

The Use of Online Paired and Grouped Peer Feedback in
Improving Low Proficiency Students' English Grammatical Ability
การใช้วิธีให้ข้อมูลย้อนกลับแบบจับคู่และกลุ่มผ่านระบบออนไลน์ต่อ
การพัฒนาความสามารถด้านไวยากรณ์ภาษาอังกฤษของนักเรียน
ที่มีความสามารถทางภาษาอังกฤษต่ำ

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การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาและเปรียบเทียบผลการให้ข้อมูลย้อนกลับระหว่างผู้เรียนแบบจับคู่และกลุ่มผ่านระบบออนไลน์ต่อการพัฒนาความสามารถด้านไวยากรณ์ภาษาอังกฤษในการเขียนของนักเรียนกลุ่มตัวอย่างระดับ

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มัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 6 ผู้วิจัยใช้วิธีการสุ่มแบบเจาะจงจากห้องเรียนสภาพจริง จำนวน 2 ห้องเรียน โดยกำหนดเป็นกลุ่มทดลองทั้ง 2 กลุ่ม กลุ่มทดลองที่ 1 มีนักเรียนจำนวน 22 คน และกลุ่มทดลองที่ 2 มีนักเรียนจำนวน 32 คน เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการวิจัย ได้แก่ แบบทดสอบการเขียนก่อนและหลังเรียนเพื่อศึกษาและเปรียบเทียบความถูกต้องของการใช้ไวยากรณ์เป้าหมายก่อนและหลังการเข้าร่วมกิจกรรมการให้ข้อมูลย้อนกลับแบบฝึกการเขียนเพื่อสำรวจความถี่ของการให้ข้อมูลย้อนกลับด้านไวยากรณ์เป้าหมาย และแบบสัมภาษณ์กึ่งโครงสร้างเพื่อศึกษาผลสะท้อนของนักเรียนที่มีต่อการให้ข้อมูลย้อนกลับด้านไวยากรณ์เป้าหมาย สถิติที่ใช้ในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงปริมาณ คือ ค่าร้อยละ ค่าเฉลี่ย ค่าเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน และค่า T-test และการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพ ใช้วิธีการจัดกลุ่ม ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ผลของการให้ข้อมูลย้อนกลับแบบคู่ และกลุ่มต่อผลสัมฤทธิ์ทางการเขียนด้านไวยากรณ์ในภาพรวมทั้งก่อนและหลังเรียนของนักเรียน มีค่าเฉลี่ยรวมไม่แตกต่างกันอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติ และการให้ข้อมูลย้อนกลับทั้ง 2 กลุ่ม มีค่าขนาดอิทธิพล (Cohen's *d*) ต่อไวยากรณ์เป้าหมายส่วนใหญ่ในระดับต่ำ ผลการวิจัย ชี้ให้เห็นว่าการให้ข้อมูลย้อนกลับระหว่างผู้เรียนนั้นมีความสำคัญและมีประโยชน์ต่อการสอนทักษะการเขียน อย่างไรก็ตาม การให้ข้อมูลย้อนกลับจากครูยังคงมีความจำเป็นสำหรับนักเรียนที่มีความสามารถทางด้านภาษาอังกฤษในระดับต่ำ

คำสำคัญ: ข้อมูลย้อนกลับระหว่างเพื่อนออนไลน์ ความสามารถด้านไวยากรณ์ในงานเขียน นักเรียนที่มีความสามารถต่ำ ข้อมูลย้อนกลับระหว่างเพื่อนแบบคู่ออนไลน์ ข้อมูลย้อนกลับระหว่างเพื่อนแบบกลุ่มออนไลน์

Abstract

The study aimed to investigate and compare the effects of online paired peer feedback (OPP) and grouped peer feedback (OGP) on Mattayomsuksa 6 students' English grammatical ability in writing. Two intact groups of fifty-four Mattayomsuksa 6 students studying at a

secondary school in Hatyai, Songkhla were purposively selected as participants in this study. They were assigned to two experimental groups, namely, OPP group (n = 22) and OGP group (n = 32). The instruments employed in this study were pre- and post-writing tests, writing tasks and semi-structured interviews. The pre- and post-writing tests were used to obtain the accuracy scores of targeted grammatical points. The writing tasks were employed to reveal the frequency of students' comments on the four grammatical aspects, and the interview data were used to illustrate students' reflections on the targeted grammatical aspects they focused on when giving comments. The quantitative data gathered from the pre- and post-writing tests and the writing tasks were analyzed using descriptive statistics and t-test for means, standard deviation and percentage. The qualitative data collected from semi-structured interviews were analyzed and categorized into themes. The findings showed that neither types of peer feedback showed any significant difference in improving students' overall grammatical ability in writing. However, both types were found to have practical significance to most of the targeted grammatical points at a low level. The findings suggest that peer feedback is beneficial for writing instruction. However, the teacher's feedback is needed for low proficiency students.

Keywords: Online peer feedback, grammatical ability in writing, low proficiency students, online paired peer feedback, online grouped peer feedback

Introduction

English is an international language which is used all over the world as a first, second and foreign language. In Thailand, English has been included in the curriculum as a compulsory foreign language for nearly a century. However, Thai students seem not to be well equipped with English competence and the evidence for this was found in their low scores in a countrywide standardized test -- the Ordinary National Educational Test (ONET). ONET results in 2013, 2014 and 2015 showed that the average English scores of Mattayomsuksa 6 students were 25.35, 23.44 and 24.98, respectively.

Among English communicative skills, writing is considered the most difficult skill for students to acquire, as it involves a complex process and requires syntactic, semantic, rhetorical, and discourse knowledge (Hyland, 2003; Nunan, 1990; Williams, 2004). Among these features, Thais' lack of grammatical knowledge is viewed as an obstacle in achieving good writing (Kaweera & Usaha, 2008; Siengsawang, 2006). Thai students have been found to make various grammatical errors in their writing, particularly in articles, tenses, sentence structure, prepositions and subject-verb agreement (Nonkukhekhong, 2013; Suwangard, 2014; Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013). As McCaskill (1998) emphasized, grammar knowledge is required in a good writer. The lack of grammatical knowledge may lead to misunderstanding the meaning of the text.

In the Thai context, teachers have played a leading role in providing knowledge, error correction and feedback in writing instruction. Students are consequently seen as passive learners who rely mostly on

teacher feedback without questioning what they have received. To encourage students to become less dependent and more active learners in a writing class, teachers can use peer feedback activities.

Peer feedback can be defined as a process in which students provide written and oral comments on a classmates' writing through active engagement over multiple drafts (Hyland & Hyland 2006; Stanley, 2011). Peer feedback can be generally supported by sociocultural theory since writing and learning are a social process in which students take learning as a social activity occurring through interaction with peers (Hansen & Liu, 2005). In Vygotsky's (1978) view of zone of proximal development (ZPD), what a learner needs to be able to learn or do something independently is to get help from an expert or a more knowledgeable person. Typically, the expert or the more knowledgeable person has been perceived to be an adult or a teacher (Wertsch, 1985). However, peers are recently viewed to be simultaneously experts and novices (Swain, Brooks, & Tocalli-Beller, 2002; Swain & Watanabe, 2013).

Peer feedback is found to fit well with Johnson and Johnson's (1998) five basic principles of cooperative learning, namely, positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face promotive interaction, interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing. The first component, positive interdependence, is based on the idea that all members in a team are reliant on each other to achieve a goal and the group success is attributed to contributions from every member. Individual accountability is each learner's belief that learning their material is crucial. Each group member has to be responsible for their own as well as their

group members' learning and makes a contribution to the group. The third component is where peer feedback process occurs the most. In this process, learners are engaged in face-to-face interaction, where they explain, argue, negotiate and link the current material with what they have learned earlier. Next, learners' sufficient social skills are developed through the practice of leadership, trust-building, communication, decision-making and conflict resolution skills. Finally, group processing involves group members establishing group goals, periodically assessing their performance as a team and then identifying what they need to change in order to function more effectively in the future. As peer feedback proceeds, students are expected to first have opportunities to work collaboratively with peers and then to improve their writing abilities individually (Tsay & Braday, 2012).

Additionally, peer feedback is found to help improve students' sense of being good readers, raise writers' awareness of their individual strengths and weaknesses, and encourage a collaborative learning process (Rollinson, 2005; Tsui & Ng, 2000). Students may also more effectively write and revise their writing by incorporating comments from their peers (Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Rollinson, 2005).

Traditionally, peer feedback is provided through a paper-pencil or face-to-face mode. However, with the increase of technology and the Internet, electronic feedback has become a viable option. Electronic feedback (e-feedback or online feedback) can be defined as feedback in digital written form and sent via the electronic platform. It transfers the concepts of oral response into the electronic space and the online

collaborative platform (Tuzi, 2004; Van der Geest & Remmers, 1994). Thus, the platform for providing peer feedback has shifted from the traditional method, paper-pencil, to computer-mediated communication (CMC) or a social annotation tool (SA) such as Facebook, Wiki, and Google Docs (Hedin, 2012). With the usefulness of social networking tools, students are provided with opportunities to interact with their peers and teachers both in real time (synchronously) and with delay (asynchronously).

The number of students included in peer feedback activities is another issue of interest in an EFL classroom. Many studies have focused on paired peer feedback, often referred to as individual peer feedback, single peer feedback or peer to peer feedback, a process in which a learner gives comments and provides feedback on a peer's writing. These studies found that this type of peer feedback has positive results compared to teacher feedback since it increases interaction between two students and creates a sense of critical readers and writers (Cho & MacArthur, 2010; de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994; Rollinson, 2005; Shehadeh, 2007; Tsui & Ng, 2000). Recently, researchers' interest has shifted from paired peer feedback to grouped peer feedback because of the belief that grouped peer feedback is more effective since it can offer more reliable and valid help to students (Shehadeh, 2007). Peer feedback in a group provides opportunities such as comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982), comprehensible output (Swain, 1985), cooperative language learning (McGroarty, 1989), and particularly "negotiated interaction" (Gass & Selinker, 1994, p. 217). Students need to negotiate the meaning of the context in writing by questioning, explaining and discussing in a group.

Peer feedback is normally conducted in the form of paired peer feedback, and a number of previous studies have focused on this type of feedback. The studies mostly compared peer feedback with other sources of feedback such as teacher feedback and self-feedback in different settings and with the use of a variety of procedures (Caulk, 1994; Cho & MacArthur, 2010; Tsui & Ng, 2000). The findings showed that peer feedback had more positive results than teacher feedback, as it increased interaction between two students and also made students become more critical readers and writers (Cho & MacArthur, 2010; Rollinson, 2005).

Apart from paired peer feedback, some researchers have paid attention to the impact of grouped peer feedback, a process in which students give comments and provide feedback on a peer's writing in a group (Shehadeh, 2007; Yu & Lee, 2014). Shehadeh (2007) proposed that grouped peer feedback is more "reliable and valid" (p.150) than individual feedback since students are likely to give feedback in various ways such as sharing knowledge, discussing different views of the writing, and pointing out missing information. Despite this remark, feedback given by groups of more than two students has received little attention in research (Storch, 2005; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007; Zhu, 2001). In particular, research that compares paired to grouped feedback on students' writing is even more limited.

Hence, this study aimed to compare the effects of online paired and grouped peer feedback on improving students' grammatical ability in writing using Google Docs as a writing and feedback tool. Four grammatical features, namely, articles, sentence structure, capitalization and subject-

verb agreement, are the targeted language points in this study and they were found to be the ten most frequent grammatical errors of Thai students' writing (Nonkukhekhong, 2013; Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013). However, since the target population were low proficiency students, this study mainly focused on the four grammatical features as discrete points regardless of content and idea development. Writing is thus treated as a platform for students to practice grammatical knowledge.

Research questions

1. Are there any differences between English grammatical ability in writing of Mattayomsuksa 6 students receiving online paired peer feedback and those with grouped peer feedback? If so, what are they?
2. What grammatical aspects do Mattayomsuksa 6 students focus on when giving peer feedback?

Research methodology

Research design and participants

Since this study focused on the effects of paired and grouped peer feedback on grammatical ability improvement, students' grammatical ability before and after participating in peer feedback activity needed to be compared. Consequently, this research adopted a quasi-experimental method with a pre- and post-test design. Two experimental groups were employed: one with online paired peer feedback (OPP) and the other with online grouped peer feedback (OGP). Fifty four students from two intact groups were purposively selected to be the participants in this study. They were enrolled in a fundamental English course at a secondary school in

Hatyai, Songkhla. According to the results of an English achievement test from the previous academic year, all participants had a low level of English proficiency and were inexperienced in using peer feedback. Due to practicality and classroom management, one intact group with 22 students was placed into the OPP group and the other intact group with 32 students was assigned to the OGP group. The participants in the OPP group provided feedback to their partner only. In contrast, the participants in the OGP group provided feedback to their three group members.

Data collection instruments

1. Writing tests

Two writing tests, a pre-test and a post-test, were used to measure students' grammatical ability before and after the treatment in four aspects: articles (ART), subject-verb agreement (SV), sentence structure (SS), and capitalization (CAP). The participants in both experimental groups were assigned to construct a 100-120 word piece of writing under the same topic, "My Best Friend," in both the pre-test and the post-test. The writing test was piloted with 20 Mattayomsuksa 6 students at another high school in Hatyai in order to determine the suitability of the selected topic and time allocation. The pilot study showed that the students were able to write a paragraph based on the given topic within the time allocated (50 minutes).

2. Writing tasks

Both experimental groups were required to complete three descriptive writing tasks in 50 minutes for each topic using Google Docs. The participants were asked to write a 100-120 word paragraph for each task relating to their current learning tasks. To avoid possible interventions

such as help from other people outside class, the participants were not allowed to write out of class. After writing the first draft of each task, the students were asked to provide feedback to their partner or group members within 50 minutes. Then they were required to revise their draft in the next class and submit the final draft at the end of class. In total, the process of writing one task lasted about three periods of 50 minutes. The same procedure was employed in the second and third writing tasks.

3. Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to investigate the students' reflections on the four targeted grammatical aspects they focused on when giving peer feedback. Six students from each group were selected to be interviewees for each writing task. The interviews were conducted in Thai in order to obtain as much information as possible without any language barriers after the students finished each of the three writing tasks but before post-test writing. The sessions took approximately 10 to 20 minutes per interviewee.

Data collection procedure

The data for this study were collected over a period of 16 weeks. One researcher was the sole teacher of the course. The overall research procedure consisted of three following phases: 1) pre-treatment process, 2) treatment process, and 3) post-treatment process as shown in Figure 1.

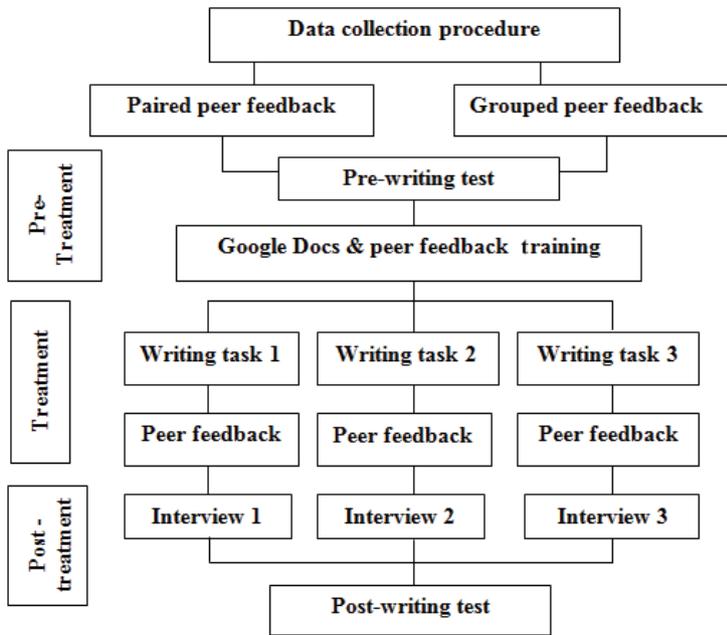


Figure1: Data collection procedure

In the pre-treatment process, the participants in both groups were asked to take the pre-test. Then they were trained to use Google Docs and to provide feedback on their peers' online writing. In the treatment process, the participants were required to complete the three writing tasks, two drafts each, and participate in peer feedback activities. After submitting each writing task, six students from each group who made the most and the least changes were selected to be interviewed. In the post-treatment process, the participants needed to take the post writing test.

Data analysis

1. Pre- and post-test

To examine the effects of the two types of treatment on learners' use of the four targeted grammatical structures, the frequency of the correct use of the targeted grammatical structures was calculated by means of obligatory occasion analysis (Pica, 1984). Obligatory occasion analysis is a method for examining how accurately students used specific grammatical features. To calculate the grammatical accuracy scores, each targeted grammatical aspect was identified separately. The number of chances where a certain target aspect was required to form a correct sentence in the context was considered an obligatory occasion. The number of correct use of specific grammatical aspects in the context was considered as the number of correct suppliance. The number of overuse of the target aspect shown in the context was considered non-obligatory context. An accuracy score was then calculated for each student by dividing the total number of correctly supplied specific aspect by the total number of obligatory occasions and overuse and then expressed as percentage as illustrated in the following formula.

$$\frac{n \text{ correct suppliance in context}}{n \text{ obligatory context} + n \text{ suppliance in non obligatory contexts}}$$

The frequency of the correct use of the four grammatical structures was coded and counted by two coders who were non-native English teachers with more than four years of English teaching experience. The calculated inter-coder reliability (Cohen's Kappa) was 0.83 for the pre-test and 0.9 for the post-test. Then to compare the differences between

the accuracy scores of the pre- and post-tests of each group, the data were analyzed using t-test.

2. Writing tasks

The comments students gave to their peers' writing in each task were calculated and analyzed using descriptive statistics for percentage.

3. Semi-structured interview

The interview data were analyzed and categorized into themes according to grammatical aspects the students focused on.

Findings

1. Accuracy scores of the pre- and post-tests

The data gathered from the pre- and post-tests revealed that the overall accuracy scores of the post-test of both groups were not statistically significantly different from those in the pre-test as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The accuracy scores of the pre- and post-tests within group

	Target	Pre-test (%)		Post-test (%)		t	Sig. (2-tailed)
		M	S.D.	M	S.D.		
OPP	Art	47.4	24.4	45.2	32.3	-0.32	0.75
	SV	48.1	15.5	61.1	20.6	2.54*	0.019
	SS	92	17.4	85.6	15	-1.23	0.234
	Cap	84	15.2	87.3	20.4	0.61	0.549
	overall	67.9	11.1	69.8	14.9	0.53	0.604
OGP	Art	29.2	34.4	27.2	33.5	-0.25	0.801

Target	Pre-test (%)		Post-test (%)		t	Sig. (2-tailed)
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.		
SV	61.3	15.5	67.8	22.7	1.63	0.112
SS	87.5	13.4	92.1	9.49	1.89	0.068
Cap	85.9	12.1	91.2	7.43	2.34*	0.026
overall	66	10.7	69.6	10	1.59	0.122

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 1 indicates that students' overall scores in the OPP group did not reach statistical significance when comparing the pre-test ($M = 67.87$, $S.D. = 11.07$) and the post-test ($M = 69.81$, $S.D. = 14.92$). When considering each aspect of language points, the difference in the aspect of subject-verb agreement between the pre-test ($M = 48.14$, $S.D. = 17.40$) and the post-test ($M = 61.09$, $S.D. = 20.63$) was found to be statistically significant ($t_{(21)} = 2.54$, $p < 0.5$). OGP students' overall scores showed no statistically significant difference in the pre-test ($M = 65.95$, $S.D. = 10.72$) and the post-test ($M = 69.57$, $S.D. = 10.01$). Considering each type of grammatical aspects in the OGP, the difference of the accuracy scores of capitalization between the pre-test ($M = 85.85$, $S.D. = 12.13$) and the post-test ($M = 91.17$, $S.D. = 7.43$) was found to be significantly different ($t_{(31)} = 2.34$, $p < .05$).

When comparing the scores gained from the pre-test to post-test between the two groups, the results revealed no significant difference between them as illustrated in Table 2. It can be said that improvement

in the students' grammatical ability did not differ. Further, Cohen's effect size value in most aspects suggested a low practical significance (Art, ES = 0.12; SV, ES = 0.12; Cap, ES = 0.12).

Table 2. The gained scores of the writing tests between two groups

Aspects	OPP (n=22)		OGP(n=32)		t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Cohen's <i>d</i> (ES)
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.			
Art	1.95	1	2.06	0.84	0.42	0.68	0.12
SV	2.36	0.95	2.25	0.98	-0.4	0.67	0.12
SS	1.91	1.02	2.22	0.94	1.15	0.26	0.32
Cap	2.18	1.01	2.06	1.01	-0.4	0.67	0.12
Overall	2.1	1	2.3	1	0.8	0.42	0.22

2. Student's comments on the four grammatical aspects in the writing tasks

Data collected from the three writing tasks revealed that the number of students' comments on the four grammatical aspects varied across the three tasks as illustrated in Figure 2.

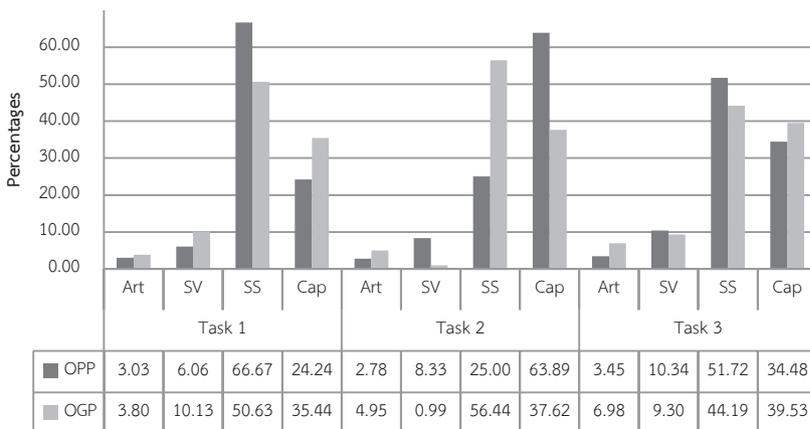


Figure 2. Frequency of students' comments on the four grammatical aspects across the three tasks

Figure 2 showed that in all writing tasks the aspects that students in both groups made the most comments about were sentence structure and capitalization, and the aspects with the least comments were subject-verb agreement and articles.

3. Semi structured interviews

The interview data showed students' reflections on the four targeted grammatical aspects. Overall, the students from both groups reported that they did not focus on articles and subject-verb agreement when giving comments on their peer writing due to their limited knowledge of such grammatical aspects as shown in the following comment:

3.1 Students' reflections on articles

“I think my English grammatical knowledge was not sufficient, especially on articles to provide feedback on my friend's writing so I chose not to comment on this aspect in order not to make my friend's writing get worse.”

(St3OPP, personal communication, January 6, 2017)

As exemplified in the comment below, some students revealed that they did not have enough knowledge about articles, so they avoided giving feedback on this aspect.

“I do not have enough knowledge about articles and I don't know where to look so I did not give any comments on this aspect.”

(St7OGP, personal communication, March 2, 2017)

3.2 Students' reflections on subject verb agreement

Some students stated that they were not certain of what they know about subject-verb agreement so they rarely gave comments on this aspect.

“ I was not sure if what I know about subject- verb agreement was right or wrong, so I did not frequently give comments on this aspect on my partners' writing.”

(St2OPP, personal communication, January 6, 2017)

3.3 Students' reflections on capitalization

Interestingly, students in both groups claimed that they were confident when giving feedback about capitalization.

“My English is not good and I do not really know about articles so I mainly focused on capitalization which I think I know well.”

(St9OGP, personal communication, February 10, 2017)

“When giving comments, I firstly focused on capitalization because I think it is easy to see. I am confident that my comments on capitalization were correct.”

(St20OPP, personal communication, January 6, 2017)

3.4 Students' reflections on sentence structure

One student reported that a number of the comments on sentence structures received from a peer made him capable of making comments on this aspect in his peer writing.

“I gave many comments on sentence structure because one of my partners gave me many comments on this aspect on my writing. I think those comments made me now know how to write correctly on sentence structure and then I think I am good at this aspect so I provided many comments about this aspect on my other partners' writing.”

(St1OGP, personal communication, February 16, 2017)

3.5 Students' reflections on other points

Some students revealed that they did not interact with only their partners; they communicated with their friends who were sitting around them to ask for help when they had difficulty in providing feedback.

“Sometimes, I asked A or B who were not my partners to help me look at and read through my partners' writing because I did not understand and was not sure that my comments were correct.”

(St8OPP, personal communication, February 16, 2017)

Though numerous students in both groups reported that they thought peer feedback was useful in their writing, they stated that if it was possible, they would like to receive feedback from both peer and teacher.

“I thought comments from my peers were useful but I thought if there were comments from a teacher included, it would be better since the teacher was more knowledgeable.”

(St21OPP, personal communication, January 6, 2017)

“I thought peer feedback was useful but if it was possible, I would like to receive comments from a teacher after receiving from peers.”

(St1OGP, personal communication, February 16, 2017)

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that even though the OPP and the OGP did not significantly improve the students' overall grammatical ability in writing, both could help students improve their use of grammatical aspects, and the practical effects of improvement were revealed to range from small to medium. Interestingly, the students from both groups were found not to be able to improve the use of article which has been found to be one of the aspects that is difficult for EFL learners (or even advanced learners) to master (Barret & Chen, 2011; Crompton, 2011; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami & Takashima, 2008). This difficulty may be caused by their first language interference, especially for Asian learners whose mother tongue does not have the article system (Barret & Chen, 2011; Crompton, 2011; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami & Takashima, 2008). For Thai learners, the fact that the Thai language has no articles coming before nouns may explain Thais' neglect of this grammatical aspect in both writing and speaking (Bennui, 2008; Likitrattanaporn, 2001).

Even though training on the aspect of articles was provided, the students did not appear to improve in their ability to use articles. One explanation could be their low level of English proficiency. A similar finding was found in Kamimura's (2006) study investigating the effectiveness of peer feedback on high and low proficiency learners' language improvement. Kamimura found that even though both high and low proficiency learners improved in overall quality of writing in the post-test, some low proficiency learners seemed unable to use the knowledge they had obtained through peer feedback training adequately in the post-test due to their limited English ability.

The interview data in the current study also indicated that students' low proficiency might be one of the factors influencing their limited improvement. Most of the students from both groups viewed their English grammatical ability as being so insufficient that they could not provide constructive feedback on their peers' writing. A similar finding was reported in Cheng and Warren (2005) who found that half of the 27 Hong Kong undergraduate student interviewees saw themselves as being unqualified to review their peers' tasks because of their limited English proficiency, leading to their avoidance of providing feedback. Even though the students in this study were trained for over six hours on how to provide feedback on the four targeted grammatical aspects, their self-efficacy seemed to be a barrier in improving their ability. It may be possible that this barrier makes low proficiency level students unable to provide constructive feedback to their peers and unlikely to benefit from the same proficiency level peers. Additionally, the students reported that comments from teachers were still necessary for them because they viewed the teacher as more knowledgeable. Similar findings were observed in Nelson and Carson's (1998) interview of four L2 university students. The findings showed that students preferred teacher comments to peer comments so they incorporated teacher comments in their revisions more frequently than peers'. The current study's finding can be explained by Vygotsky's (1978) view of "ZPD" in that what was significant for learning was the process that an expert or a more knowledgeable person would help students from not being able to learn without others' help to being able to learn independently. It is possible that some low proficiency students

in the current study need assistance from a more knowledgeable person who is a teacher rather than a novice who is a peer who has the same proficiency level to improve their grammatical knowledge ability.

When comparing the two types of peer feedback activities, the findings illustrated that there was no significant difference between them, suggesting the number of reviewers in peer feedback activities did not affect the degree of improvement of grammatical ability in writing. This suggests that providing feedback via individual peer or multiple peers does not affect the results. In fact, the matter that positively affects students' grammatical ability in the current study could be the interaction between students while participating in peer feedback activities. As Swain and Lapkin (2002) proposed when participating in peer feedback, students could serve as both experts and novices. They benefit from the interactions through their discussions, sharing ideas and critiques. The interview data support this claim. Some students in the study reported that when they had difficulty providing feedback to their partners, they would seek help from friends sitting next to them. These findings can be explained by a sociocultural theory which asserts that students first achieve a new function with the aid of another person and then internalize this function so that they can perform it without any help (Vygotsky, 1978). Furthermore, one of the students in the OGP group reported that he learned by receiving comments from peers and tried to pass what he learned onto other peers. Additionally, all the students claimed they thought peer feedback on their drafts was useful because their peers helped them correct their errors in writing. When students participated in

peer feedback, they interacted with each other. The interaction did not happen just between them and partners; instead, they asked for help, negotiated the meaning of comments and discussed writing issues with other peers. It is conceivable that the interactions between students play an essential role in helping students improve their grammatical ability in writing. This finding seems to support earlier findings that peer feedback is useful (Caulk, 1994; Cho & MacArthur, 2010; Rollinson, 2005; Tsui & Ng, 2000), and that students can effectively revise their writing by incorporating their peers' comments (Caulk, 1994; Rollinson, 2005).

Unfortunately, the participants' sample size in this study was rather small, limiting the researchers' ability to firmly conclude the effects of both types of feedback on students' improvement in the four targeted grammatical aspects. It is possible that if a larger sample size had been used in this study, the results could have been strongly confirmed.

Conclusion and pedagogical implications

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the mode of peer feedback, either in pair or in group, does not affect the improvement of students' grammatical ability. Both types of peer feedback appear to be able to help students improve grammatical ability in some areas. These findings have pedagogical implications. Firstly, peer feedback should be considered as an essential component to encourage students to become active learners in writing instruction. Secondly, since low proficiency students had great difficulty providing feedback to their peers, teacher feedback should be combined with peer feedback in order to provide

feedback on some difficult grammatical aspects, especially in the use of articles. Additionally, teachers should be concerned with how to increase students' confidence in demonstrating their English knowledge because confidence seems to be an obstacle for EFL students participating in peer feedback activities.

Recommendations

Due to the small sample size in this study, generalization of the findings is problematic. Therefore, the effects of the two types of peer feedback need to be further investigated using a larger sample. Additionally, a longitudinal study should be conducted so as to investigate whether the students can succeed in improving their grammatical ability if they have a longer training period. Data collected across two consecutive semesters or longer time may reveal more valid results of what aspects of grammatical ability students can develop. Students can have more chances to practice writing and give feedback on certain grammatical points, which can possibly help them improve their grammatical ability. To also develop students' overall writing ability, other features contributing to good writing such as content and idea development can be emphasized.

Since the current study mainly focused on using the quantitative approach, further research should adopt a qualitative approach in order to gain more insight in the findings. Textual analysis of students' writing and comments from peers can possibly show the relation between

feedback on certain points and its effect on the grammatical aspects which students are able to improve.

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