Peer Review: Student Perspectives and Strategies Found from a Semi-Structured Interview

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Abstract

This paper aims to elucidate the students' perspectives on peer review and their strategies in giving critical feedback by reporting the findings from the semi-structured interview of four students who took one of the author's three writing classes in the second half of the academic year 2020. Additionally, it reveals the participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of Grammarly and Criterion®, software for assisting and evaluating writing, as they were used concurrently with peer review. It was found that the participants' perspectives of the benefits and drawbacks of peer review supported the findings in the previous studies. The feelings about giving critical feedback varied among the participants, yet they consciously used various strategies for providing critical feedback in their own ways. Through the interview, the need for and difficulty in communication in online classes is confirmed. The participants' experience with and perception of Grammarly and Criterion® unveiled the software's potential and the need for appropriate training to maximize its effectiveness. These findings provide insights for preparatory training as well as for optimal use of various feedback types. Limitations of this research are discussed as well.

Keywords: peer review, L2 writing, semi-structured interview, critical feedback, learner strategy

1. Introduction and Literature Review

In second language writing pedagogy, peer review seems to have gained its standing as one practical activity and means of feedback. Peer review, also called peer response or peer feedback, can be described as an activity that "gives writers opportunities to discuss their texts and discover others' interpretations of them" (Hyland & Hyland, 2019, p.7). More specifically, peer review utilizes "learners as sources of information and as interactants for each other in such a way that learners assume the roles and responsibilities more typically taken on by a formally trained teacher, tutor, or editor, in commenting on and critiquing each

other's draft in both written and oral formats in the process of writing" (Liu & Hansen-Edwards, 2018, p.1). Peer review is supported by many theories and hypotheses, such as sociocultural theory—including Vygotsky's concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978)—and the interaction hypothesis (Long, 1996), to name a few.

1.1 Benefits and limitations of Peer Review

Many studies conducted to date have found considerable benefits of peer review for both writers and reviewers. For writers, peer review is said to a) raise the writers' awareness of the readers (Mendonça & Johnson, 1994; Rollinson, 2005; Tsui & Ng, 2000), b) help them obtain additional and different feedback from that given by the instructor (Ferris, 2018; Mendonça & Johnson, 1994; Rollinson, 2005; Villamil & Guerrero, 1998), c) provide the learners with opportunities for meaningful interaction with peers and collaborative learning (Mendonça & Johnson, 1994; Tsui & Ng, 2000), d) encourage and motivate the writers by supportive, informal, and less authoritative peer feedback (Rollinson, 2005), and e) foster the sense of ownership of the writers' texts (Tsui & Ng, 2000; Villamil & Guerrero, 1998).

Peer review benefits the reviewers as well. Ferris (2018) claims that the primary purpose of peer review is "to benefit the reader" (p.102), and Lundstrom and Baker (2009) found that peer review improves the reviewers' writing ability more than that of the receivers of feedback. Peer review a) raises the reviewers' awareness of their strengths and weaknesses in writing by comparing their writing with others' (Mendonça & Johnson, 1994; Tsui & Ng, 2000), b) helps the reviewers learn from peers' writing (Mendonça & Johnson, 1994), and c) helps them become critical readers and reviewers of their own texts (Berg, 1999; Ferris, 2018; Rollinson, 2005; Sommers, 2013; Yu & Hu, 2017). Additionally, the reviewers find reading their peers' writing stimulating (Hatakeyama, 2010; Mendonça & Johnson, 1994).

However, the limitations of peer review have been reported as well. From the writers' perspectives, the lack of confidence in their peers' ability to provide feedback has led to the lower uptake of peer comments compared to teacher comments (Tsui & Ng, 2000). From the reviewers' perspectives, some were reluctant to give feedback, stemming from their lack of grammatical knowledge or their fear of giving inappropriate comments (Srichanyachon, 2011). Additionally, in their study in the US, Carson and Nelson (1996) found that their Chinese participants were reluctant to initiate critical comments not to break group harmony by contrasting them with the Spanish participants who perceived that their critical comments would help their peers improve their essays. However, as the researchers admit, it is worth exploring whether it is true in other contexts, such as Asia or Japan in the 21st century. In addition, since the researchers attributed it to cultural and educational background, Japanese university students' educational experiences and how they perceive giving critical comments are also worth exploring.

1.2 Peer Review in Asian and Japanese Contexts

Recent studies in Asia show various learner behaviors in and perceptions of peer review (Hu & Lam, 2010; Yu & Hu, 2017). Hu and Lam (2010) report behaviors of Chinese adult students who, as reviewers, gave valid suggestions which were selectively incorporated into the writers' revised drafts, leading to the improved quality of the revised drafts. They also show that these students generally perceive peer

review as an appropriate pedagogical activity, with some showing preference for teacher feedback over peer feedback. Yu and Hu (2017), in their case study, have revealed marked individual differences in their feedback practices, such as their foci of feedback. They maintain that these differences are influenced by various factors, including beliefs, prior experience of giving and receiving feedback, and group dynamics.

In tertiary education in Japan, there have been many instances of peer review in writing classes (e.g., Satake, 2016; Sawaya & Yokoyama, 2013; Smith, 2019; Yakame, 2005). These studies endorsed many of the previous research findings, including the benefits and limitations of peer review. As a benefit, Yakame (2005) claims that peer review promotes autonomous learning for writing skills. She also reports the writers' enhanced reader awareness, high rate of uptake of peer comments thanks to the specific advice from the reviewers, elaboration of ideas by the writers, and the writers' positive attitude about getting feedback. Similarly, Satake (2016) reports peer review facilitates EFL writing as it promotes 'noticing' among other elements, helps them understand how to revise their writing specifically, and motivates them to write reader-friendly texts. Additionally, Sawaya and Yokoyama (2013) report that the writers were selective in incorporating reviewers' comments, hinting that they have a sense of ownership of their texts. Smith (2019) reports the successful introduction of the four-step system (i.e., factual observation by the reviewer, the reviewer giving advice, the reviewer giving praise or encouragement, and the writer considers feedback) in peer review.

At the same time, points of concern were raised in these studies. Some writers did not use peer comments (Sawaya & Yokoyama, 2013; Yakame, 2005). Satake (2016) attributes it to the writers' unwillingness to communicate with others or the lack of motivation to be understood by others. Moreover, it was found that some writers did not receive any suggestions or questions and that some reviewers had difficulty in giving comments (Yakame, 2005). The foci of reviewers were found to be minor points than global points, and the importance of providing peer review worksheets was confirmed (Sawaya & Yokoyama, 2013). The need for peer review training is called for to mitigate these concerns (Sawaya & Yokoyama, 2013; Yakame, 2005).

1.3 Peer Review Training

How can the benefits of peer review be maximized and its drawbacks minimized? This has been a question of interest for writing teachers and researchers since, as Rollinson (2005) states, considerable time is invested in the activity of peer review itself. Hence, many studies have been conducted to see the effects of training on peer review.

One way to assess the effectiveness of peer review is the quality of feedback given by the reviewers. Min (2005) reports that after intensive peer-review training, the reviewers provided more comments consisting of multiple steps (e.g., clarifying writers' intentions, identifying problems, explaining the problems, and giving specific suggestions) and more relevant and specific comments on the global aspects of the texts. Before and after training, the reviewers' stances changed from a dominant prescriptive stance to a collaborative one (Min, 2008). The writers, or the receivers of feedback in these two studies, also perceived the positive change in the quality and the stance of the feedback given by the reviewers (Min, 2008).

Another perspective to see peer review's effectiveness is the revisions made by the writers. According to Berg (1999), the trained peer review contributed to the increased instances of meaning changes compared to untrained peer review, and trained peer review yielded higher holistic writing quality score gain by revisions. Moreover, Min (2006) reports that, after peer-review training, 90% of the revisions made by the writers were triggered by peer review and that the number of revisions with enhanced quality was significantly higher than those before the training.

Building on the previous studies, the researcher investigated the quality of feedback and the revision strategies of the writers by using the writers' reflection texts as data in a female university in Japan (Hatakeyama, 2021). It was found that, under the condition in which peer review took place after the writers self-checked their grammar using the grammar checking software Grammarly, the writers received more critical feedback than compliments and more comments on global aspects than local aspects. They also incorporated a high percentage of the reviewers' suggestions into their revised drafts and revised their texts on their own judgment. It was also found from the time-series analysis that the number of peer-review opportunities contributed to the enhanced quality of feedback comments. In this study, the learners received some training before starting peer review, with some teacher intervention on each peer review opportunity. However, the time spent on peer review training was considerably shorter than in Min (2005, 2006, 2008)'s studies, implying that the learners learned how to do peer review autonomously through multiple peer-review experiences. This has led the researcher to explore the learners' perspectives of peer review—including its benefits and limitations—, how they think about giving critical feedback, and what strategies they use in providing critical feedback.

1.4 Software for Assisting and Evaluating Writing

With the advancement of AI, various software for helping and assessing writing has prevailed in education and business. Grammarly, a cloud-based writing assistant, has been increasingly used in business and academia. It was launched in 2009 and reviews spelling, grammar, punctuation, clarity, and so on by using AI (Grammarly, 2021).

One of the previous studies revealed how students perceive the feedback given by Grammarly (O'Neil & Russell, 2019). It was found that the satisfaction rate of those who received feedback from Grammarly—supplemented by the input given by academic learning advisors—was higher than those who received feedback only from the advisors. The participants in the study point out that the strength of Grammarly feedback lies in the speed of response, range of errors addressed, and the customized nature of feedback. However, the accuracy of feedback was raised as a concern as well.

Another category of software is automated writing evaluation (AWE), as represented by Criterion®, a web-based writing evaluation service provided by ETS, which gives "immediate diagnostic feedback" on writing (ETS, 2021). The overall validity of AWE programs is regarded as high in large-scale standardized tests (Warschauer & Ware, 2006). However, in writing classrooms, research findings (e.g., Chen & Cheng, 2008; Li et al., 2014) imply that using AWE programs themselves do not automatically lead to desired outcomes. Careful implementation by considering the learners' English proficiency and the characteristics of feedback and scores seem to be required.

2. The Study

Based on the findings of the previous studies, this study explores how L2 learners of English, who are of intermediate English proficiency in a women's university in Japan, perceive peer review done in online synchronous classes and their perception of and strategies in giving critical feedback. It also aims to investigate how they perceive the effectiveness of software for grammar check and writing evaluation. The research questions are outlined below.

1. What kind of previous experience of peer review do the participants have?
2. How do the participants perceive the benefits of peer review?
3. How do the participants perceive the limitations of peer review?
4. How do the participants feel about giving critical feedback?
5. What strategies do the participants use for giving critical feedback?
6. How do the participants find Grammarly as a grammar-checking tool?
7. How do the participants find Criterion as a writing assessment tool?
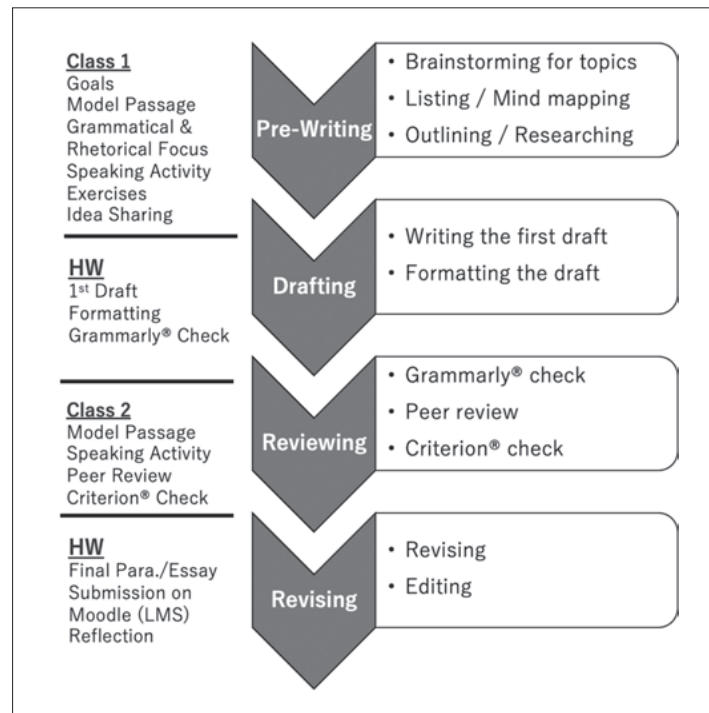
3. Method

3.1 The Courses

In the academic year 2020, due to the spread of COVID-19 and to avoid the occurrence of "clusters" of COVID-19 on campus, many classes were taught online, using Zoom, at the researcher's university. The researcher's classes for speaking and writing skills became synchronous online. The activities which used to be done face-to-face, were adjusted for the online mode. As for peer review, although the basic procedure of conducting peer review remained the same, some changes took place. For instance, the paired students were put into breakout rooms for peer review. They exchanged their drafts online instead of exchanging the printed papers. Instead of writing comments on the guided feedback sheet and exchanging them in face-to-face classes, they noted the comments for feedback and conveyed them orally to their partners.

In the second half of the academic year 2020, peer review was supplemented by feedback given by AWE software. By the beginning of the class in which peer review took place, the students wrote drafts, checked grammatical errors using free grammar-checking software Grammarly, self-corrected them, and submitted their drafts on the university's learning management system, Moodle. The instructor suggested checkpoints for peer review, and then the students were randomly put into pairs in class. The paired students exchanged their drafts online, read the partners' drafts, took notes or memos, and then gave oral feedback. The time for peer review was about 20 minutes for each assignment. The language to be used in feedback was left to the students' choice, and almost all the students used Japanese. Criterion®, automated writing evaluation (AWE) software operated by ETS, was concurrently used in class, and the students could get feedback from Criterion® as well. The writing processes and class flow for each writing assignment are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Writing Processes and Class Flow

3.2 Participants

The participants of this study were recruited by email at the end of the academic year 2020. The email, which explained the purpose of the research and the interview procedure, was sent to all the students who completed either one of the three writing classes—paragraph-writing or essay-writing classes—in the second half of the academic year. Five students volunteered, and after schedule adjustment, four students participated in the interview. Table 1 summarizes the participants' pseudonyms, year at university, writing classes, major field of studies, and English proficiency (CEFR). Two participants' English proficiency was not available due to the cancellation of the placement test at the beginning of the academic year 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the researcher's observation as a teacher, their English proficiency was equivalent to the other two participants.

Table 1

Summary of Participants' Attributes

Pseudonyms	Year	Class	Major Field of Studies	CEFR
Sara	2	Paragraph-Writing	Humanities (History)	B1
Yuna	1	Paragraph-Writing	Science (Physics)	N.A.
Mona	1	Paragraph-Writing	Humanities (Language/Literature)	N.A.
Rina	2	Essay-Writing	Humanities (Global Studies)	B1

3.3 Interview Procedure

The semi-structured interview, facilitated by the researcher, the course instructor, took place online, using Zoom, in February 2021 for 90 minutes. In the interview, Japanese, which was the native language for all the participants, was used. The interview questions had been shared with the participants beforehand.

At the beginning of the interview, the participants introduced themselves briefly in Japanese, with their video turned on. They then turned off the video, and the interview and the recording started. The participants' consent for the recording has been obtained in advance. During the interview, each question was asked and answered by all participants, in turn, followed by clarification or follow-up questions asked by the facilitator. After all the participants finished commenting on each question, they gave supplemental or additional comments before moving on to the next question. At the end of the interview, each participant was given time to freely comment on their views on peer review or writing in general. Within a month from the interview, university-designated honoraria were paid to the participants. The entire procedure had been approved by the university's research ethics committee.

3.4 Analysis

The participants' comments in the interview in the recording were transcribed by the researcher after the interview. Then the Japanese transcription was translated into English by the researcher. The transcripts were categorized and analyzed manually by the researcher.

4. Findings

4.1 Participants' Previous Experience of Peer Review.

All participants had some experience of either peer review or peer interaction in Japanese and/or English in their primary and secondary education. However, the contexts of their experiences—the timing, frequency, continuity, subjects, and language—varied significantly. Each participant's experience of peer review is summarized below.

4.1.1 Sara's Experience

In her third year of junior high school, Sara's English teacher emphasized peer review. Each student wrote the manuscript of a speech, exchanged drafts with a partner, and gave and received advice. The topics of the speech were relatively casual, such as the good points of her class. She has another memory of reading her classmates' writing, although it was not peer review per se. In an English composition class at junior high school, the teacher distributed two or three good anonymous writing pieces to the class and explained their good points. However, when she was a high school student, there were no formal class activities involving peer review.

4.1.2 Mona's Experience

Mona had the experience of peer interaction, if not peer review, in her high school days. In her third year of high school, in her English class, as a pre-writing activity, she talked with her partner(s) to share

information about and thoughts on the writing topic before starting to write. She also had an experience of sharing her returned and graded writing with peers in her English class in her second year of high school. In this class, they commented on what they liked about the partners' writing. She recalls that reading the work of students who were good at English led her to notice new aspects of language.

4.1.3 Rina's Experience

Rina remembers doing peer review for one to two years in her English composition class at high school. In this class, the students worked on universities' past exam questions—those requiring English composition—, read the partners' writing, and received feedback. Through this experience, she realized that different expressions conveyed the same content and confirmed the varieties in grammar use. However, from the way the classes were given, she noticed some limitations: there were so-called "correct" answers. The learners were expected to use certain grammatical features and sentence structures. She also noticed that students were inclined to use typical expressions, such as "First," "Second," and "It is important that…." Thus, she desired to learn various ways to express the same content to increase her repertoire.

4.1.4 Yuna's Experience

Yuna had no experience of peer review in English until she entered university. However, she had many peer-review-like opportunities in her elementary and junior high schools in Japanese. In her elementary school, all the classmates placed their book reports on their desks, went around the classroom to read their peers' reports, and gave feedback by writing short comments on sticky notes. In her junior high school, she remembers doing the same activity using a written assignment in social studies. She does not remember any activities similar to peer review in high school nor English.

4.2 Participants' Perspectives on the Benefits of Peer Review

The four participants commented on various benefits of peer review from the perspectives of the writers and the reviewers.

From the writers' perspectives, they could get effective feedback from the reviewers, including the negotiation of meaning, which enabled them to revise the text for the readers to understand. Sara said: "I could get feedback about whether my paragraph is easy to read or not and receive comments such as 'What do you mean here?' from somebody other than myself." The feedback also helped them to become aware of the readers' viewpoint as well. Rina said: "I could understand which part of my text others focus on." Additionally, the compliments in feedback led them to have confidence and joy in writing. Rina continued: "My partners were kind and gave a lot of compliments. Thus, I could have self-esteem in writing. I felt glad that I wrote." Furthermore, time for peer review has provided them with collaborative learning opportunities to share their concerns. Mona mentioned: "It was good that I could share with my partners the points where we got stumbled."

As reviewers, they felt stimulated by reading partners' drafts and were impressed with their written work. Yuna said: "I was inspired that there are people who can write at such a high level." They also saw peer review as a precious opportunity to see how other classmates tackled the assignments, especially in

online classes. Mona recalled: "It's natural to have the opportunities to see how my classmates worked on the assignment in regular classrooms, but it's hard to have them online." Moreover, one student consciously tried to integrate the superior aspects of her partners' writing into her own. Rina stated: "What is good about peer review is that I can 'steal' my partners' skills . . . so, I try to 'steal' the good aspects of their writing, integrate them into my writing, and create better-thought-out texts."

4.3 Participants' Perspectives on the Limitations of Peer Review

The participants were also vocal in articulating the limitations of peer review from both writers' and reviewers' perspectives.

As writers, they were sometimes disappointed that not all the reviewers gave critical comments but gave compliments only. They were often at a loss about how to improve their drafts without those readers' feedback. Yuna said: "Only about half of the reviewers advised me to fix some parts while the remaining half didn't. I think we can grow by being taught where to change." Mona stated: "In my class, most of my partners gave me suggestions. Without the third person's opinion and without knowing where to improve, I sometimes had difficulties in improving my draft." Yuna then suggested: "If we are required to point out at least one good point and one bad point, we will feel obliged to give suggestions. Also, in our reflection note, if the teacher can create space to write the partner's name and give extra points to effective feedback, we will be more motivated to give constructive comments."

One participant pointed out that the variety of feedback may be limited due to the similar educational backgrounds of the reviewers. Rina stated: "I think it is better to have peer review than not to, but, if possible, I want more experienced people, those who have read various English texts, or native speakers of English to give me feedback."

From the reviewers' perspectives, one participant expressed a lack of confidence in the validity of her own feedback and was afraid of deteriorating her partners' drafts. As a countermeasure, she suggested a system of enabling more than one reviewer to review one writer's draft. Sara said: "When I commented on my partner's draft, I could comment based only on my image or impression. As a reviewer, I was afraid that the quality of my partner's text might go down. If a writer can only receive advice that may not necessarily be appropriate, both the writer and the reviewer may feel uneasy. If there is an opportunity for a writer to seek opinions from various people, it will be better." Rina followed: "We can upload ours on Moodle so that everybody can read and give feedback. We can even specify the checkpoints for the reviewers."

One participant expressed dissatisfaction that she had not much to learn from her partners' drafts since they looked similar to hers. Rina stated: "When I read my partners' passages, they resembled mine in many ways as we are Japanese and have taken similar classes. Many of their essays have the same structure as those in the textbook, with different contents."

4.4 Participants' Feelings about Giving Critical Feedback

The participants' feelings about giving critical feedback were mixed. Two participants did not find it difficult to provide suggestions, while the other two participants felt a little nervous or found it challenging to communicate what needs improvement, especially online.

Two participants, Mona and Yuna, did not find it difficult to give suggestions nor felt nervous. Mona said: "Personally, it is not so hard for me to point out areas for improvement. I don't think I am saying something so advanced. So, it was not something that I get nervous about and gather up courage about." One participant, Rina, felt nervous a little but conveyed what to improve. Rina said: "I feel nervous just a little bit when I convey points for improvement. But I think the purpose of the peer review is to make each other's texts better by revising them. So, I just convey what to improve."

The other participant, Sara, was initially hesitant from the fear of being seen as the kind of person who looks down on others. On a related note, she confessed that she found it challenging to communicate with her partner online due to the limited information about the partner. Sara stated: "I was feeling reluctant to comment on the points for improvement. I did not want to be perceived as not nice or as somebody who looks down on others. Especially this year, we had online classes, and I sometimes did peer review with video turned off due to connection problems. So, the information of my partners, such as motivation and personality, was limited. Once the conversation stopped, it was pretty hard for me to break this 'wall of silence.'"

4.5 Strategies for Giving Critical Feedback

Even though the participants' hurdles for giving critical feedback varied notably, they all gave critical feedback by devising various ways independently. One common strategy was to say good points first and then give critical comments to get the writers to accept suggestions positively. Yuna said: "I usually say the good points first because I genuinely feel the passage is nice. I can then say, based on the positive feeling, 'Why don't you change this? If you do so, your passage will be much better for sure.'" Similarly, Rina stated: "I think how to convey the areas for improvement is the most important. After telling the good points and communicating that I like this text or expression very much, I would say, 'Your text will be better if you fix this part.' If I say, 'This part is not good,' my partner's feelings will be hurt. So, I try to devise ways to give feedback."

Another common strategy was to give concrete suggestions instead of just pointing out areas for improvement. Mona said: "I just say as a reader, 'The text will be easier to understand if you explain this in more detail,'. . . and 'What you want to say will be more logically conveyed if you place the information in this order in terms of idea development.'"

The final common strategy was to communicate that the feedback is only one reader's comment. Sara said: "I tried to give concrete suggestions. I also said things merely as my personal comments. I said, 'I think this way, but I am not sure whether it is correct or other people feel the same.'" Yuna stated: "I am not good at grammar at all. I don't have a large vocabulary either. So, I said something like, 'This part is a bit difficult to understand for me.'"

Interestingly, one participant shared her strategy of receiving critical feedback. Rina said: "When I did not get critical feedback, I asked my partners' thoughts on the part I was not confident about. Then my partners gave new suggestions."

4.6 Grammarly as a Grammar-Checking Tool

All the participants found Grammarly as a helpful tool in general. Sara said: "I almost always accepted Grammarly's suggestions. I could also learn many things because it explained why it is wrong." Rina also stated: "Grammarly points out spelling mistakes and the omission of third-person singular 's.'" Some also acknowledged that it is not "perfect," though. Rina continued: "Once, when I was extremely sleepy, I wrote a passage that made no sense, but Grammarly didn't point out any error."

All participants liked the procedure of having their grammatical errors checked using Grammarly beforehand to get more valuable feedback on content and organization in peer review. Mona said: "I still make careless mistakes often, and I feel sorry to have my friends or teacher point them out when we can use the time for more advanced issues. I like that I could check my drafts beforehand using Grammarly." Rina followed: "I think that eliminating grammatical errors using the software and then doing peer review was suitable for me. It is because we can have a conversation of higher quality and get feedback on text organization and content."

4.7 Criterion® as a Writing Evaluation Tool

It seemed that it took some participants time to fully utilize Criterion®, and they perceived that it is less user-friendly than Grammarly. Yuna said: "Compared to Grammarly, it was less easy to use. I was not sure about how to use it in the beginning, and I have finally mastered it in the last two lessons." Sara agreed: "I didn't know how to use Criterion at first, either. Some advice was not clear enough for me and a bit difficult to understand. Also, I was not sure which points were crucial because it didn't clearly show the priority for revisions." On the other hand, others found its strength in grasping the organization of the entire text. Rina stated: "Grammarly gave me feedback on a word-by-word basis whereas Criterion provided feedback on texts as a whole on a broader perspective, which was interesting for me. Mona followed: "I also think Criterion gives feedback on the text as a whole. In addition, I think Criterion is more effective if you intend to write an organized passage."

On a related note, one participant suggested how effectively feedback from Criterion® can be integrated with peer feedback. Sara suggested: "I think showing the screen of Criterion may be an effective way. I can ask my partner, 'Criterion judges my sentence structure this way, but do you think so, too?' In our paragraph-writing class, we did an activity of finding a topic sentence of a model paragraph. I think it is similar to that."

5. Discussion

5.1 Participants' Experience of Peer-Review

The participants' peer-review experience, in their primary and secondary education, varied, with some having rich experiences while others had just a little. However, it is worth noting that all four participants had had some experiences of peer interaction and reading classmates' pieces of writing, if not peer review. In other words, activities involving peer interaction were not new to them. Their prior experiences could have contributed to the effectiveness of peer-review itself and their insights on peer review, as displayed

in the interview. Put differently, they might have built on their experiences and applied what they learned earlier: they were, in a sense, ready for peer review. Moreover, the participants' tone in their recall was pleasant, implying that they regarded their previous peer-interaction experiences as favorable. Therefore, the different attitudes toward peer review between the participants of this study and the Chinese participants in Carlson and Nelson (1996), who were reluctant to initiate critical feedback, could be partly explained by the familiarity with and the perception of peer review, among other factors.

5.2 The Benefits and Limitations of Peer Review from the Participants' Perspectives

The participants were aware of the benefits and limitations of peer review. From the writers' viewpoints, their comments in the interview endorsed many of the previous research findings, including increased reader awareness (Mendonça & Johnson, 1994; Rollinson, 2005; Tsui & Ng, 2000), obtaining additional feedback (Ferris, 2018; Mendonça & Johnson, 1994; Rollinson, 2005; Villamil & Guerrero, 1998), meaningful interaction and learning with peers (Mendonça & Johnson, 1994; Tsui & Ng, 2000), and increased motivation and confidence-building (Rollinson, 2005). On the other hand, the participants were found to be eager to receive critical comments and willing to incorporate the reviewers' suggestions, which is contrary to Sawaya and Yokoyama (2013) and Yakame (2005)'s findings. Moreover, different from Satake (2016), they were willing to communicate and were motivated for their written work to be understood by the reviewers.

As a limitation from the writers' perspectives, not always getting critical or constructive feedback was pointed out, which was in line with previous research (Carson & Nelson, 1996; Yakame, 2005). One participant voiced her preference for feedback from more experienced writers over peer feedback, which aligns with the literature (Hu & Lam, 2010; Tsui & Ng, 2000) that shows the writers' preference for teacher feedback. In light of her desire to receive feedback from those with diverse backgrounds, proficiency, and points of view, in an environment in which the opportunities to receive feedback from native or experienced writers are limited, devising ways to diversify the sources of feedback need to be taken into account.

From the reviewers' perspective, the participants supported various benefits of peer review in the literature, including learning and stimulation from peers' drafts (Hatakeyama, 2010; Mendonça & Johnson, 1994) and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of their own writing through comparison with peers' (Mendonça & Johnson, 1994; Tsui & Ng, 2000). One participant's comment implies her sense of ownership in her text (Tsui & Ng, 2000; Villamil & Guerrero, 1998) and that she aims to be critical in reviewing her own writing (Berg, 1999; Ferris, 2018; Rollinson, 2005; Sommers, 2013; Yu & Fu, 2017).

In addition, especially in online classes under the COVID-19 pandemic, it seems that they were genuinely satisfied to have precious opportunities to communicate with peers and to get to know peers' work and attitudes towards learning and assignments. Enabling them to peek into peers' work might have made them relieved. In an environment where the students tend to be in their silos, providing interaction opportunities is necessary.

As limitations of peer review from the reviewers' perspective, a point discussed in the literature was raised from the participants: the lack of confidence in giving feedback (Srichanyachon, 2011) due to the fear of making the partner's draft worse. In response, teachers may need to ease the psychological burden of reviewers with such a mentality. For example, as one participant suggested, letting writers obtain various

feedback—from more than one reviewer and/or Criterion®—is one option. As another, teachers can tell the writer that the ownership of the texts is theirs and that it is the writer's choice to incorporate the reviewers' suggestions.

Interestingly, the foci of the reviewers' feedback, which tend to be on local and grammatical points according to some previous literature (e.g., Sawaya & Yokoyama, 2013; Yu & Hu, 2017), were not voiced in this interview. Instead, the interview participants' minds were on global points, especially on whether and how to effectively convey the intended meaning. Perhaps the writers' checking their grammar before peer review and the checklist in the peer-review worksheet led the reviewers to focus on content and organization.

5.3 Participants' Feelings about and Strategies for Giving Critical Feedback

Feelings about giving critical feedback revealed notable differences among the participants. Although identifying the underlying factors is out of the scope of this study, previous experience of peer interaction, reviewer personality, including the extent to which they feel peer pressure, and their level of confidence in English writing could have played some role. Moreover, as one participant noted, doing peer review online added to the difficulty.

Even with the above-mentioned individual differences, it seems that all participants managed to give many critical and constructive comments in their own considerate ways: a) giving compliments before pointing out the areas for improvement; b) giving concrete suggestions; and c) giving comments as personal opinions. By receiving and giving feedback and reflecting on it during the semester, they have devised effective ways to give critical feedback while avoiding communication breakdown. This finding is consistent with the time-series analysis in Hatakeyama (2021) that the quality of feedback improved as they became more experienced in peer review.

Another interesting finding from the interview was a writer's asking questions proactively to her reviewer to elicit more critical and constructive feedback. This can be one behavior that writers, or the receivers of feedback, can model after, especially when they cannot receive the kind of feedback they want. This behavior can also support the reviewers who may be at a loss about what to point out and those who may be hesitant about providing critical feedback.

As an implication of these findings for pedagogy, further streamlining the learning goals, class activities, and points for feedback before peer review may help those without much confidence feel more confident and less anxious in giving critical feedback. Moreover, the participants' strategies for giving and receiving critical feedback can be conveyed in peer review training. Discussing the benefits and limitations of peer review, sharing strategies for providing and receiving critical feedback, and simulating feedback using samples, can be done. Moreover, before, during, and after each peer review, many things can be done to provide a comfortable environment. For instance, teachers can plan speaking activities involving peer interaction, join and monitor breakout rooms during peer review, facilitate communication whenever necessary, and ask some dyads to share feedback examples with the class.

5.4 The Participants' Perceptions of Grammarly and Criterion®

The participants found Grammarly helpful and liked checking grammatical mistakes before peer review while recognizing its limitation, supporting previous findings (O'Neil & Russell, 2019). Its use seems to have enabled the reviewers to focus more on meaning/content than form/grammar and more on global aspects than local aspects in giving feedback. In other words, the use of Grammarly not only contributed to reducing grammatical errors of the written texts but also raised the learners' awareness on non-grammatical aspects of their writing in peer review.

As for Criterion®, while some participants acknowledged its strength in analyzing the organization of the text, the need for training became clear to realize its potential, which again endorses previous studies (e.g., Chen & Cheng, 2008; Li et al., 2014). As pedagogical implications, demonstrations of how to use Criterion® using a sample passage will help them understand how it works. Communicating the characteristics of Criterion® will enable them to see what can and cannot be done by Criterion®. If effectively implemented, various means of feedback will complement each other. As suggested by a participant, integrating it with peer feedback may help them raise their awareness in this regard.

6. Conclusion

The participants in this study were aware of the benefits and drawbacks of peer review, which are primarily in line with the previous studies' findings. The feelings about giving critical feedback varied among the participants, and they consciously used various strategies for providing critical feedback. The issues peculiar to online classes—the participants' desire for and difficulty in communication—were also elucidated. Moreover, the participants' experience with and perception of Grammarly and Criterion® unveiled the software's potential and the training needed to maximize its effectiveness. These findings provide insights for training as well as for optimal use of various feedback types.

This study has some limitations. This qualitative study is exploratory, with a small number of participants. Therefore, the participants' profiles are not comprehensive or representative in terms of personality, motivation, English proficiency, and background. In addition, since the researcher, who was the course instructor, facilitated the interview, there is a possibility that the participants surmised the researcher's intention, refrained from saying what they had in mind, or changed the nuance of their comments. Moreover, since the interview was done online due to COVID-19, the atmosphere or the setting of the interview was different from those casually done face-to-face with drinks and snacks.

From the academic year of 2022, education based on the revised National Curriculum Standards for high schools, which emphasize "proactive, interactive, and deep learning," will start in Japan (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), 2018, p.3). Hence, university students who have experienced peer interaction are expected to increase in the future. In addition, ICT technology is expected to play a larger role in primary and secondary education, as outlined in GIGA School Program (MEXT, 2020). Furthermore, the shift to online classes in the academic year 2020 has triggered and accelerated various changes in tertiary education. In these contexts, some of the agendas for future research may be to investigate the effectiveness of concurrent use of AWE and peer feedback and the effect of peer

review training incorporating the findings from this study.

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