Students' perceptions of peer feedback

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Abstract

Researchers have posited that students have different perceptions of peer feedback depending on their cultural background. However, studies on American students' perceptions of peer feedback in foreign language writing research are scarce. The purpose of this study was to investigate American students' perceptions of peer feedback in college foreign language courses. Quantitative results showed that students had overall high perceptions of the experience, with significantly higher perceptions of receiving written comments than either reading their partner's composition or receiving face-to-face feedback from their partner. In addition, qualitative results revealed that students reported receiving from their partners more global aspect comments, focused on organization and idea development, than local aspect comments, focused on grammar and mechanics.

Keywords: peer feedback; writing instruction; student perceptions; foreign language; mixed methods.

Resumen

Algunos investigadores han expresado que los alumnos tienen percepciones variadas, según su origen cultural, en cuanto a la retroalimentación que reciben de sus pares. Sin embargo, aun faltan estudios en el campo de la escritura en lenguas segundas que investiguen las percepciones acerca de la retroalimentación por pares de alumnos estadounidenses. El propósito del presente estudio fue investigar las percepciones de estos alumnos acerca de la retroalimentación por pares en clases universitarias de español como lengua extranjera. Los resultados cuantitativos indicaron que los alumnos tuvieron percepciones positivas acerca de la experiencia en general, con percepciones significativamente más altas acerca de recibir comentarios por escrito de sus pares que de leer el ensayo de sus pares o de recibir retroalimentación cara a cara. Además, los resultados cualitativos revelaron que los alumnos indicaron que recibieron más comentarios enfocados en aspectos globales, como la organización y el desarrollo de ideas, que en aspectos locales, como mecánica y gramática.

Palabras clave: retroalimentación por pares, enseñanza de la escritura, percepciones de los alumnos, lenguas extranjeras, métodos mixtos.

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WRITING IS AN essential component of foreign language learning. The importance of writing as a mode of communication has been delineated by The National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (NSFLEP) and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) in the Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century (SFLL), which encompass five FL curricular goals: communication, cultures, comparisons, connections, and communities (NSFLEP, 2006). The Communication goal includes three standards that address three different modes of communication, namely, interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational, which can all be incorporated into foreign language classes through writing instruction.

Despite the importance of writing as a mode of communication, however, research specifically addressing foreign language (FL) writing instruction is scarce, although the need for clarification of the purpose of writing instruction has been identified as essential in FL writing research (Reichelt, 2001). Several scholars and researchers focused on FL pedagogy and acquisition have highlighted the importance of peer feedback as part of the writing process (Omaggio Hadley, 2000; Shrum & Glisan, 2005) and have conducted empirical studies to investigate various aspects of the implementation of peer feedback in the FL classroom (Amores, 1997; Carson & Nelson, 1996; de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994; de Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Hu, 2005; Liu & Hansen, 2005; Min, 2005; Min, 2006; Nelson & Carson, 1998; Tsui & Ng, 2000).

Grounded in sociocultural theory, peer feedback provides students with scaffolding opportunities to advance their zones of proximal development (de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994, 2000; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Liu & Hansen, 2005). The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving […] in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). In addition, peer feedback provides opportunities for students to reflect on their roles as writers and audience, on the negotiation of meaning needed in order for the intended message to be communicated successfully, and on the linguistic and rhetorical features necessary to achieve the communication of meaning (Hu, 2005; Kinsler, 1990; Williams, 2005).

Literature Review: Peer Feedback

In the writing process, it is essential that students receive feedback on their progress before they submit their final drafts for summative assessment, as it is through explicit relevant feedback that student writers will be able to engage in the editing and revision of their writing, thus improving their work (Omaggio Hadley, 2000; Shrum & Glisan, 2005). Scholars have highlighted the importance of responding to student writing in a variety of ways, including teacher and peer feedback (Omaggio Hadley, 2000; Shrum &

Glisan, 2005; Williams, 2005). In relation to the latter, Williams (2005) stated that "all writers can benefit from having a real audience to write for, especially if the readers can provide helpful feedback. A readily available audience in the classroom is the writer's classmates, or peers" (p. 93). Hence, the incorporation of a peer feedback component into FL writing instruction seems not only feasible but also a potential source of benefit for students.

A social constructivist perspective
A major justification for including peer feedback as part of writing instruction is the Vygotskian theoretical framework of social constructivism/sociocultural theory. Liu and Hansen (2005) explain that "cognitive development is a result of social interaction in which an individual learns to extend her or his current competence through the guidance of a more experienced individual" (p. 5), thus helping her or him advance her or his zone of proximal development (ZPD). In this sense, students who engage in collaboration during peer feedback sessions have the opportunity to negotiate meaning and construct their understanding of language mechanics (local aspect) and discursive features (global aspect).

Social interaction and negotiation of meaning have been posited to be the basis for the construction of knowledge (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). This approach involves social interactions in which "a more knowledgeable 'other' structures the learning experience in a way that allows the novice to overcome whatever limitations in skill might impede his or her attainment of a desired goal" (Prawat, 1996, p. 217). In other words, learning and knowledge construction are mediated through interaction with others (Doolittle, 1997). Another point of emphasis is the importance of this social mediation being situated in authentic environments and tasks where the individual has the opportunity to interact with others and thus "becom[e] self-regulated, self-mediated, and self-aware [through] feedback received from the environment (e.g. others, artifacts) and self-reflection on [his/her] understanding and experience" (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003).

This social constructivist perspective can be applied to the teaching of writing in a foreign language for the purpose of helping students improve their language and writing proficiency, both in terms of global and local aspects. Specifically, writing instruction in a foreign language should include peer interaction (social interaction) in the writing process (authentic task). Collaboration among peers "allows students to use language to mediate their language learning because in collaboration students use language to reflect on the language they are learning" (Shrum & Glisan, 2005, p. 25). Researchers have thus identified peer collaboration as a viable approach to help students in their foreign language development through interaction (Donato, 2004; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf &

Thorne, 2006).

One way to incorporate peer collaboration in FL writing is in the form of peer feedback sessions, which Hu (2005) defined as "a collaborative activity involving students reading, critiquing, and providing feedback on each other's writing, both to secure immediate textual improvement and to develop, over time, stronger writing competence via mutual scaffolding" (pp. 321-322). This definition highlights the significance of providing opportunities for student interaction that can help students ultimately become self-regulated learners.

Students' perceptions of the value of peer feedback

The success of a writing instruction approach that incorporates peer feedback as one essential step in the writing process is related to students' perceptions of this type of strategy (Amores, 1997; Carson & Nelson, 1996; Hu, 2005; Liu & Hansen, 2005; Nelson & Carson, 1998; Tsui & Ng, 2000). If students do not see peer feedback as a valuable and helpful process that can enhance their writing proficiency, and thus the quality of their foreign language essays, it is likely that they will not fully commit to the process.

One important aspect of peer feedback is its impact on students' motivation to give and receive peer feedback as measured through their perceptions of the peer feedback experience (Carson & Nelson, 1996; Nelson & Carson, 1998). Carson and Nelson (1996) investigated the interaction styles and perceptions of Chinese students who engaged in the editing of their ESL peers' writing. Carson and Nelson identified several perceptions of the Chinese ESL students in relation to their participation in a peer feedback experience; specifically, the students expressed a reluctance to criticize drafts, to disagree with peers, and to claim authority. In addition, students expressed feelings of vulnerability. Carson and Nelson (1996) concluded that "the kinds of behaviors that Chinese students would normally exhibit in groups are different from the behaviors that are frequently desired in writing groups" (p. 18). Moreover, Carson and Nelson stated that Chinese ESL students seemed more preoccupied with maintaining group cohesion than with giving their peers valuable feedback on their writing, recognizing "that making negative comments on a peer's draft leads to [group] division" (p. 18).

In a follow-up study, Nelson and Carson (1998) investigated the interaction styles and perceptions of Hispanic and Chinese ESL students in a peer feedback experience. Nelson and Carson again identified several themes; specifically, students expressed a preference for negative comments, expressed a preference for teacher's comments, perceived peers' comments as ineffective, and perceived the effectiveness of peer feedback differently based on cultural differences. Students' rationale for preferring teacher's comments was based on their perception that the teacher, not their peers, was the expert. In addition, students sometimes perceived their peers' comments to be

ineffective or unhelpful, especially since they "felt that too much time was spent talking about unimportant issues [including] grammar and sentence-level details" (Nelson & Carson, 1998, pp. 125–126).

Tsui and Ng (2000) also investigated students' perceptions of peer feedback. The subjects in this study were 27 Chinese students enrolled in grades 12 and 13 in a secondary school in Hong Kong in which English was used as the medium of instruction. The results of the study indicated that students favored teacher comments over peer comments, and that teacher comments lead to more revisions than peer comments. In addition, Tsui and Ng (2000) identified several results of peer feedback; specifically, peer feedback (a) enhanced students' sense of audience, who therefore viewed their peers as the real audience for their writing; (b) raised students' awareness through their giving and receiving feedback, and thus contributed to helping students transfer the ability to spot others' mistakes and develop metacognitive abilities to spot their own; (c) encouraged collaborative learning and negotiation of meaning among students; and (d) fostered a sense of text ownership among student writers, especially since students viewed their peers' comments as lacking authoritativeness, which let them decide whether to incorporate their peers' comments into their final drafts without feeling compelled to do so.

The results of these studies (Carson & Nelson, 1996; Nelson & Carson, 1998; Tsui & Ng, 2000) indicate that peer feedback is a viable option for improving FL writing that can be incorporated into learner-centered writing instruction. Not only does peer feedback help students develop their writing ability in terms of global aspects, for instance, audience-awareness and sense of text ownership, but peer feedback also helps students develop metacognitive skills, such as awareness of their own mistakes when writing, as well as group interaction and negotiation of meaning. As indicated in Nelson and Carson's (1998) study, students may perceive a singular focus on local aspect errors as unhelpful, which may cause them to become discouraged from giving and receiving peer feedback. In this sense, it is important that students, as peer editors, recognize the significance of focusing on both global and local aspects of their partner's writing in order to be able to provide meaningful feedback.

The samples in the previous three studies were drawn from Asian and Hispanic populations of students learning English as a foreign language both in China and in the United States. However, given that cultural differences can potentially influence students' impressions of this method of foreign language writing instruction (Nelson & Carson, 1998), it becomes relevant to further expand the knowledge base and thus investigate American foreign language students' perceptions of peer feedback.

The purpose of this study was to investigate American students' perceptions of peer feedback in college foreign language courses. Specifically, students enrolled in

an Intermediate Spanish class were either trained or not trained to use specific peer feedback guidelines prior to engaging in the process of peer feedback. Students were subsequently surveyed regarding their perceptions of the peer feedback process. The rationale for conducting this mixed methods study was to add to the knowledge base in foreign language writing instruction (Newman, Ridenour, Newman, & De Marco Jr., 2003), particularly understanding in more depth students' perceptions of a peer feedback experience.

Method

Participants

Sixty-five undergraduate students enrolled in four intact Intermediate Spanish college classes at a major university in the southeastern United States participated in the study. Two classes were randomly selected and assigned to Group T (n=33) and the remaining two classes were assigned to Group U (n=32). The students' average age was 19.4 years old, with 42 female and 23 male students. Regarding participants' ethnicity, the distribution was 51 Caucasian students, 3 African-American students, 2 Hispanic students, and 4 Asian/Pacific Islander students (5 students did not report their ethnicity). In addition, 11 students were freshmen, 29 sophomores, 16 juniors, and 4 seniors (5 students did not report their year in college). The average number of years of Spanish instruction these students had received before enrolling in this class was 4.25 years, including high school and college level FL instruction. In addition, prior to their enrollment in Intermediate Spanish classes, students take an institutional placement test that evaluates their knowledge of diverse grammar topics, as well as their speaking and writing abilities, to ensure that students with equivalent knowledge and abilities are placed in these classes. The students' intended level of proficiency at the end of the two-semester sequence Intermediate Spanish course, as measured with the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, is expected to be intermediate-mid in reading and listening, and intermediate-low in speaking and writing.

Instruments and Materials

Survey instrument. The survey instrument was adapted from Tsui and Ng (2000) and consisted of close-ended and open-ended questions designed to elicit students' perceptions of the peer feedback experience in which they had participated in their Spanish class (see Appendix A). This adaptation involved rephrasing several of the survey statements to better fit the foreign language focus of the class. In addition, three open-ended questions were added to the survey. Specifically, there were 10 Likert-scale questions, from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly-agree, consisting of three subsections representing three peer feedback phases: reading one's partner's essay (3 questions),

receiving written comments from one's partner (3 questions), and participating in the face-to-face peer feedback session (4 questions). A reliability analysis of the survey data, following data collection, revealed a Cronbach's alpha of .94. In addition to the 10 survey items, there were 3 open-ended questions:

1. What are some specific examples of aspects of your composition that improved after participating in the peer feedback experience?
2. What are some of the things that you liked most about the peer feedback experience? Why?
3. What are some of the things that you liked least about the peer feedback experience? Why?

Peer feedback guidelines and training. The peer feedback guidelines consisted of instructions and a set of 15 questions. The instructions prompted students to provide meaningful feedback with the purpose of helping their partner improve the quality of his/her writing. Students were advised not to concentrate on local aspects only (e.g., punctuation or grammar mistakes), but also on global aspects (e.g., organization, transition of ideas, exemplification) so that they could successfully communicate the message he or she was trying to convey to his or her target audience. Students were asked to read their partner's essay and select the most relevant of 15 questions in the guidelines and answer them thoroughly in writing, to provide meaningful feedback. Students were asked to provide this feedback on a separate sheet of paper following these formatting criteria: 12 point font, 1 inch margins, double spacing, and a two-page length. Finally, students were also informed that they could also write marginal comments on their partner's paper in addition to the other comments.

Students in two of the classes (Group T) were trained in the use of these guidelines. The training consisted of a 30-minute session in which the researcher modeled how to provide constructive feedback, similar to Hu's (2005) training sessions. The researcher provided each student with a writing sample. Using the guidelines, the researcher revised the writing sample using think-aloud techniques, describing orally what type of feedback she would give to the author and a rationale for that feedback. Students were also provided with sample written comments, which served to model the type and quality of comments regarding their partner's essay that students were expected to provide. Then, students were given additional excerpts of writing samples so that, in small groups, they could discuss the types of comments they would provide to that particular writing sample, following the guidelines. Finally, students in each group were asked to provide examples of the feedback they had given based on the excerpts, and a whole-class discussion was held in order to clarify the rationale for the type of feedback

students provided, as well as to model rephrasing of student comments to make them more constructive. The session ended with the researcher addressing students' final questions and concerns regarding the feedback process. Students in the remaining two classes (Group U) did not receive this training, but only received a copy of the peer review guidelines.

Procedure

A triangulation mixed methods design was used in this study, which included data collected concurrently from undergraduate students enrolled in four intact Intermediate Spanish classes who participated in a peer feedback experience as part of a writing assignment. The four classes were taught by the same instructor and all students completed the same writing assignment toward the end of the semester. The four intact classes were randomly assigned to one of two groups: trained peer feedback with guidelines (Group T), and untrained peer feedback with guidelines (Group U). The researcher trained students in Group T during a 30-minute training session on how to critique their peers' essays and provide them with constructive feedback.

As part of the essay assignment, students completed a sequential series of tasks. On Day 1, students completed the first task, writing the first draft of an essay, at home. The essay prompt was provided by the course instructor and consisted of two possible topics, marriage or divorce. Students were asked to write an expository section on the advantages and disadvantages of marriage or divorce, and a persuasive section where students were asked to provide advice to a friend who was thinking of getting married or divorced.

On Day 2, students in Groups A and B received a set of printed guidelines in class to provide peer feedback. Students in Group T were trained on critiquing their partner's essay and providing constructive feedback using these guidelines. Students in Group U received no training. Students in both groups then exchanged drafts with their partner.

On Days 3 and 4, over the weekend, students completed the second task, which involved reading their partner's essay and providing constructive feedback. On Day 5, students completed the third task, which involved their participation in an in-class 50-minute face-to-face peer feedback session, where students discussed their partner's essay and clarified the feedback received.

On Days 5 and 6, at home, students completed the fourth task, which involved writing a final draft taking into account feedback received from their partner. On Day 7, in class, after submitting their final draft, students in both groups completed the paper-and-pencil survey addressing their perceptions of the peer feedback experience.

Results

Perceptions of the Peer Feedback Phases by Trained and Untrained Students

In order to assess trained and untrained students' perceptions of peer feedback across the three peer feedback phases (i.e., reading one's partner's essay, receiving written comments from one's partner, and participating in a face-to-face peer feedback session), a single repeated measures ANOVA was conducted. This ANOVA was used to test for differences between trained and untrained students' perceptions of peer feedback, student's perceptions of the three phases of peer feedback, and trained and untrained students perceptions of the three phases of peer feedback. Mauchly's Test of Sphericity for equality of variances showed that the sphericity assumption was violated, Mauchly's W(2) = .887, p < .05; therefore, the Huyn Feldt correction was used.

Trained versus untrained students. The ANOVA revealed no significant main effect (between subjects) for trained versus untrained students, F (1,63) = 0.55, p = .45 (see Table 1). These results indicate that students trained and not trained in peer feedback had similar general perceptions of the peer feedback experience. Further, these results show that, in general, students had positive perceptions of the peer feedback experience.

| | Perceptions of peer feedback | | | |
| | Untrained (n = 32) | | Trained (n = 32) | |
Peer Feedback Phase	M	SD	M	SD
Reading partner's composition	5.17	1.11	5.36	1.11
Receiving written comments	5.53	1.17	5.74	0.98
Receiving face-to-face feedback	5.51	1.07	5.45	1.15

Table 1. Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) of students' perceptions of peer feedback.

Peer feedback phases. The ANOVA did reveal, however, a significant main effect (within subjects) for peer feedback phase, F (2,126) = 5.90, p = .04. A series of pair-wise comparisons (paired-samples *t*-tests) revealed that overall, students had a higher perception (p < .05) of *receiving written comments* than either *reading partner's composition*, t (64) = .415, or *receiving face-to-face feedback*, t (64) = .217. There was, however, no significant difference (p > .05) between *reading partner's composition* and *receiving face-to-face feedback* t (64) = .959. These results indicate that students perceived the peer feedback phase of *receiving written comments* more positively than either of the other two phases.

Interaction between training and peer feedback phases. Finally, the ANOVA

revealed no significant interaction in students' perceptions of peer feedback between trained and untrained students' across the peer feedback phases, $F_{(2,126)} = 0.05$, $p = .94$.

Analysis of High and Low Peer Feedback Perceivers

In order to assess whether or not students who perceived the peer feedback process more positively viewed the process differently than students who did not, a composite peer feedback score was computed. The composite peer feedback scores were simply the means of all 10 survey questions. These peer feedback composite scores were used to group the students into quartiles. The mean peer feedback composite perception score for the bottom quartile (n=16) was 4.14 ($SD = 0.43$), whereas the mean peer feedback composite perception response for the top quartile (n=16) was 6.68 ($SD = 0.23$). A t-test comparing the bottom (low) and top (high) quartiles resulted in a significant difference, $t_{(30)} = 20.8$, $p = .00$. The three open-ended questions were analyzed to identify differences between those students that perceived the peer feedback process more highly (high peer feedback perception) and those students that had more neutral perceptions regarding the peer feedback process (low peer feedback perception). This analysis was conducted using a data transformation, mixed methods approach (Caracelli & Greene, 1993). Specifically, the students' responses were evaluated for common themes, these common themes were then defined and described, and finally, students' responses were re-evaluated for the presence of these themes and numerical counts were determined based on the presence or absence of the themes in each student's responses.

   Composition improvement after peer feedback. The first open-ended question was, "What are some specific examples of aspects of your composition that improved after participating in the peer feedback experience?" An analysis of students' responses to this question resulted in two main categories, global aspect improvements and local aspect improvements. The *global aspects* category refers to comments on text coherence and cohesion, development of main and subordinate ideas, exemplification, flow, and organization. The *local aspects* category refers to comments on vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation. Among the global aspects category, several themes were identified: introduction and conclusion development ("I added a better opening sentence and a stronger closing"); enhancement of flow, organization, and transitions ("I was able to rearrange the paragraphs so that my paper had a better flow to its organization"); topic and idea development ("my points became more distinct"); and, incorporation of richer examples ("I also provided more examples to support my thesis"). Among the local aspects category, several themes were also identified: improved grammar accuracy ("my partner helped me fix some of my grammar"), enhanced richness of vocabulary ("my vocab choices… of my paper definitely improved"), and complex structure development

("she also helped me see that I needed more varied sentence structures").

Table 2 shows the percentages of high and low peer feedback perception students referring to each composition improvement theme.

	Perceptions of peer feedback	
Composition Improvement Themes	Low	High
Global Aspects Category		
Enhancement of flow, organization and transitions	63%	63%
Topic and idea development	31%	50%
Introduction and conclusion development	31%	44%
Incorporation of richer examples	6%	13%
Local Aspects Category		
Improved grammar accuracy	38%	13%
Complex structure development	19%	38%
Enhanced richness of vocabulary	13%	6%

Note: N=16 for both higher and lower perception groups.

Table 2. Students with higher and lower perceptions of peer feedback referring to each theme related to composition improvement.

The data in Table 2 were subsequently collapsed into a 2 x 2 matrix addressing the number of low and high perceiving students who provided global and local aspect comments in response to the "what aspects of your composition improved after participating in the peer feedback experience" question (see Table 3). A 2 (peer feedback perception) x 2 (aspect category) chi square analysis revealed that peer feedback perception was not related to aspect category, $\chi^2_{(.05,1)} = 1.57$, p > .05. An ensuing one-way chi square addressing the frequency of global and local aspect responses indicated that, overall, students provided more global aspect responses than local aspect responses, $\chi^2_{(.05,1)} = 4.68$, p < .05. These results indicate that while low and high perception students did not differ in the number of global and local aspect comments, overall, students reported receiving more global aspect comments than local aspect comments.

	Perceptions of peer feedback	
Improvement comments	Low	High
Global	21	27
Local	17	12

Table 3. Observed counts of global and local improvement comments made by higher and lower peer feedback perception students.

Aspects of the peer feedback experience that students liked the most. The second open-ended question was, "What are some of the things that you liked most about the peer feedback experience?" An analysis of students' responses to this question resulted in three themes: getting a different perspective on and a real audience for one's essay ("it is always nice to have someone else read your work and point out aspects/points you wouldn't have noticed yourself"), getting new ideas ("the discussion of the topic gave a better understanding of the views of other people on marriage"), and being able to notice one's own mistakes ("[peer feedback] allows you to see the problems in your own paper while you see them in another's paper"). Table 4 shows the percentages of high and low perception students referring to each theme regarding aspects of the peer feedback experience that they liked the most. These results indicate that students' primary support for peer feedback involved the benefits obtained from a new perspective (i.e., new perspectives and new ideas from others and self).

	Perceptions of peer feedback	
Peer feedback themes	Low	High
Themes liked the most		
Getting a different perspective on and real audience for one's essay	56%	88%
Being able to notice one's own mistakes	56%	50%
Getting new ideas	13%	31%
Themes liked the least		
Feeling unsure about the accuracy of feedback provided and received	38%	13%
Lengthy face-to-face session	19%	38%
Writing a formal critique	13%	6%

Note: N=16 for both higher and lower perception groups.

Table 4. Perceptions of peer feedback related to aspects students liked the most and the least.

Aspects of the peer feedback experience that students liked least. The third open-ended question was "What are some of the things that you liked least about the peer

feedback experience? Why?" An analysis of students' responses to this question resulted in three themes: lengthy face-to-face session ("talking for twenty mins per essay was a little long"), feeling unsure about accuracy of feedback provided and received because both students are developing their Spanish proficiency ("I am afraid I will give them wrong or incorrect advice"), and writing a formal critique ("I didn't like having to write two pages of feedback"). Table 4 shows the percentages of high and low perception students referring to each theme regarding aspects of the peer feedback experience that they liked least. These results indicate that students' primary concerns regarding peer feedback included both structural concerns (e.g.,length of feedback sessions) and proficiency concerns (e.g., accuracy of feedback given and received).

Discussion

Research has shown that peer interaction is a valuable component of foreign language instruction since it leads to language development through scaffolding processes and negotiation of meaning with peers (Donato, 2004; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Shrum & Glisan, 2005). It is important, however, to take into consideration students' perceptions of the value of peer interaction in the development of their own language proficiency, since lower perceptions may result in decreased willingness to interact with peers providing and receiving feedback, thus hindering the expected language development.

The present study addressed this issue by considering students' perceptions as part of a peer feedback experience in foreign language writing instruction. After participating in the experience, students reported their perceptions of this method of writing instruction. The quantitative findings of the study demonstrate that regardless of the type of scaffolding students received, either trained or untrained peer feedback with guidelines, all participants expressed positive perceptions of the peer feedback experience, with a significant preference for written comments.

The qualitative data suggested that students perceived that the quality of their writing improved after the peer feedback experience. Students expressed that the experience enabled them to improve their essay's organization, transition and flow, "she said to use transitional sentences, which I needed in my paper to make it flow better […] the last body paragraph flowed better after she pointed out to me it was choppy and awkward." This not only indicates that students focused on giving their partners detailed feedback of global aspects, but it also illustrates the student's enhanced metacognitive awareness when she acknowledged that she needed to make the change to her essay in order to increase its flow.

Further, previous research (Tsui & Ng, 2000) found that students assign value to the peer feedback experience in terms of its contribution to providing a real audience,

different perspectives, and raising metacognitive awareness. The results of the present study echo these findings as both higher and lower peer feedback perceiving students expressed that getting a different perspective on their essay and a different audience were some of the aspects of the experience they liked the most, "it gave my paper another person's perspective. It made me see how another person would perceive what I had written," and "the feedback helped me get a fresh perspective on what my paper was lacking." In addition, students expressed that participating in the experience helped them notice their own mistakes, thus helping to enhance their metacognitive awareness, "it helped me to think in more detail about my own writing, which made it better," and "the feedback was encouraging and had suggestions I had never thought of. I'm not confident in Spanish and enjoy any aid to making me a better writer."

In contrast, there were some aspects of the experience that students did not particularly like. Students expressed that the face-to-face session was lengthy: "we spent too long on it. It did not take very long for us," and "it took a lot of class time." Similar to some of the findings in the literature (see Carson & Nelson, 1996; Nelson & Carson, 1998), students identified their lack of confidence in providing accurate feedback as an issue, due to the fact that both students in the dyad were still developing their language proficiency, "I didn't feel comfortable editing other people's papers because I am not very helpful with my Spanish.… I don't give good comments," and "peer editing makes improving Spanish difficult since both people are at approximately the same level."

Conclusions

These findings have three main implications for instruction. First, the results clearly show that students find participating in peer feedback experiences useful and valuable in contributing to the enhancement of the quality of their writing. Therefore, these types of experiences are viable in foreign language writing instructional design, given the benefits expressed by the participants. Second, and contrary to previous studies (cf. Nelson & Carson, 1998), however, the present results show that students focused on both global and local aspects. This may have been the result of students' focusing on the guidelines provided, which included questions related to both global and local aspects. In this sense, the guidelines might have helped focus students' comments and prevent a singular focus on grammar and punctuation in the feedback provided. Therefore, providing students with guidelines may make the feedback richer and more meaningful, thus increasing students' perceived value of the experience.

Third, given students' expressed concerns with the length of the face-to-face session, the instructor might consider shortening the session to take half a class period (30 minutes). Although students were advised to discuss their written comments and elicit further clarification from their partners, it took students a shorter time than planned

to engage in the negotiation of meaning with their partner. Therefore, a viable option would be to incorporate this kind of experience into regular writing instruction so that students become used to engaging in meaningful interaction with their partner and make the experience richer.

Overall, this study shows that peer feedback is perceived highly among students and that peer feedback has immediate benefits in terms of providing students with a chance to enhance the quality of their essays, including both global and local aspects. In addition, peer feedback can also have long-term benefits, as it contributed to activate students' metacognitive awareness, which can result in enhanced writing proficiency in a foreign language.

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Appendix A

Peer Feedback Survey

1. I liked reading my classmate's composition.
2. I found reading my classmate's composition useful.
3. Reading my classmate's composition helped me improve the quality of my composition.
4. I liked reading my classmate's written comments.
5. I found my classmate's written comments useful.
6. My classmate's written comments helped me improve the quality of my composition.

7. I liked the face-to-face peer feedback session.
8. I found my classmate's comments in the face-to-face peer feedback sessions useful.
9. I found discussing my classmate's written comments in the face-to-face session useful.
10. My classmate's comments in the face-to-face peer feedback session helped me improve the quality of my composition.