Peer Correction vs. Self Correction in English Writing

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Abstract
This study examines how peer correction affects students’ self correction skills of English writing by comparing two different essays and analyzes the types of common errors made by medical students.

Keywords
Error analysis, peer correction, self correction, feedback on English writing

Introduction
The needs for English in the medical field are especially prevalent as English textbooks are used in some institutions and research papers are published in the internationally cited publications and/or SCI journals. To fulfill the current needs for competent English writing, teachers’ feedback on the learners’ writing plays an important role. It is usually the English teacher’s job to give learners feedback so they understand what errors to correct and how to revise. Along with teacher’s feedback, peer’s feedback has been utilized as part of error correction. This study is to investigate if peer correction affects on the learners’ ability to self-correct their errors and reduce them.

1 Literature Review

1.1 Error Analysis
It is important to understand what types and classifications of errors are usually made by ESL learners and how often they are made in order to provide the teaching instruction for them. Ellis(1985) stated that considering whether sentences are “overtly idiosyncratic” or “covertly idiosyncratic” is important. Kim(1998) noted that Korean high school students showed problems with determiners, especially articles as the most common error type, followed by awkward expressions. Cha(2004) verified and supported Kim’s findings with his university students, stating that they have the same problem. Other errors than articles such as over generalization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules and the use of false hypotheses were noted in Ryoo’s(1992) study.

Corder(1967) and Laroche(1983) asserted that error analysis helps students figure out how far towards the goal the learner has progressed and what remains to learn, reasoning the importance of error analysis. There are some critical views on error analysis. Brown(2000) indicated a major shortcoming as disregard of the learning process. Schachter(1974) and James(1998) viewed another limitation of error analysis as strategy of avoidance.

1.2 Feedback in English Writing
Studies investigated English writing feedback whether students incorporate teacher or peer feedback into their revisions. Further studies were done to learn if students understand feedback and how they response to feedback. According to Hedgcock & Lefkowitz’s(1994, 1996) study, EFL students believe feedback focused on linguistic accuracy is more useful while ESL students are more interested in feedback that helps them develop their ideas. Cho & MacArthur examined student drafts upon feedback from expert, feedback from peer and feedback from multiple peers and suggested that students with multiple peer feedback lead them to more complex repairs and revised drafts of higher quality revisions but understood peer feedback better than teacher feedback.

2 Methods
The subjects were 46 1st-year medical students(17 females, 29 males). Four students studied overseas and their English competence was superior to that of their peers. The 1st writing assignment was an essay whether Korean College Scholastic Ability Test adequately assesses learners’ English ability with justification of their reasons and suggestions for better assessment. These essays were peer corrected. Another was on IT industry in Korea and Mr. Ahn’s political career. It was self-corrected.

The types of errors were classified into 11 categories: subject-verb agreement, tense, wrong words, missing words, article, preposition, awkward expressions, parallelism, run-on sentence, because-clause used as a sentence, and plural errors. Technical errors such as punctuation, capitalization...
and spelling errors were out of consideration for the study.

3 Results

Errors of 11 categories were listed on the master sheet by the number of frequency. Classification and types of errors made by individual students were analyzed. It was noted that over three quarters of the subjects made errors of wrong word choice. Omitting inflective –s for plural nouns as in “most student” and subject-verb agreement errors as in “Ahn have announced that he consider running for Seoul mayor job.” were overlooked by over half of the subjects. These errors were not reduced on the second writing.

Errors in article, preposition, missing word, tense, awkward expression, using because-clause as sentence, parallelism, and run-on sentences are still difficult for these learners to correct.

4 Conclusion

Having fully aware of the importance of CSAT as a critical criterion for college entrance test, subjects were assigned to write whether this test adequately assesses students’ English ability by stating justification of their reasons as well as suggestions. The peers then reviewed the final draft of the writing and made comments on what they thought of the essay, what was necessary to improve, and what revisions were recommended. It was to examine how well and how many errors were corrected by peers. Peer’s feedback was to see if it helped learners to self correct their errors and furthermore, reduce errors.

Even though it is the teacher’s responsibility to provide feedback on the learners’ writing, reading essays of a large class size and providing them with relevant comments on grammar, contents, and coherence of the writing requires too much time and effort on the part of the teacher. Peer correction and feedback comes to fill the gap of demand from the learners and too much responsibility on the teacher.

Through the class interview, subjects expressed preference on teacher’s feedback although peer feedback was interesting. As some peer correction as a practice to correct errors rather than depending on the feedback itself.

The study is not few of limitations. The interval of the two essays was merely a three-week period, and only two essays were compared. Comparison of the peer corrected and self corrected was not statistically significant. Further study on a larger group in a more lengthy period may generate comprehensive conclusion and generalization.

References


