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Review of Applied Linguistics in China

Issues in Language Learning and Teaching



English Language Center Shantou University

汕头大学英语语言中心



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Review of Applied Linguistics in China

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Volume 3

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Review of Applied Linguistics in China

Issues in Language Learning and Teaching

The dawn of the 21st Century is a time of tremendous challenge and enormous potential for the English language in China, as well as the fields of TESOL and Applied Linguistics in general. With its recent accession to the WTO, the long-awaited 2008 Olympics in Beijing, and new language policies all calling for higher levels of English proficiency, China has made learning English a national priority. With nearly a quarter of the world's population, China also poses stimulating challenges for language researchers and theorists alike. The concept of "World Englishes," for example, will inevitably take on new relevance as more and more Chinese speakers of English enter the world stage. In addition, classroom realities in China will necessitate a more contextualized understanding of language learning, as well as the expansion of sites where researchers and teaching professionals can interact more fully and fruitfully.

To address these areas of pressing need, *Review of Applied Linguistics in China (RALC)* has emerged as a semi-annual publication by the English Language Center at Shantou University in China. Peer-refereed, *RALC* is dedicated to classroom-oriented research in English language learning and teaching, including the exploration of vital issues related to the teaching English in China and the learning and use of English by Chinese speakers worldwide. This theory-driven, research-based, and practice-oriented publication also strives to provide a vibrant interactive forum for researchers and practitioners at all levels of instruction in the fields of TESOL and Applied Linguistics. It is open to contributors from around the globe with experience researching or teaching in China or with students whose first language is Chinese.

Key to the success of this serial publication is an editorial

board consisting of top-notch researchers and practitioners who have learned or taught English in Chinese contexts, and/or are familiar with teaching Chinese students at home and abroad. They are experienced and genuinely concerned with issues related to the teaching, learning, and use of English by Chinese speakers. In addition, a rigorous, two-step review process ensures a high level of professional integrity and relevance.

The core of each issue is comprised of **full length, research-based articles** dedicated to a range of contemporary topics such as:

- ☐ Curriculum development and syllabus design
- ☐ Teaching methodology and reflective teaching
- ☐ Evaluation, assessment, and testing
- ☐ Materials development
- ☐ E-learning, distance learning, and cooperative learning
- ☐ Non-native English teacher education, professional standards, and development
- ☐ Language program administration and evaluation
- ☐ Classroom-oriented research methodology
- ☐ Second and foreign language learning and development
- ☐ Socio-cultural and sociopolitical aspects of language learning and teaching
- ☐ Affective variables in language learning
- ☐ Contrastive rhetoric issues pertinent to Chinese speakers of English
- ☐ Chinese students studying abroad

Each issue also contains an **interview** with a top researcher in the field. Addressed in the interview section are the researcher's evaluation of the current field, his/her thoughts on questions pertinent to the field, and perspectives on future directions of

study.

Next, a **mentoring column** is intended to provide a valuable connection between researchers and practitioners, and to guide research in areas where there are specific needs based on in-practice problems. Classroom teachers are encouraged to submit issues they have encountered in teaching English to Chinese native speakers. These practitioners will provide a description of the learning context, a brief account of the problem encountered, and any tentative solutions. The challenge will then be given to an expert in the field, who will respond with an analysis of the problem, a suggested research design and guidelines for implementing data collection, practical suggestions for classroom use, and a recommended reading list.

Finally, *RALC* publishes **reviews** of recent books and software in the field. In particular, *RALC* welcomes comparative discussions of several publications that are related to one topical category (e.g., contrastive rhetoric, reading-writing connection, pronunciation). Review articles should provide a description and evaluative comparison of materials or software, and discuss their relevant impact on classroom practice, as well as teacher education.

With its emphasis on contemporary issues in Applied Linguistics and TESOL viewed through the Chinese contextual lens, *RALC* serves as a focal point for language researchers and teaching practitioners interested in China and Chinese learners of English.

We would like to thank Li Ka Shing Foundation and Shantou University for their encouragement and generous support for this publication. We would also like to thank Higher Education Press for their support in bringing this volume into print and in making it available to the academic circle of Applied Linguistics in China.

In this issue

- Jette G. Hansen Edwards and Jun Liu provide a critical review of the research on the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) for peer response in second language writing classrooms. The article addresses the issue of the extent to which this mode provides a more effective

environment for responding to peers' papers, discussing comments, and revising than traditional modes of peer response. Edwards and Liu answer questions about the use, effectiveness, and implications of CMC peer response.

- ❑ Through a series of questionnaires and interviews, Jian E. Peng explores the relationship between Chinese students' willingness to communicate in the EFL classroom and the traditional Confucian values that they have learned in school and in society as a whole. In particular, she looks at how concepts such as "saving face" and belonging to the "ingroup" can lead students to refrain from participating in activities and discussions, even when they possess relatively high communicative abilities. Peng also offers some discussion of how the communicative approach might be adapted to fit better with the specific cultural context of Chinese learners of English.
- ❑ By analyzing results obtained from semantic judgment and sentence completion tasks given to three different groups of English speakers (native, advanced nonnative, and "steady-state" nonnative), Nan Jiang shows that a connection between words in a L2 and the concepts they represent in the L1 continues to exist, even after speakers have achieved high level proficiency. Although the influence of L1 semantic structures seems to decrease with the increase of fluency, it continues to effect the processing of meaning and distinguish it from that of native speakers. Jiang offers possible explanations for differences observed between non-native English speakers at different proficiency levels and considers the implications for adult ESL education in particular, and for second language acquisition in general.
- ❑ Retracing the history of communicative competence, Alan Hirvela explores why it generally isn't associated directly with writing. Hirvela explains the value of foregrounding communicative competence as a goal of L2 writing instruction, especially in EFL settings like China. He outlines the

implementation and applications of this foregrounding, illustrating the benefits of using communicative competence as both a goal of writing instruction and a reason for connecting speaking and writing.

- ❑ In an interview, Ulla Connor describes her history and work with contrastive rhetoric, explains the concept of “intercultural rhetoric,” and describes the notion of “small cultures,” illustrating the applications of this redefinition of culture to second language teaching and learning. Connor shares information about her recent travels, her organization, the Indiana Center for Intercultural Communication (ICIC), and her upcoming international conference. The interview concludes with Connor’s advice to non-native speakers who seek to publish or present their academic research.
- ❑ In our mentoring column, Liz England responds to Ruth Wong’s difficulties in getting her students to actively engage in the peer review process. She suggests that their unwillingness to seriously critique one another’s writing may be due in part to the specific circumstances of teaching in Hong Kong, where the expectation of teacher authority and the desire for peer acceptance can complicate an approach that has proven more successful in western countries. England then recommends several ways to foster more effective peer review in the writing classroom and offers a list of recommended readings.
- ❑ Corinne Renguet and Tony Becker review two recent publications related to the fields of Applied Linguistics and TESOL. Renguet looks at Gussenhoven and Jacobs’ *Understanding Phonology*, an introductory text that covers everything from the International Phonetic Alphabet to the “Maximum Onset Principle.” Becker evaluates *Strategies for Correct Writing* by Paul Fournier, a textbook intended to assist non-native students with writing English compositions at the university level.

Does Computer-Mediated Communication Facilitate Peer Response in L2 Writing Classrooms? A Critical Review

Jette G. Hansen Edwards

Chinese University of Hong Kong

Jun Liu

University of Arizona

Shantou University

This article provides a critical review of the research on the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) for peer response in second language (L2) writing classrooms and addresses the issue of the extent to which this mode provides a more effective environment for responding to peers' papers, discussing comments, and revising than traditional modes of peer response. The article addresses this issue by answering four main questions: How has CMC peer response been approached theoretically? To what extent have CMC modes been determined as more or less effective than traditional modes of peer response? How has effectiveness been defined and measured? Finally, what are the implications for future research and for pedagogy based on the findings of these studies? Findings from the review indicate that research is somewhat inconclusive due to different definitions of effectiveness, research foci, and methodological choices. However, there are a number of issues in the use of CMC for peer response that can need to be explored through future research and that have implications for pedagogical practice.

Introduction

Due to the increasing interest in technology and computer-mediated communication (CMC) for second language acquisition (SLA) in the language classroom, second language (L2) writing

researchers have begun exploring CMC modes for peer response¹ in contrast to the more commonly implemented pen-and-paper and face-to-face (FF) modes, referred to as “traditional” modes in this paper. CMC refers to the use of computer networks to create opportunities for learners to interact in either real-time² (synchronous communication) discussions through chat rooms, MOOs (Multi-user domains object-oriented), and computer programs such as Daedalus Interchange or through a delayed response time frame (asynchronous communication) via listservs, bulletin boards, email, and programs such as CommonSpace and Microsoft Word. The interest in utilizing CMC for peer response among L2 writing researchers and teachers has typically been grounded in interactionist and social constructivist theoretical frameworks. Working within these theoretical stances, researchers (e.g., Beauvois, 1992; Beauvois & Eledge, 1996; Belcher, 1999; Chun, 1994; Fanderclai, 1995; Kelm, 1992; Kern, 1995; Pellettieri, 2000; Reid, 1994; Rheingold, 1993; Sproull & Kiesler, 1991; Warschauer, 1996) have measured the effectiveness of CMC on increased amount of participation (e.g., increased output) and interaction, especially the negotiation of meaning, which are believed to facilitate SLA. Results indicate that CMC may be an “equalizer” in participation, fostering greater participation by less active students; creating a more equal playing field between the teacher and students by lessening a teacher-dominated discussion structure; and increasing classroom participation by all learners. Research also indicates that CMC may in some cases lead to more favorable opportunities

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- 1 Peer response, also sometimes called peer review, peer feedback, or peer editing, is an activity in which learners take on the role of teachers, editors, or tutors in providing information on each other's writing either through a written, oral, or computer-mediated mode (Liu & Hansen, 2002). Starting in the 1970s, when writing instruction moved from a traditional “product” view of writing to a process view with multiple drafting and peer feedback across the various drafts, peer response has become an important activity in the writing classroom.
 - 2 As one reviewer pointed out, in reality, few synchronous platforms are in fact in “real-time” and a better description may be “near real-time” since many of these platforms require an additional keystroke to send the message and make it visible to the participants, rendering a slight time delay.

for students to use and learn the target language through increased opportunities and motivation for meaning negotiation and authentic interaction (Beauvois, 1992; Kern, 1995), greater communication and lowered anxiety (Beauvois, 1992; Fanderclai, 1995; Kern, 1995; Reid, 1994), increased self-confidence and improved linguistic proficiency (Beauvois & Eledge, 1996), increased creativity (Warschauer, 1996) and ability to read larger chunks of text and to read for meaning (Kelm, 1992); contain more syntactic complexity and sophisticated language used (Chun, 1994; Kern, 1995; Warschauer, 1996); employ a wider array of discourse functions (Chun, 1994; Kern, 1995); and may push learners to produce output that is meaning and form-focused (Pellettieri, 2000).

Review of CMC and L2 peer response research studies

While the use of CMC for L2 peer response has increasingly been a focus of research (e.g., Bloch & Brutt-Griffler, 2001; Braine, 1997, 2001; DiGiovanni & Nagaswami, 2001; Huang, 1998a, 1998b; Liu & Sadler, 2003; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996; Schultz, 2000), it is not clear to what extent this mode provides a more effective environment for responding to peers' papers, discussing comments, and revising than traditional modes of peer response. The purpose of this article is therefore to critically review literature on CMC and L2 peer response by addressing the following questions: How has CMC peer response been approached theoretically? To what extent have CMC modes been determined as more or less effective than traditional modes of peer response? How has effectiveness been defined and measured? Finally, what are the implications for future research and for pedagogy based on the findings of these studies? The paper is organized as follows: First, a critical review of studies on CMC for L2 peer response is presented, followed by suggestions for future research and pedagogical suggestions. Finally, a conclusion summarizing the state-of-the-art in regard to CMC for L2 peer response is provided.

While all of the research studies reviewed for this article have as a major theoretical underpinning a process approach to L2 writing, which espouses multiple drafting and revision and in which peer response activities are an integral component, all of the studies also take other theoretical approaches to investigating the efficacy of traditional versus CMC modes for L2 peer response.

Each study is detailed in Table 1, below. As Table 1 indicates, the most common theoretical rationale taken in addition to process writing theory is an interactionist framework, and research utilizing this framework builds on work by SLA researchers such as Kern (1995) and Warschauer (1996), and defines efficacy as quantity and equality of participation as well as types of comments and interactions generated in peer response sessions. A second approach is cognitivist; only one study, Schultz (2000) utilized this framework, with effectiveness defined as the extent to which each mode fostered the utilization of various cognitive processes, some of which were perceived to be better for language development. The final approach, social constructivism, was also only taken by one study (Bloch and Brutt-Griffler, 2001), with effectiveness measured by the extent to which each mode fostered effective text processing and text construction strategies, and conditions for social aspects of L2 writing and learning. An analysis and synthesis of the findings of these studies is presented below, arranged by theoretical orientation. As all the studies have process writing theory as a framework supporting peer response activities, the studies are organized by the other main theoretical framework utilized in the study: interactionist (Braine, 1997, 2001; Huang, 1998a, 1998b; DiGiovanni & Nagaswami, 2001; Liu & Sadler, 2003; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996), cognitivist (Schultz, 2000), and social constructivist (Bloch and Brutt-Griffler, 2001).

Table 1 Studies on computer-mediated communication and L2 peer response

Study	Setting FL or SL	Mode	Theoretical framework	Effectiveness measurement(s)
Sullivan & Pratt (1996)	English as SL in Puer- to Rico	Synchronous (Daedalus InterChange), FF	Interactionist; Process writing	Quantity and quality of interaction in peer response groups
Braine (1997)	English as SL in US	Synchronous (LAN), FF*	Interactionist; Process writing	1. Writing quality 2. Degree of im- provement between first and final drafts 3. Lengths of comments (num- ber of words) on peer review sheets or in CMC
Braine (2001)	English as FL in Hong Kong	Synchronous (LAN), FF	Interactionist; Process writing	1. Writing quality 2. Degree of im- provement between first and final drafts

Huang (1998a)	English as FL in Taiwan	Synchronous (Daedalus InterChange), FF	Interactionist; Process writing	1. Quantity of speech produced 2. Amount of participation in peer response groups
Huang (1998b)	English as FL in Taiwan	Synchronous (Daedalus InterChange), FF	Interactionist; Process writing	Analysis of comments across 18 discourse functions
DiGiovanni & Nagaswami (2001)	English as a SL in US	Synchronous (Norton Textra Connect), FF	Interactionist; Process writing	Interaction in FF and CMC peer response sessions
Liu & Sadler (2003)	English as SL in US	Synchronous (MOO), FF & Asynchronous (Microsoft Word), pen-and-paper	Interactionist; Process writing	1. Types of comments made 2. Effects of comments on revision
Schultz (2000)	French as FL in US	Synchronous (Daedalus InterChange), FF	Cognitivist; Process writing	1. Quantity and quality of participation 2. Number of changes made by writers on papers on content, organization, style, grammar
Bloch & Brutt-Griffler (2001)	English as SL in US	Asynchronous (Commonspace)	Social constructivist; Process writing	1. Ability of CMC to foster social aspects of L2 writing/learning 2. Text processing and construction strategies

*FF = face-to-face

Interactionist framework

The majority of the research on CMC and L2 peer response has been conducted within an interactionist framework, with the underlying hypothesis that a greater amount of participation in the discussion - FF versus CMC - is beneficial for language development, and that certain types of comments and interactions are more beneficial for L2 writing and learning. The question of whether a traditional or a CMC mode of peer response is more effective has therefore been defined by a comparison between modes in terms of quantity of participation (and/or comments) and quality of comments and/or interactions generated in each mode. Each of these foci is discussed in turn below.

Quantity of participation and comments

Sullivan and Pratt (1996), Braine (1997), and Huang (1998a) have specifically addressed this issue although Huang (1998b), DiGiovanni and Nagaswami (2001), and Liu and Sadler (2003)

also discuss this topic as part of their analysis of types of comments and interactions generated in CMC versus traditional modes of peer response. The studies have conflicting findings. For example, while Braine (1997) and Liu and Sadler (2003) found that CMC groups generated a greater number of words during peer response sessions and Sullivan and Pratt (1996) found that there was greater participation in CMC than FF groups, Huang (1998a) and Huang (1998b) found that the FF groups generated more speech than the CMC groups. Huang (1998a) also found that the FF groups had a higher level of participation in each discussion than the CMC groups while DiGiovanni and Nagaswami (2001) found that the amount of interaction, and particularly negotiation, was higher in the FF than in the CMC groups. In sum, half of the studies found that CMC peer response had a higher quantity of comments and interactions, whereas the other studies found the opposite. These studies are discussed in more detail below.

Braine (1997), Liu and Sadler (2003), and Sullivan and Pratt (1996) found that quantity of comments and participation were higher in the CMC over the FF groups. Specifically, Braine found that the CMC group had more than twice as many peer response comments (480 versus 197 for the traditional class). The author also assessed the degree of interaction in the computer networked class and found that for the 480 words generated, 76% were between students. However, the instructor participated in the CMC discussions (though not in the FF discussions) and this likely affected the level of participation in the CMC discussion. Additionally, there was no analysis of the degree of interaction in the traditional classroom as a comparison with the interaction in the CMC classroom.

Sullivan and Pratt (1996) found that the FF groups had a greater number of turns than CMC groups (40-70 to 14-25), that participation in the CMC peer response activity was much greater than in the FF mode, with 100% participation in the CMC mode versus 50% in the FF mode, and that there was less teacher dominance in the CMC activity. These findings led the authors to conclude that computers are advantageous for teaching writing and to state "Students in the computer-assisted classroom dem-

onstrated more interest in discussions” (p. 500).

Liu and Sadler (2003) also found that the CMC groups in their study, in this case an asynchronous CMC mode utilizing Microsoft Word, had more comments (316 to 108) than traditional pen-and-paper groups; however, as the authors note, the reason for the greater number of comments was due to the use of the spellchecker and grammar checker in Microsoft Word by the peer responders. As a result, the comments were mostly concerned with grammar, spelling, and other minor editing issues. It is possible that had the students been using a different software program that did not have a spelling and grammar check feature, they may not have made as many comments. This leads to the possibility that it was the software and not the mode itself that fostered the greater number of comments.

In contrast to the previous studies, both Huang (1998a) and Huang (1998b) found that a traditional mode of peer response, in this case FF, might offer a more effective environment for commenting and participation. For example, Huang (1998a) found that the FF session generated a great deal more speech than the CMC session, 89.2 words in four person and 93.1 in five person FF groups in contrast to 21.6 and 37.1, respectively, for each of these CMC groups. She also found that CMC groups had lower levels of student participation: only 5.1 - 5.7% of writing episodes (a small discussion about a specific writing issue) had full group participation in contrast to 16.0 - 16.2% for the FF groups. The researcher suggests that “there was a higher possibility for the quality of a FF discussion to be superior, because there was a greater chance for ideas to be expressed by a student to be expanded, supported, or refuted by other students” (p. 4) and recommends that CMC not be used frequently for peer response. However, as she acknowledged, the fewer comments generated in the CMC group may have been caused by the slower typing speeds of a number of students.

Based on the same data set though a different research foci (types of comments - see below), Huang (1998b) also found that the FF groups made more comments overall (3.5 to 2.5 times more than the CMC groups), and spent more time discussing their writing plans and responding to comments. Based on this data,