used in the FPR group, constituting only 8.9% of total revision changes. Overall then, the face-to-face peer response group produced a significantly larger number of comments and only had a slightly larger number of comments leading to revisions. However, the electronic peer response group had a larger percentage of revision-oriented comments, thus resulting in a higher percentage of comments incorporated into revisions.

The primary explanation was based on the examination of the students' revised drafts. It was seen that the most frequent level occurring in the FPR group was

vocabulary (40.6%). The students almost first corrected all the spelling errors or changed a better word while revising. However, such surface changes could not improve the revision quality effectively, and vocabulary was also weighed a lower level based on the analytical scale. Sometimes, paragraphs were rearranged or new information was added to emphasize the topic sentences or main ideas, and sentences were adjusted to achieve better unity and coherence because content and organization changes concerned the second (31.4%) and the third (12.7%) functions. The surprising point was that few grammatical changes (8.9%) were made in revisions even though some sentences or phrases were still incorrect, which was extremely different from the percentage of this kind of comments produced (21.5%). Therefore, although the students' drafts were improved after using the comments that the peers had given, the revisions did not lead to an excellent text.

The EPR group, on the other hand, incorporated comments into revisions differently. The primary stimulation for the students to revise their drafts was meaning-based comments. The most frequent revision occurred at the function of content (52.6%), followed by organization (20.8%) and grammar (14.3%). Vocabulary changes (9.0%) were the fewest except mechanics. In the revised drafts, topic sentences and supporting ideas were first emphasized. Paragraphs were usually rearranged and combined to serve this purpose. Once ideas became clear, the students turned to organize the sentences to achieve better format and coherence and then substituted informal and inexact phrases and words with formal and precise ones to enhance its professional look.

The results showed that the students' essays were improved effectively with the help of the e-peer feedback according to the raters' scoring.

This finding was also supported by the interview results obtained from the raters. They stated that some revised drafts with a more meaningful and organized change satisfied their expectations and let them know the writers' intention more clearly than the original ones.

> *Some of the first drafts lack thesis statements, and some lack main ideas.*
>
> *But the students rewrite the topic sentences or reorganize the whole*
>
> *paragraphs to make it clearer in revisions. This gives me a clearer*
>
> *understanding on their writing.*

However, the raters also agreed that some revisions did not change much of the content. As pointed out by one rater,

> *Some revised essays mainly substitute the words and phrases, and have*
>
> *little to do with idea and organization development. These surface*
>
> *changes do not have much impact on improving overall writing quality.*

As a result, such essays did not show a significant improvement because content and organization were two main criteria for a quality essay based on the scale.

4.2.4.2.2   Students' Reactions to Impact of Peer Response

The students' reactions to the impact of peer response on their revisions during the interviews were further investigated to fully answer

Research Question 4. The reactions shown by the students were twofold. Most of them claimed that peer response benefited them a lot at the textual levels of word and meaning, but ineffectively promoted their grammar ability (Leki, 1990; Mendonca and Johnson, 1994; Tusi and Ng, 2000). The students in the FPR group felt their largest surprise lay in the vocabulary use. Some of them mentioned they did not put more stress on how to use more precise words in their past writing experience because content, grammar, and structure were more important in their opinions. As reviewers, however, they discovered that the vagueness and dullness of the words negatively affected their understanding on the writer's ideas when checking the surface errors in the essays. Hence, in the feedback, they often stated this issue and produced more formal and precise vocabulary they knew. As a result, they learned a lot of vocabulary and phrases through the peers' comments. Yang explained how she appreciated the vocabulary use produced by her peers.

> *I have learned more vocabulary, especially for using some precise words instead of common ones. I remember at the beginning I had a hard time to use good words. Most of time I gave up and used some simple and repeated terms. However, when I saw my classmates' feedback, they often gave me some good choices and told me which ones should be changed. I understood what it meant on my paper and tried to look it up in the dictionary, started using it more. Later I found my vocabulary was increased and I didn't feel using new words so hard as before.*

The reactions also revealed that the students made rapid progress in content with the help of electronic peer response (Tuzi, 2004; Wu, 2006). A large number of students had a difficulty in developing an argumentative essay before and were not able to write a clear and informative text. Their essays used to be vague and the themes lacked sufficient supporting ideas. During the electronic peer response session, the students did not need to make more efforts on the language use owing to the features of Moodle's Forum and Word, and primarily negotiated with the meaning-based text in consequence. Therefore, they obtained a clearer understanding of how to produce an informative essay. Wu talked about her learning experience in the EFP group.

> *My peers' feedback helped me a lot. I once felt it was too hard to write*
>
> *an essay with good meaning. My meaning was always unclear or vague*
>
> *and I often only thought about one point by myself. It was really*
>
> *discouraging. Fortunately, I got a lot of advice from my peers. They told*
>
> *me how to add more information and use more examples to support the*
>
> *theme. Now I felt much better.*

Although both groups agreed peer response helped improve their writing, the students perceived the peers' comments on grammar as not particularly effective in making revisions on their drafts (Nelson and Carson, 1998; Guardado and Shi, 2007). They regarded grammar as an unimportant issue and felt the time spent on it was a waste because they did not trust their peers' language proficiency, particularly whose level was lower than

theirs. They thought the students were not as authoritative as the teachers on this issue. Discussing such grammatical problems seemed ineffective, and they rarely adopted this kind of feedback in the revisions only in the case of obvious mistakes. As Chen said:

> *I usually received the comments on grammar. Sometimes I accepted because they are actual errors. But most of time I put it away because I am not sure whether they are right or not. I think the writer needs the opinion for the whole paragraph or the whole essay, not a spelling or a sentence. It isn't important.*

To conclude, the students' reactions to the impact of peer response demonstrated how two modes of peer response affected the students' revisions from another perspective and provided better knowledge of why the EPR group produced better revisions than the FPR group.

4.2.5 Research Question 5

The fifth research question, "Does electronic peer response promote more improvement in students' writing quality than traditional face-to-face peer response?", was related to the students' final writing quality. The data used for comparing which mode of peer response group produced better final writing and achieved more improvement prior to and post the experiment were drawn from the essay scores of the pre-test and the post-test. The results were described as follows.

4.2.5.1 Result of the Pre-test

As discussed in details in Chapter Three, a pre-test was administrated before the students participated in the three writing tasks. Table 4.20 clearly shows that there was no significant difference ($p > 0.05$)

between the FPR and the EPR groups prior to the experiment, which further supported that the grouping was reliable. The mean score of the FPR group (71.75) was slightly higher than that in the EPR group (70.60).

Table 4.20   The result of the pre-test in the FPR and EPR groups

Group	N	Mean	M. D	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
FPR / EPR	20 / 20	71.75 / 70.60	1.15	.611	.545

However, as mentioned above, two students dropped this study in the third writing task and there were only 18 students in the FPR group participating in the post-test at the end of the experiment. Hence, with the consideration that the data collected from the pre-test would be compared with those in the post-test in order to examine which mode of peer response promote more improvement in the students' writing quality, the two students' scores were omitted from the raw data in the pre-test for the quality of the analysis. The modified result of the pre-test in the two groups was shown in Table 4.21 as follows:

Table 4.21   The modified result of the pre-test in the FPR and EPR groups

Group	N	Mean	M. D	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
FPR / EPR	18 / 20	72.11 / 70.60	1.51	.786	.437

By contrast to Table 4.20, it could be seen that the modified result was quite similar with the original one. The mean score of the FPR group was changed from 71.75 to 72.11, still slightly higher than that in the EPR group (70.60). There was still no significant difference between the two groups at the level of 0.05. Therefore, this

result suggested that the absence of the two students did not bring large positive or negative influences to the present study, and it was eventually kept as the participants' initial writing performance before the experiment.

4.2.5.2   Comparison between the Pre-test and the Post-test

A post-test was administrated when all of the students finished the three writing tasks and their final essays were rated to be compared with those in the pre-test. The comparison revealed that both groups promoted the improvement in the writing quality prior to and post the experiment, as shown in Table 4.22. However, the face-to-face peer response group achieved a mean improvement of 1.22 at the level of p value more than 0.05 ($t = .496$, $p = .626$), whereas the electronic peer response group demonstrated greater improvement with a mean of 4.95 at the level of p value less than 0.01 ($t = 3.360$, $p = .003$).

Table 4.22   A comparison of the pre-test and the post-test in the FPR and the
EPR groups

Pretest / Posttest (2-tailed)	N	Mean		M. D	t	Sig.
		Pretest	Posttest			
FPR	18	72.11	73.33	-1.22	-.496	.626
EPR	20	70.60	75.55	-4.95	-3.360	.003**

The negative mean difference and t-value refers to the scores of pretest are lower than those of posttest.

** $p < 0.01$

4.2.5.3   Answers to the hypotheses

As presented in Chapter 1, a set of 5 null hypotheses that there was no significant difference in effects of electronic peer response in comparison with face-to-face peer response on Chinese university students' final writing, was formulated to answer Research Question 5. Table 4.23 shows the findings for the hypotheses, followed by a description of each.

Table 4.23   A comparison of the final drafts between the FPR and the EPR groups

Final draft	Mean		M. D	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
	FPR	EPR			
Content	27.06	29.50	-2.44	-3.403	.002**
Organization	24.11	25.25	-1.14	-2.989	.005**
Grammar	11.33	11.15	.18	.341	.735
Vocabulary	6.11	4.55	1.56	3.529	.001**
Mechanics	4.78	4.95	-.17	-1.578	.123
Quality	73.33	75.55	-2.22	-1.346	.187

The negative mean difference and t-value refers to the scores of the FPR group are lower than those of the EPR group.

** $p < 0.01$

Hypothesis 1

The first null hypothesis, "there is no significant difference in the content of students' final writing between two modes of peer response groups," was rejected ($t = 3.403$, $p = .002$). That is, in terms of content, the EPR group wrote better essays than the FPR group.

Hypothesis 2

The second null hypothesis, "there is no significant difference in the organization of students' final writing between two modes of peer response groups," was also rejected (t

$= 3.403$, $p = .002$). This means that the students in the EPR group organized their final essays significantly better than those in the FPR group ($t = 2.989$, $p = .005$).

Hypothesis 3

The third null hypothesis, "there is no significant difference in the grammar of students' final writing between two modes of peer response groups," was accepted ($t = .341$, $p = .735$). This indicates that both FPR and EPR groups did not perform differently in terms of grammar.

Hypothesis 4

The fourth null hypothesis, "there is no significant difference in the vocabulary of students' final writing between two modes of peer response groups," was rejected ($t = 3.529$, $p = .001$). That is, the FPR group significantly outperformed in the aspect of vocabulary in the final essays.

Hypothesis 5

The fifth null hypothesis, "there is no significant difference in the mechanics of students' final writing between two modes of peer response groups," was accepted ($t = 1.578$, $p = .123$), which shows no significant difference in terms of mechanics in the final essays between the two groups.

The findings of all five null hypotheses carefully considered, it was apparent that the EPR group wrote better essays in terms of content and organization, while the FPR group significantly outperformed in the aspect of vocabulary. In writing assessment, content and organization are regarded as high-level fluency of expression, the first concern in the scoring. In contrast, language use, covering grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics, is seen as

surface accuracy and weighed lower than content and organization in various scales (Kappan, 1999; Weigle, 2002). In the present study, an analytic scale (Jacobs *et al*, 1980) was chosen to score the students' writing where content and organization were also two most primary criteria for a quality essay. It could, therefore, be concluded that the EPR group outperformed the FPR group in the final drafts.

4.2.5.4   Final Writing Quality

The data in Table 4.23 also indicate that the final drafts written in the face-to-face peer response environment had a mean score of 73.33, while those in the electronic peer response environment had a mean score of 75.55. The mean difference was -2.22, which revealed the students in the EPR group wrote better essays than those in the FPR group, but with no significant difference ($t = 1.346, p = .187$).

4.3   Summary

This chapter addressed the results and the discussion of the experiment. The data obtained from the present study were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. It reported on the types of peer comments produced and incorporated, the functions that provided and used peer comments served, the students' cultural behaviors that influenced in providing comments, the impact of face-to-face and electronic peer response on the students' revisions, and finally the resulted writing quality after peer response activity. The final chapter would present conclusions, limitations and implications of the present study.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This chapter concludes the results of the data analysis, consisting of three sections. It first summarizes the major findings of the present study and then points out some limitations in relation to the study. A discussion on the theoretical and pedagogical implications of this study is made in the final section.

5.1 Conclusions

This section draws the conclusions from the findings of the data analysis. The present study set out to investigate effects of electronic peer response in comparison with face-to-face peer response on Chinese university students' writing revision. An examination of historical influences and previous studies revealed that in most of universities in China, the teaching and learning method used in the writing courses was the traditional 'teacher-centered' approach. The teacher's comments on the students' work primarily focused on linguistic features and mechanics, which did not really assist the learners to develop their writing skills in a balanced way, and hardly stimulated their motivation to write essays in the social setting that they inhabit. The students lacked the awareness of autonomous learning and did not have a clear understanding

understanding on how peer response could enhance such autonomy. As a consequence, peer response did not really serve its purpose. Besides, an issue of whether the traditional face-to-face peer response and electronic peer response would affect the students' writing revision differently became the key problem giving rise to the present research.

The research project was implemented in College of Foreign Languages of Guizhou University from March 31st to July 4th, 2008, covering a period of 14 weeks. 40 Chinese EFL third year university students participating in this study were divided into two groups, the face-to-face peer response group and the electronic peer response group. After a 6-hour training session on how to provide peer feedback, the participants completed three writing tasks, one of which consisted of an argumentative essay and the subsequent peer response sessions in two different writing environments. The participants' first drafts, revisions, and peer comments produced during the tasks as well as questionnaires and interviews were collected as data for research analysis. The approval and support of both participants and college leadership ensured the successful implementation of this research. As language pedagogy is innovative in nature, the present study did not seek a solution to the relevant problems in writing, but focused on the effects of two modes of peer response on Chinese university students' writing revision. The findings from this study were summarized as follows:

5.1.1   Answers to Research Question 1

The first research question was "How are peer comments on the students' written work provided by the electronic peer response group in comparison with the face-to-face peer response group?" The results indicated that the face-to-face peer response group produced significantly a larger number of peer comments than the electronic peer response group. Although the students' preference in providing peer comments was different in each writing task, overall, their main attention in the FPR group was given to praise, followed by question and suggestion. Most of the students were reluctant to negatively comment on their peers' essays, though this situation was improved later. In contrast, the students' first concerns in the EPR group were suggestion and question comments. Praise and critical feedback occupied the second and third focus. The students hardly provided restatement comments.

In terms of the functions that peer comments served, two modes of peer response groups also emphasized differently. The most frequent levels occurring in the FPR group were content, vocabulary, and grammar, which suggested that the students focused on both form and meaning when providing their feedback. In the EPR group, the features of Moodle's Forum and Word allowed the students more chances for self-correction in their language use before peer response online. As a result, the comments made by the students primarily focused on content and secondly on organization.

5.1.2　Answers to Research Question 2

The second research question was "What roles do the students' cultural behaviors play in providing peer comments in the electronic and face-to-face peer response groups?" The peer response session, as an interactive learning mode, was inevitably influenced by the social context and the learners' culture. In the present study, the results revealed that the EPR group produced more revision-oriented comments than the FPR group because the type of praise comments accounted for the largest number of the total face-to-face peer comments, which was certainly influenced by the students' cultural behaviors. In a face-to-face group-working context, Chinese students' cultural behaviors determined that they generally worked towards keeping the group harmony and mutual face-saving to maintain a state of cohesion. They preferred positive comments to negative comments based on the apprehension that they did not want to hurt their peers' faces, generate conflicts by disagreeing with their peers, or to be defensive in the group. It was no doubt such behaviors affected the nature and types of peer response. As a result, the students were reluctant to produce negative feedback to their peers' drafts, particularly direct critical statements. Sometimes when the students had to focus on the deficiencies due to the peers' demands for effective response, some strategies, such as providing suggestion and question comments, were usually used for softening the criticism in order to help the peers accept their weak points in the essays easily. Therefore, these behaviors led to the use of praise, question, and suggestion comments being the most frequent of the total comments produced.

The students in the EPR group were not constrained much by the above cultural behaviors. The decreasing social pressure and cultural influences promoted their expression of more true ideas. They did not feel so nervous, worried, or discouraged when providing critical comments, which enabled them to identify more problems in their peers' essays and provide tactful critiques on the written pieces. Consequently, their supportive approach in providing peer response gave the writer more effective comments for the revision.

5.1.3   Answers to Research Question 3

The third research question was "How are peer comments on the students' written work used in the revision by the electronic peer response group in comparison with the face-to-face peer response group?" An examination of the students' revisions revealed that the students in the FPR group preferred to incorporate suggestion, criticism, and question comments because these kinds of direct response gave them a clear sense on how to revise their essays, guiding them to make changes. In addition, most of the students ignored praise comments and nearly made no revisions because they did not help the writers identify the problems occurring at the levels of word, sentence, organization, or content in their essays.

The students' preferences for the use of peer feedback in the EPR group were apparent on suggestion, question, criticism, and clarification comments. Clarification comment was a new one compared with those made in the FPR group. This difference lay in the different nature of two modes of peer response groups. The less-threatening

electronic group interaction and the adequate responding time encouraged the students to clarify more unclear points in discussion online, thus resulting in more clarification feedback incorporated into the revisions. With regards to the students' ignorance, a majority of students lost the interests in the use of restatement and praise comments due to their non-informative nature and low effectiveness for making changes.

5.1.4 Answers to Research Question 4

The fourth research question was "How does electronic peer response impact the students' revision in comparison with face-to-face peer response?" The essays scored by the raters indicated that the quality of revisions was significantly improved compared with the first essays in the two groups. The face-to-face peer feedback primarily helped the students make a great progress on vocabulary use and secondly on content. By contrast, the electronic peer response had a significant effect on content and organization at all time. It was worth noting at this point that according to the analytical scale used in the present study, vocabulary was weighed a lower level, while content and organization were two main criteria for a quality essay. In brief, the revisions written by the EPR group were better than those by the FPR group.

5.1.5 Answers to Research Question 5

The fifth research question was "Does electronic peer response promote more improvement in students' writing quality than traditional face-to-face peer response?" The comparison of the pre-test and the post-test indicated that the electronic peer response group's essays significantly improved after the experiment, whereas those

from the face-to-face peer response group though improved, not at a significant level. According to the findings of the five null hypotheses, in the final essays, the FPR group significantly outperformed in the aspect of vocabulary, while the EPR group's writing quality improved greatly in terms of content and organization. Both FPR and EPR groups did not perform differently in terms of grammar and mechanics. Based on the analytic scale employed in the present study, it could, therefore, be concluded that the EPR group outperformed the FPR group in the final drafts. However, although the students in the EPR group wrote better essays than those in the FPR group, no significant difference was found.

5.2   Limitations

Like other empirical studies, there were still some limitations existing in the design of the present study.

First, although a 6-hour peer response training session was administered before the experiment in order to ensure the reliable quality of the results, it was not comprehensive or long enough. Moreover, students did not have a hands-on training experience to really practice giving peer review to more sample writings. Due to a time limit, only one sample writing was assigned, which might not be adequate to give the students a clear understanding of the actual peer response application before the main study.

Second, only the argumentative genre of writing was investigated in the present study. Whether the students writing other genres will show different results

still call for further investigation. The previous studies did not draw such a conclusion (Sullivan and Pratt, 1996; Braine, 1997, 2001; Liu and Sadler, 2003). More studies on this issue are necessary.

Third, a shortcoming of this study was its short-term duration, during which only three writing tasks were examined. However, the results showed that the students' preferences in providing face-to-face peer response in the last task seemed to change compared with those in the first and the second tasks. Whether the students writing on the face-to-face environment over a longer period will show different results also needs more explorations.

5.3   Implications

The present study has some implications for the theory and the pedagogy as follows:

First, in addition to its contribution to the L2 writing research, the current study shed new light on the comparison of face-to-face and electronic peer response. The findings of this study clearly revealed how two modes of peer response had effects on the students' writing quality. Today, it is widely accepted that computer-mediated communication is a new trend in the L2 writing process, as empirical studies have offered the positive evidence for the use of electronic peer response in L2 writing classrooms. These studies, however, failed to give a detailed comparison of impact of face-to-face and electronic peer response on L2 writing, because they did not explore in depth how the two modes of peer response may affect

the textual levels of an essay. The present study provided a detailed description of how face-to-face and electronic peer response comments were produced and incorporated into the revisions as well as their impact on the students' productions. Such information was helpful to enrich the knowledge of peer response in L2 writing.

Second, the results of this study gained an insight into L2 writing instruction by providing the teachers with valuable information about how the students revised their production based on peer response comments they received, and what difficulties they may face throughout the peer response session. The teachers can adopt the appropriate mode of peer response to help the students alleviate the study load in the pedagogy based on the real teaching conditions and the students' cultural behaviors, learning experience, and language proficiency.

Finally, this study also provided an inspiration for L2 learners' autonomous and collaborative learning in a writing class. The findings of this study revealed that face-to-face and electronic peer response sessions were inevitably influenced differently by the social context and the learners' culture according to their different natures of learning environment. When working in the small groups, the learners' unfamiliarity with the peer response technique, cultural behaviors, and lower language ability might generate the conflicts that affected the effectiveness of peer response. Therefore, it was suggested that L2 learners be allowed to select the appropriate mode, FPR or EPR, for themselves when participating in peer response activities. They should take their own cultural behaviors, learning experience, and language proficiency into account when deciding whether or how to use peer response in order to avoid their interference in writing.

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APPENDIX A

WRITING TOPICS

Topic Used in the Pre-test

Purpose: The Internet is about to take off in China. As many as 9 million people are on line, a number that is estimated to hit 20 million by the end of 2000. It is predicted that this phenomenal growth will have great impact on our society and economy. Choose one aspect of our society or economy where you think the impact will be most strongly felt, and write an essay of about 400-450 words entitled:

The Impact of the Internet on…

Directions: In the first part of your essay you should state clearly your main argument, and in the second part you should support your argument with appropriate details. In the last part you should bring what you have written to a conclusion or make a summary.

Mark will be awarded for content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and appropriacy. Failure to follow the above instructions may result in a loss of marks.

Topic Used in the First Writing Task

Purpose: Nowadays with the development of economy, existing cities are growing bigger and new cities are appearing. What do you think is ONE of the major problems that may result from this process of urbanization? Write an essay of about 400-450 words entitled:

One Major Problem Resulted from Urbanization

Directions: In the first part of your essay you should state clearly your main argument, and in the second part you should support your argument with appropriate details. In the last part you should bring what you have written to a conclusion or make a summary.

Mark will be awarded for content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and appropriacy. Failure to follow the above instructions may result in a loss of marks.

Topic Used in the Second Writing Task

Purpose: The 29th Olympic Games is going to be held in Beijing this summer. It is predicted that this Olympic Games will have great impact on China. Choose the aspects where you think the impact will be most strongly felt, and write an essay of about 400-450 words entitled:

Beijing Olympic Games

Directions: In the first part of your essay you should state clearly your main argument, and in the second part you should support your argument with appropriate details. In the last part you should bring what you have written to a conclusion or make a summary.

Mark will be awarded for content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and appropriacy. Failure to follow the above instructions may result in a loss of marks.

Topic Used in the Third Writing Task

Purpose: It was reported that a teacher individually escaped from Wenchuan earthquake without saving his students in class. People had different opinions about this issue. Some thought that one of the teacher's responsibilities was to protect his or her students in danger, while others held a negative view, saying that personal life was the most important. What do you think? Write a composition of about 400-450 words entitled:

When Facing the Disaster

Directions: In the first part of your essay you should state clearly your main argument, and in the second part you should support your argument with appropriate details. In the last part you should bring what you have written to a conclusion or make a summary.

Mark will be awarded for content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and appropriacy. Failure to follow the above instructions may result in a loss of marks.

Topic Used in the Post-test

Purpose: You are going to graduate from university in half a year. How do you think your college years have prepared you for your future life? Write an essay of about 400-450 words entitled:

What I have learned from my years at university

Directions: In the first part of your essay you should state clearly your main argument, and in the second part you should support your argument with appropriate details. In the last part you should bring what you have written to a conclusion or make a summary.

Mark will be awarded for content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and appropriacy. Failure to follow the above instructions may result in a loss of marks.

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE: THE PILOT STUDY

Questionnaire for the FPR Group

Purpose: To collect the data on your perceptions of and attitudes towards traditional face-to-face peer response technique.

Instruction: This questionnaire consists of three parts: your personal information, your perceptions of and attitudes towards writing difficulty, training session, and traditional face-to-face peer response technique, and the problems occurred when you used peer response technique.

Part I: Please tick (X) to give information about yourself.

1. You are …   (   ) male   (   ) female

2. You have learned English for …

   (   ) 8 years   (   ) 9 years   (   ) 10 years   (   ) 11 years or more

Part II: Please tick (X) to express your perceptions of and attitudes towards writing difficulty, training session, and peer response technique.

1. What do you think about the writing difficulty?

   (   ) very difficult   (   ) difficult   (   ) not sure   (   ) easy

   (   ) very easy

2. What do you think about peer response training session?

   (   ) very useful   (   ) useful   (   ) not sure   (   ) useless

   (   ) very useless

3. What do you think about face-to-face peer response technique?

    ( ) very useful   ( ) useful   ( ) not sure   ( ) useless

    ( ) very useless

4. If you think face-to-face peer response is useful, it is useful to…

    ( ) poor students   ( ) advanced students

    ( ) students at all levels of proficiency

5. Do you often provide face-to-face peer response to your peers?

    ( ) very often   ( ) often   ( ) it depends   ( ) not often

    ( ) hardly

6. Which types of comments do you prefer to provide to your peers' essays?

    ( ) praise   ( ) criticism   ( ) explanation   ( ) suggestion

    ( ) evaluation   ( ) question   ( ) clarification   ( ) restatement

7. Which do you focus on when you provide your comments to the peers' essays?

    ( ) content   ( ) organization   ( ) grammar   ( ) vocabulary

    ( ) mechanics

8. How much do you incorporate your peers' comments into your revision?

    ( ) all   ( ) the majority   ( ) half   ( ) a small part

    ( ) nothing

9. Which types of comments do you prefer to incorporate into your revision?

    ( ) praise   ( ) criticism   ( ) explanation   ( ) suggestion

    ( ) evaluation   ( ) question   ( ) clarification   ( ) restatement

10. Which types of comments do you ignore to incorporate into your revision?

    ( ) praise   ( ) criticism   ( ) explanation   ( ) suggestion

    ( ) evaluation   ( ) question   ( ) clarification   ( ) restatement

11. Which do you focus on when you incorporate your peers' comments?

    ( ) content   ( ) organization   ( ) grammar   ( ) vocabulary

    ( ) mechanics

12. What do you think can be improved in your writing through face-to-face peer response activity?

( ) content   ( ) organization   ( ) grammar   ( ) vocabulary

( ) mechanics

13. Do you often provide the negative comments to your peers?

( ) very often   ( ) often   ( ) it depends   ( ) not often

( ) hardly

Part III: Please tick (X) the problems you had when you used peer response technique

( ) Cannot identify the grammatical errors

( ) Cannot identify the content needing to be improved

( ) Cannot identify the organization needing to be improved

( ) Cannot identify the vocabulary needing to be improved

( ) Cannot give good advice to improve peers' writing

( ) Do not trust peers' comments

( ) Not enough time for responding

( ) Lack self-confidence for negotiation

( ) Do not give the negative comments for face-saving

( ) Others

Remarks: Face-to-face peer response means you provide comments to your peers' writing face-to-face.

Thank you for your cooperation

Questionnaire for the EPR Group

Purpose: To collect the data on your perceptions of and attitudes towards electronic peer response technique.

Instruction: This questionnaire consists of three parts: your personal information, your perceptions of and attitudes towards writing difficulty, training session, and electronic peer response technique, and the problems occurred when you used peer response technique.

Part I: Please tick (X) to give information about yourself.

1. You are …   (   ) male   (   ) female

2. You have learned English for …

   ( ) 8 years   ( ) 9 years   ( ) 10 years   ( ) 11 years or more

Part II: Please tick (X) to express your perceptions and attitudes towards electronic peer response technique.

1. Do you have the access to Internet?

   (   ) Yes   (   ) No

2. What is your level of expertise with the following computer applications

	No experience	Novice	Intermediate	Advanced
Sending attachment				
Using word-processing program				
Searching the Internet				
Sending the message on the website				

3. How do you feel reading with computer?

    (   ) very comfortable   (   ) comfortable   (   ) I survive

    (   ) uncomfortable   (   ) I avoid reading as much as possible

4. How do you feel writing with computer?

    (   ) very comfortable   (   ) comfortable   (   ) I survive

    (   ) uncomfortable   (   ) I avoiding writing as much as possible

5. What do you think about the writing difficulty?

    (   ) very difficult   (   ) difficult   (   ) not sure   (   ) easy

    (   ) very easy

6. What do you think about peer response training session?

    (   ) very useful   (   ) useful   (   ) not sure   (   ) useless

    (   ) very useless

7. What do you think about electronic peer response technique?

    (   ) very useful   (   ) useful   (   ) not sure   (   ) useless

    (   ) very useless

8. If you think electronic peer response is useful, it is useful to…

    (   ) poor students   (   ) advanced students

    (   ) students at all levels of proficiency

9. Do you often provide electronic peer response to your peers?

    (   ) very often   (   ) often   (   ) it depends   (   ) not often

    (   ) hardly

10. Which types of comments do you prefer to provide to your peers' essays?

    (   ) praise   (   ) criticism   (   ) explanation   (   ) suggestion

    (   ) evaluation   (   ) question   (   ) clarification   (   ) restatement

11. Which do you focus on when you provide your comments to the peers' essays?

    (   ) content   (   ) organization   (   ) grammar   (   ) vocabulary

    (   ) mechanics

12. How much do you incorporate your peers' comments into your revision?

   (   ) all   (   ) the majority   (   ) half   (   ) a small part

   (   ) nothing

13. Which types of comments do you prefer to incorporate into your revision?

   (   ) praise   (   ) criticism   (   ) explanation   (   ) suggestion

   (   ) evaluation   (   ) question   (   ) clarification   (   ) restatement

14. Which types of comments do you ignore to incorporate into your revision?

   (   ) praise   (   ) criticism   (   ) explanation   (   ) suggestion

   (   ) evaluation   (   ) question   (   ) clarification   (   ) restatement

15. Which do you focus on when you incorporate your peers' comments?

   (   ) content   (   ) organization   (   ) grammar   (   ) vocabulary

   (   ) mechanics

16. What do you think can be improved in your writing through electronic peer response activity?

   (   ) content   (   ) organization   (   ) grammar   (   ) vocabulary

   (   ) mechanics

17. Do you often provide the negative comments to your peers?

   (   ) very often   (   ) often   (   ) it depends   (   ) not often

   (   ) hardly

Part III: Please tick (X) the problems you had when you used peer response technique

(   ) Cannot identify the grammatical errors

(   ) Cannot identify the content needing to be improved

(   ) Cannot identify the organization needing to be improved

(   ) Cannot identify the vocabulary needing to be improved

(   ) Cannot give good advice to improve peers' writing

(   ) Do not trust peers' comments

(   ) Lack self-confidence for negotiation

(   ) Lack familiarity with Moodle's Forum

(   ) Do not give the negative comments for face-saving

(   ) Others

Remarks: Electronic peer response means you provide comments to your peers' writing on Moodle's Forum.

Thank you for your cooperation

APPENIDX C

QUESTIONNAIRE: THE MAIN STUDY

Questionnaire for the FPR Group

Purpose: To collect the data on your perceptions of and attitudes towards traditional face-to-face peer response technique.

Instruction: This questionnaire consists of three parts: your personal information, your perceptions of and attitudes towards traditional face-to-face peer response technique, and the problems occurred when you used it.

Part I: Please tick (X) to give information about yourself.

1. You are …   (   ) male   (   ) female

2. You have learned English for …

   (   ) 8 years   (   ) 9 years   (   ) 10 years   (   ) 11 years or more

Part II: Please tick (X) to express your perceptions and attitudes towards writing difficulty, training session, and peer response technique.

1. What do you think about face to-face peer response technique?

   (   ) very useful   (   ) useful   (   ) not sure   (   ) useless

   (   ) very useless

2. If you think face-to-face peer response is useful, it is useful to…

   (   ) poor students   (   ) advanced students

   (   ) students at all levels of proficiency

3. Do you often provide face-to-face peer response to your peers?

    (   ) very often   (   ) often   (   ) it depends   (   ) not often

    (   ) hardly

4. Which types of comments do you prefer to provide to your peers' essays?

    (   ) praise   (   ) criticism   (   ) explanation   (   ) suggestion

    (   ) evaluation   (   ) question   (   ) clarification   (   ) restatement

    Would you like to list your reasons?

    _____

    _____

    _____

    Which do you focus on when you provide your comments to the peers' essays?

    (   ) content   (   ) organization   (   ) grammar   (   ) vocabulary

    (   ) mechanics

    Would you like to list your reasons?

    _____

    _____

    _____

    How much do you incorporate your peers' comments into your revision?

    (   ) all   (   ) the majority   (   ) half   (   ) a small part

    (   ) nothing

5. Which types of comments do you prefer to incorporate into your revision?

    (   ) praise   (   ) criticism   (   ) explanation   (   ) suggestion

    (   ) evaluation   (   ) question   (   ) clarification   (   ) restatement

    Would you like to list your reasons?

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

6. Which types of comments do you ignore to incorporate into your revision?

( ) praise ( ) criticism ( ) explanation ( ) suggestion

( ) evaluation ( ) question ( ) clarification ( ) restatement

Would you like to list your reasons?

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. Which do you focus on when you incorporate your peers' comments?

( ) content ( ) organization ( ) grammar ( ) vocabulary

( ) mechanics

Would you like to list your reasons?

_____

_____

_____

_____

8. What do you think can be improved in your writing through peer response activity?

( ) content ( ) organization ( ) grammar ( ) vocabulary

( ) mechanics

Would you like to list your reasons?

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. Do you often provide the negative comments to your peers?

( ) very often ( ) often ( ) it depends ( ) not often

( ) hardly

Would you like to list your reasons?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Part III: Please tick (X) the problems you had when you used peer response technique

(   ) Cannot identify the grammatical errors

(   ) Cannot identify the content needing to be improved

(   ) Cannot identify the organization needing to be improved

(   ) Cannot identify the vocabulary needing to be improved

(   ) Cannot give good advice to improve peers' writing

(   ) Do not trust peers' comments

(   ) Not enough time for responding

(   ) Lack self-confidence for negotiation

(   ) Do not give the negative comments for face-saving

(   ) Others

Remarks: Face-to-face peer response means you provide comments to your peers' writing face-to-face.

Thank you for your cooperation

Questionnaire for the EPR Group

Purpose: To collect the data on your perceptions of and attitudes towards electronic peer response technique.

Instruction: This questionnaire consists of three parts: your personal information, your perceptions of and attitudes towards electronic peer response technique, and the problems occurred when you used it.

Part I: Please tick (X) to give information about yourself.

1. You are …   (   ) male   (   ) female

2. You have learned English for …

    (   ) 8 years   (   ) 9 years   (   ) 10 years   (   ) 11 years or more

Part II: Please tick (X) to express your perceptions and attitudes towards electronic peer response technique.

1. What do you think about electronic peer response technique?

    (   ) very useful   (   ) useful   (   ) not sure   (   ) useless

    (   ) very useless

2. If you think electronic peer response is useful, it is useful to…

    (   ) poor students   (   ) advanced students

    (   ) students at all levels of proficiency

3. Do you often provide electronic peer response to your peers?

    (   ) very often   (   ) often   (   ) it depends   (   ) not often

    (   ) hardly

4. Which types of comments do you prefer to provide to your peers' essays?

    (   ) praise   (   ) criticism   (   ) explanation   (   ) suggestion

    (   ) evaluation   (   ) question   (   ) clarification   (   ) restatement

Would you like to list your reasons?

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. Which do you focus on when you provide your comments to the peers' essays?

( ) content   ( ) organization   ( ) grammar   ( ) vocabulary

( ) mechanics

Would you like to list your reasons?

_____

_____

_____

_____

6. How much do you incorporate your peers' comments into your revision?

( ) all   ( ) the majority   ( ) half   ( ) a small part

( ) nothing

7. Which types of comments do you prefer to incorporate into your revision?

( ) praise   ( ) criticism   ( ) explanation   ( ) suggestion

( ) evaluation   ( ) question   ( ) clarification   ( ) restatement

Would you like to list your reasons?

_____

_____

_____

_____

8. Which types of comments do you ignore to incorporate into your revision?

( ) praise   ( ) criticism   ( ) explanation   ( ) suggestion

( ) evaluation   ( ) question   ( ) clarification   ( ) restatement

Would you like to list your reasons?

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. Which do you focus on when you incorporate your peers' comments?

( ) content   ( ) organization   ( ) grammar   ( ) vocabulary

( ) mechanics

Would you like to list your reasons?

_____

_____

_____

What do you think can be improved in your writing through electronic peer response activity?

( ) content   ( ) organization   ( ) grammar   ( ) vocabulary

( ) mechanics

Would you like to list your reasons?

_____

_____

_____

Do you often provide the negative comments to your peers?

( ) very often   ( ) often   ( ) it depends   ( ) not often

( ) hardly

Would you like to list your reasons?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Part III: Please tick (X) the problems you had when you used peer response technique

(   ) Cannot identify the grammatical errors

(   ) Cannot identify the content needing to be improved

(   ) Cannot identify the organization needing to be improved

(   ) Cannot identify the vocabulary needing to be improved

(   ) Cannot give good advice to improve peers' writing

(   ) Do not trust peers' comments

(   ) Lack self-confidence for negotiation

(   ) Lack familiarity with Moodle's Forum

(   ) Do not give the negative comments for face-saving

(   ) Others

Remarks: Electronic peer response means you provide comments to your peers' writing on Moodle's Forum.

Thank you for your cooperation

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW: THE PILOT STUDY

Questions of A Semi-structured Interview

Purpose: To gain the students' writing problems, perceptions of and attitudes towards writing difficulty, training session, and face-to-face and electronic peer response techniques.

Part I. Personal writing problems

1. Do you usually practice your English writing?

2. What is a good English writing in your mind?

3. What are the defects do you think in your English writing?

Part II. Perceptions of and attitudes towards writing difficulty and training session

1. What do you think about the writing difficulty in the study?

2. What do you think about the peer response training session?

3. Do you think is there any part needed to be improved?

Part III. Perceptions of and attitudes towards face-to-face and electronic peer response

1. Which mode of peer response do you use when responding to your peers' essays?

2. Do you often give comments when you are reading your peers' essays?

3. Do you often incorporate your peers' comments into your essay?

4. Whether is your writing quality improved through peer response technique?

5. What do you think about peer response technique?

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW: THE MAIN STUDY

Questions of A Semi-structured Interview

Purpose: To gain the students' writing problems, perceptions of and attitudes towards face-to-face and electronic peer response techniques.

Part I. Personal writing problems

1. Do you usually practice your English writing?

2. What is a good English writing in your mind?

3. What are the defects do you think in your English writing?

Part II. Perceptions of and attitudes towards face-to-face and electronic peer response

1. Which mode of peer response do you use when responding to your peers' essays?

2. Do you often give comments when you are reading your peers' essays?

3. Which types of comments do you prefer to provide to your peers' essays?

4. What do you focus on in providing comments?

5. Do you often incorporate your peers' comments into your essays?

6. Which types of comments do you prefer to or ignore when you incorporate your peers' comments?

7. What do you focus on when you incorporate your peers' comments?

8. Which levels of your revision are improved?

9. Whether is your final writing quality improved through peer response?

APPENDIX F

CRITERIA FOR WRITING ASSESSMENT SCORING

Content: 40 points

36-40: The essay deals with the issues centrally and fully. The position is clear, and strongly and substantially argued. The complexity of the issues is treated seriously, relevant to the topic in details.

30-35: The essay deals with the issues well. The position is clear and the substantial arguments are presented. The complexity of the issues is taken into account, relevant to the topic in details.

20-29: The essay talks about the issues but could be better focused or developed. The position is thoughtful, but could be clearer and the arguments could have more substance. Repetition or inconsistence may occur occasionally. The complexity of the issues is taken into account, mostly relevant to the topic but lacks details.

10-19: The essay talks generally about the issues, but lacks developments. The position is not clear and the arguments lack substance. The complexity of the issues is not taken into account.

0-9:   The essay does not develop or support an argument about the topic.

Organization: 30 points

26-30: The essay is cohesive, logical sequencing and well-organized. The ideas are clearly stated with adequate supports and fluent expression.

20-25: The essay is cohesive, logical but incomplete sequencing and somewhat choppy. The ideas are clearly stated with fluent expression but inadequate supports.

10-19: The essay is choppy and loosely organized. The ideas are stated but lack adequate supports and fluent expression.

6-9: The essay lacks developments. The organization and ideas are confused or disconnected and the expression is not clear.

0-5: No argumentative structure.

Grammar: 15 points

13-15: The essay has excellent language control. The grammatical structures are complex and there are no errors of agreement, tense, number, word function, pronouns and prepositions.

10-12: The essay has good language control and reads smoothly. The grammatical structures are effective but simple. There are several errors of agreement, tense, number, word function, pronouns and prepositions.

6-9: The essay has rather weak language control. The sentence meaning is confused or obscured. There are major problems in the grammatical structures and frequent errors of agreement, tense, number, word function, pronouns and prepositions.

0-5: The essay has no language control.

Vocabulary: 10 points

9-10: The vocabulary chosen are able to express the ideas and carry the meaning precisely.

6-8: The vocabulary chosen are able to express the ideas and carry the meaning adequately, not obscured.

3-5: The vocabulary chosen are able to express the ideas and carry the meaning most of the time, but sometimes confused or obscured.

0-2: Little knowledge of English vocabulary.

Mechanics: 5 points

5: Excellent spelling and punctuation.

4: Few errors of spelling and punctuation.

3: Occasional errors of spelling and punctuation.

2: Some errors of spelling and punctuation.

0-1: Frequent errors of spelling and punctuation.

APPENDIX G
SAMPLE WRITING

First Draft

Should we pay so much attention to the Olympic Games?

The Olympic Game is coming soon! It left no more than two months to be the Auguest 8th, on which day the Game will start. Nearly all the media newspapers, TV shows, radio programs and internet filled with the information of Olympic Games. Each Chinese knows of the official mascots of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games__Fuwa, the nestle and the water cubic. Half of the university students in Beijing and the others in other cities are busying with the Olympic Games. Does it really necessary for us to pay so much attention to the Games?

Altough, a great number of people in the world are sports fans, and sports does make us be relax and exciting. A live football match can make thounsands of men and women wait for a whole night. The sports stars are as popular as the movie stars. Esapecially who wins Olympic Games or be the champion of the Games.

It even has been a national affair. The government is in a battle state since the day of applying for the right to hold the Games, going through a intense competition with the other countries. When the final winnership was obtained, it also meant that the government has a further and harder way to go: building different gymnasiums for different matches, renewing the transportation systems to fit for the route to Olympic Games, preparing enough hotels for the players and the audience from all over the world. Everything is working for the Games.

Should we pay so much attention to this sports matter?

There are too many things waiting for us to deal with. The money and vigor which paid on the Games can do more meaningful things. There are still uncountble children who have o chance to receive the basic education, the number of people who is unable to afford the fees of medicine care is so high. The pollution problem is becoming more and more serious. Let us make an imangination: if we spend the money which be used on Games on the education, the transportation and the pollution what the result will be ? Of course, we will have so many new schools which means children could receive the education, we will have many high quailty high ways and the air the water will be cleanner.

We can feel fun and passion from the Games, we can admire the talents of the excllent players, but what can be left after all the matches? A hot topic? A popular chatting theme? People may say we exchanged the culture with other countries and we have more business opprtunities, but do these can be balanced with our payment?

We have no needs to pay such a great vigor and money on the matter, we can do many things which are more meaningful than it.

Group Members' Peer Comments

A's comments:

Your draft is very interesting. Many people's attitudes towards Beijing Olympic Games are positive, but yours are different and attract my attention. It is very good for me. However, when you argue with other people's points of views, you don't strongly support your ideas in details. For example, the fifth paragraph is your arguments. However, first, how many opinions do you have? What are your topic sentences? I think they are not clear, at least, for me. Second, your supporting ideas lack developments as well, which made your arguments rather weak.

By the way, there are many spelling errors and grammatical errors in your draft. I have already underlined them. Please check and correct them if possible.

B's comments:

This essay is quite good, particularly your ideas. You know everyone is glad that Beijing is going to hold the Olympic Games, but your opinions are negative. Interesting! However, if you could improve your organization, spelling and grammar, your essay would be much better.

The beginning part is very good. The background and theme is very clear. If you could be careful for your sentence grammar, it would be better. For example, the verbs in the third, fifth and sixth sentences are incorrect.

I am not clear what you want to say in the second paragraph? Could you give me more explanations?

There are also some grammatical errors in the fifth paragraph. Could you check? Besides, I personally think this paragraph needs more developments to support your ideas. How do you think about that?

At last, how do you think about your conclusion? Is that too short compared with your beginning part?

C's comments:

Your essay talks about people should not pay more attention to Beijing Olympic Games. Your ideas are original and the essay is well-organized. It is very clear to see your theme, other people's opinions and your arguments.

Some weak points are also found in your essay. I believe this essay would be better if you could pay more attention to them. First, some vocabulary spelling errors appear in your essay and I have underlined them for you. Although they are minor errors, they are not good for your essay. Second, I don't understand some sentences. For example, "if we spend the money which be used on Games on the education, the transportation and the pollution what the result will be?" What do you mean here? Third, I am confused what you intend to express in your second paragraph. Is this a transition?

I hope my comments are useful for your revision.

Second Draft

Should we pay so much attention to the Olympic Games?

The Olympic Game is coming soon! It left no more than two months to be the August 8th, on which day the Game will start. Nearly all the media newspapers, TV shows, radio programs and internet are filled with the information of Olympic Games. Each Chinese knows of the official mascots of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, such as Fuwa, the Nestle and the Water Cubic. Half of the university students in Beijing and the others in other cities are busying with the Olympic Games. Is it really necessary for us to pay so much attention to Beijing Olympic Games?

As we all know, a great number of people in the world are sports fans because the sports does make us relaxed and exciting. A live football match can make thousands of men and women celebrate a whole night. The sports stars, especially who win the golden medal in the Olympic Games, are the heroes in people's minds. The Olympic Games are very important for them.

The Olympic Games have even been a national affair. The government is in a battle state since the day of applying for the right to hold the Games, going through an intense competition with the other countries. When the final winnership was obtained, it also meant that the government has a further and harder way to go: building different gymnasiums for different matches, renewing the transportation systems to fit the route to the Olympic Games, preparing enough hotels for the players and the audiences from all over the world. Everything is working for the Olympic Games.

However, should we really pay so much attention to this sports matter?

In my opinion, I don't think we should pay so much attention to the Olympic Games. There are many things waiting for us to deal with. The money and vigor which were paid on the Games can do more meaningful things. First, we can use this money to improve our educational conditions. There are still uncountable children

who don't have a chance to receive the basic education. Second, we can use this money to improve our medicine conditions. The number of people who is unable to afford the fees of medicine care is so high. Third, we can use this money to improve our environmental conditions. The pollution problem is becoming more and more serious. Let us make an imagination: if we spend the money which is used on the Olympic Games on the education, the transportation and the pollution, what the result will be? Of course, we will have so many new schools where children could receive the education; we will have many high-quality high ways; and the air and the water will be cleaner.

We can feel fun and passion from the Games, we can admire the talents of the excellent players, but what can be left after all the matches? A hot topic or a popular chatting theme? People may say we exchanged the culture with other countries and we have more business chances, but do these can be balanced with our payment?

We have no needs to pay such a great vigor and money on the matter, we can do many things which are more meaningful than it.

Group Members' Peer Comments

A's comments:

Your revision is much better than the first draft. I found you made many changes and added more information. The ideas are more meaningful and the organization is clearer and more logical. That's really good. You also correct some spelling and grammatical errors, which makes your revision good looking.

I also found you added three topic sentences in the fifth paragraph to make this paragraph clearer. But I still think your supporting ideas for each topic idea is not well developed. They are a bit short and weak. If you could add more information, it would be better. What's more, I don't think to use first person as the subject in the topic sentence is a good way. How about passive voice?

B's comments:

I have to say you did a good job. This revision looks much better. You make many changes and they really improve the writing quality.

The beginning part is good, but I don't understand "Half of the university students in Beijing and the others in other cities are busying with the Olympic Games". What are they busying with for the Olympic Games?

Now I understand your second paragraph. Thank you. But I think only an example of football match is not enough to show the popularity of sports. How about one or two more?

The organization of the fifth paragraph is clearer than before. But I am confused about your ideas. For the first half, you say we should use the money to improve education, medicine and environment. But latter you say we can improve education, transportation and environment. Why? Are they consistent?

C's comments:

Your revision let me know my comments are helpful. Thank you.

You correct a lot of your vocabulary spelling errors and sentence errors, but I still get a few in your revision. Such as, the 2nd sentence of the 1st paragraph, the 2nd sentence of the 3rd paragraph and the last sentence of the 6th paragraph. In the 3rd paragraph, what's the meaning of 'winnership'?

In addition, I found your ideas in the fifth paragraph are not consistent. Why?

I hope my comments are still helpful for you.

Final draft

Should we pay so much attention to the Olympic Games?

Beijing Olympic Game is coming soon! Nearly all the media newspapers, TV shows, radio programs and internet are filled with the information of Olympic Games. Each Chinese knows of the official mascots of Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, such as FuWa, the Nestle and the Water Cubic. A lot of the university students in Beijing and other cities are busying with the volunteers for the Olympic Games. However, is it really necessary for us to pay so much attention to Beijing Olympic Games?

As we all know, a great number of people in the world are sports fans because the sports does make us relaxed and exciting. A live football match can make thousands of men and women celebrate a whole night. A NBA game with Yao Ming can attract thousands of Chinese people's eyes. The sports stars, especially who are well-known all over the world or win the golden medal in the Olympic Games, are the heroes in people's minds. The Olympic Games are very important for them.

The Olympic Games have even been a national affair. The government is in a battle state since the day of applying for the right to hold the Games, going through an intense competition with the other countries. When our country finally obtain the right to host 2008 Olympic Games, it also means that the government has a longer and harder way to go: building different gymnasiums for different matches, renewing the transportation systems to fit the route to the Olympic Games, preparing enough hotels for the players and the audiences from all over the world. Everything is working for the Olympic Games.

However, should we really pay so much attention to this sports matter?

In my opinion, I don't think we should pay so much attention to the Olympic Games. There are many things waiting for us to deal with. The money and vigor which were paid on the Games can do more meaningful things. First, the educational

conditions need to be improved. There are still uncountable children who don't have a chance to receive the basic education. They are the future of our country and can't lose on the starting line. Second, the medicine conditions need to be improved. The number of people who is unable to afford the fees of medicine care is so high. If this problem can't be solved well, it may lead to the serious result to the stability of our society. Third, the environmental conditions need to be improved. The pollution problem is becoming more and more serious nowadays, which is certainly harmful to people's health. Let us make an imagination: if we spend the money which is used on the Olympic Games on the education, the medicine and the pollution, what the result will be? Of course, we will have so many new schools where children could receive the education; we will have many high-quality hospitals with low medicine fee; and the air and the water will be cleaner.

We can feel fun and passion from the Games, we can admire the talents of the excellent players, but what can be left after all the matches? A hot topic or a popular chatting theme? People may say we exchanged the culture with other countries and we have more business chances, but can these be balanced with our payment?

We have no needs to pay such great vigor and money on this matter. We can do many things which are more meaningful than it.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Song Wang was born on April 22, 1980 in Guiyang, China. He graduated from Guizhou University in 2002 with the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature. Within the same year, he passed the National Entrance Examination for Postgraduate and studied his Master degree in School of English, College of Foreign Languages, Guizhou University. Having completed all the courses and thesis prescribed in the teaching program, he was awarded the Degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature in 2005.

Upon graduation from Guizhou University in 2005, Song Wang has been enrolled in the Ph.D. program of English Language Studies in School of English, Institute of Social Technology, Suranaree University of Technology, Thailand. His research field is second language writing. In 2008, Song Wang started his working experience in Guizhou University. He is presently a lecturer in College of Foreign Languages.