

PEER FEEDBACK IN LANGUAGE TEACHER TRAINING: STUDENTS' PEDAGOGIC APPROACHES AND INTERPERSONAL POSITIONING

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ABSTRACT

Although peer feedback is increasingly used in English as a foreign language (EFL) courses within European higher education (HE), little research has been carried out to explore its efficacy within specific sociocultural contexts outside of the Asia-Pacific region, and much of the research into peer feedback has been limited to English as a second language (ESL) rather than EFL contexts. Students' positioning of themselves relative to the authors of the texts they review and relative to the texts themselves reveals significant information about how culture and context impact their approach to peer feedback. This study examined 118 written peer response texts of first- and second-year undergraduate EFL teachers in training in a Norwegian HE institution, aiming to investigate both students' pedagogic approaches to providing feedback on peer texts and the interpersonal stances they took toward each other while providing feedback. It found that students who take a collaborative approach to giving feedback are more likely to position themselves as professionals, while those who approach their peers' texts in a prescriptive manner are more likely to view themselves as underqualified. Overall, the responses analysed indicated a preference for collectivist rather than individualistic approaches to peer response, perhaps resulting from low power distances between the students or the Nordic educational context.

KEYWORDS

Academic writing; EFL; Peer response; Peer review; Teacher education

1. Introduction

Peer feedback, also known as *peer assessment*, *peer response*, or *peer review* is “a communication process through which learners enter into dialogues related to performances and standards” with the dual aims of “enhanced understanding and improved learning” (Liu & Carless, 2006, p. 280). It has become a popular form of assessment in higher education (HE) due to its efficiency and its promotion of students’ higher-order thinking skills and metacognition (Liu & Carless, 2006; Topping, 1998; Tsui & Ng, 2000). Because it both requires students to take an active role in feedback and editing processes and makes assessment processes transparent, peer feedback promotes students’ academic literacy, reflection, and confidence (Tsui & Ng, 2000; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996; Vu & Dall’Alba, 2007).

In Norway, peer feedback can be seen to fulfil the requirement that students be made aware of what is emphasized during assessment, that they have the opportunity to improve their work through assessment, and that they have the opportunity for self-assessment and reflection (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2009, §3.2–3.3, 3.12). As teacher trainees are required to be able to evaluate and document their future pupils’ learning and development, both by giving formative feedback and by ensuring that the pupils themselves are able to reflect over and evaluate their own learning (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2010, §2), peer feedback can be seen as a particularly relevant tool in teacher training programs. For the training of English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers, such activities are even more relevant, as peer feedback not only equips student teachers with assessment strategies (Sluijsmans, Brand-Gruwel, van Merriënboer, & Martens, 2004, p. 60) but also develops their English language skills.

However, studies have shown that interpersonal variables can affect the efficacy of peer feedback activities through, for instance, a lack of trust in the self as an assessor or in peers’ ability to assess (Duggan & Ofte, 2016; Mulder, Pearce, & Baik, 2014; van Gennip, Segers, & Tillema, 2010) or through concern for peers’ feelings (see, e.g., Duggan & Ofte, 2016; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996). Students’ stances and pedagogic approaches when undertaking peer feedback are also affected “by various power processes” (Topping, 2003, p. 67), which can in turn be influenced by culture and environment (Hofstede, 2011). For example, Zhao (2018) has shown that different interpersonal patterns of interaction affect the changes made to the reviewed

text and has confirmed that culture likely informs the interactive pattern followed by the reviewer/reviewee. Given that context and culture can influence students' approaches to peer feedback, understanding varied sociocultural contexts may provide teacher trainers with deeper knowledge of how students position themselves relative to one another and each other's texts. Such knowledge would help teacher trainers to provide more effective peer feedback training.

Nonetheless, in the academic study of peer feedback, foreign language learning settings have often been neglected (Yu & Lee, 2016). In 2016, Yu and Lee identified student stances and sociocultural contexts as key areas for future research in peer feedback (pp. 478–479). While significant attention has been paid to the benefits of peer feedback on student learning (e.g., Li, Xiong, Hunter, Guo, & Tywoniw, 2019), research on responder (writer)/respondee (reader) positioning in peer feedback activities, including on power relations and their influence on the responses given, is limited. Power relations and contexts not only affect the ways in which responders position themselves in relation to respondees but also how they approach respondees' texts from a pedagogic perspective.

Recent studies have focused more frequently on students' interpersonal relationships during peer feedback activities, including power negotiations and students' attitudes towards peer feedback (e.g., Turpin, 2019; Zhao, 2018). The current paper aims to further contribute to this trend by exploring responder/respondee positioning during peer feedback activities from two perspectives: it both investigates student responders' pedagogic approaches to peer feedback and demonstrates how their positioning of themselves relative to the respondee (the feedback recipient) is reflected in their critiques.

The study presented here analysed 118 written peer feedback texts produced in the EFL stream of a teacher training program at a Norwegian university. The results, presented below, indicate that the students' positioning of themselves towards each other demonstrates a perceived low power distance (Hofstede, 2011)¹ between participants, shows a statistically significant correlation between taking a collaborative pedagogic approach and a professional interpersonal

¹ In its original form, *power distance* is used to describe “flat” versus “hierarchical” cultures. We use the term to describe relationships within an educational environment. As such, a low power distance might describe the relationship between two students in the same class, while there is likely to be a high power distance between a first-year undergraduate student and the university president.

stance, and suggests that responders favour a collectivist approach to peer feedback (Carson & Nelson, 1994). Possible reasons for these findings are discussed below.

2. Literature Review

Peer feedback activities encourage reflective and self-regulatory practices which have a positive effect on teacher trainees' learning and professional development (see, e.g., Kremer-Hayon & Tillema, 1999; Reilley Freese, 1999; Sluijsmans et al., 2004) and have been found to help students become more confident in and capable of giving feedback (Sluijsmans et al., 2004, p. 74). In recent years, the study of peer feedback has broadened from L1 and second language learning settings to foreign language learning settings (Liu & Carless, 2006; Sluijsmans et al., 2004; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Villamil & De Guerrero, 1996). However, the role of peer feedback within EFL contexts remains in need of significant scholarly attention (Yu & Lee, 2016). In particular, studies of students' stances and the influences of sociocultural contexts within EFL classrooms are scarce (Yu & Lee, 2016). This seems counterintuitive, as peer feedback activities are particularly useful and relevant to EFL teacher trainees; practicing peer feedback is one method of equipping student teachers with the skills for successfully providing formative feedback to their future pupils (Sluijsmans et al., 2004, p. 60).

Yu and Lee (2016) argue that although there have been sporadic articles examining student stances and the sociocultural contexts surrounding peer feedback since the 1990s, research has largely been conducted in ESL rather than EFL contexts and has yielded contradictory results (pp. 478–479). Moreover, studies of peer feedback within EFL contexts have largely been undertaken in the Asia-Pacific region, while studies of peer feedback within an ESL context have largely come out of the United States. Both of these areas have markedly different classroom cultures than the Nordic region, where education reflects social welfare policies emphasizing equality, inclusion, and the good of the community, even if these emphases have been moderated in recent decades by newer policies which stress competence and competition within a global marketplace (Telhaug, Mediås, & Aasen, 2006; Welle-Strand & Tjeldvoll, 2002).

Regional difference has been considered a limitation to the generalizability of studies on peer feedback in the past; Min (2008), for example, has acknowledged that the results of her study “cannot be generalized to other writing contexts due to the [participants’] . . . almost identical cultural backgrounds” (p. 302). As such, the findings of studies from abroad may not be indicative of the efficacy of peer feedback in Norway. Nonetheless, we here provide a brief overview of these earlier studies’ findings.

Studies of responder/respondee relations began with Johnson and Yang’s (1990) qualitative examination of politeness strategies in peer feedback texts. Several studies in the 1990s furthered Johnson and Yang’s (1990) work: Johnson (1992) studied the syntactic patterns of compliments in peer feedback texts, identified several common patterns for providing compliments, and discussed possible social reasons compliments were used as a discourse strategy in peer feedback activities. Mangelsdorf and Schlumberger (1992) analysed student responders’ approaches towards each other’s papers, coding them as “prescriptivist,” “collaborative,” or “interpretive” and finding that responders most often adopted a prescriptivist approach. Lockhart and Ng (1995) extended Mangelsdorf and Schlumberger’s (1992) work through their analysis of peers’ oral responses to papers, coding peer feedback texts as “authoritative,” “interpretive,” “probing,” and “collaborative”. Villamil and de Guerrero (1994, 1996) categorized responses as either “collaborative” or “prescriptivist,” finding that responders preferred a collaborative to a prescriptivist approach, in contrast to earlier research. They suggested that this difference was due to sociocultural differences between the United States and Puerto Rico (Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996, p. 68).

Although, as Min (2008, pp. 287–288) has noted, interest in “the stance issue” fizzled out in the late 1990s, the last decades have seen a return to responders’ approach to texts in studies of peer interaction. For example, Min (2008) found that novice responders are more likely to take a prescriptivist approach than experienced responders, while Zhao (2018) has shown that the socioculturally influenced interpersonal positions taken on by students while giving and receiving peer feedback influence not only the type of feedback given but also the types and quality of changes made to the text by respondees. However, despite this limited renewed interest, “the stance issue” remains an under-researched aspect of peer feedback.

The influence of culture(s) on peer feedback has been a central question in previous work on the subject. However, few studies have examined the influence of culture in detail. Perhaps among the earliest, Carson and Nelson (1994) argued that the cultural patterns of individualism and collectivism² strongly influence the efficacy of peer feedback, suggesting that students from collectivist cultures may struggle more with peer feedback tasks than those from individualist cultures. While it may be presumptuous to define entire cultures in such binary terms, this view is certainly useful when examining approaches and attitudes to peer feedback in local settings, and these terms have been used in almost all previous research on the topic. Villamil and de Guerrero (1996), for example, specifically emphasised cultural perspectives when they argued that their students' collaborative approach to peer feedback may have been due to Puerto Rico's collectivist culture, and Min (2008) and Chang (2016) also emphasized the shared collectivist cultures of their studies' participants.

However, culture, and how it might influence individual attitudes towards group work, is a fraught topic. Gullestad (2004) has argued that culture is “a complex and polysemous concept in Norway,” which can include both “ways of life . . . and patterns of social action” and “frames of interpretation” (p. 191). The term *culture* can be conceived both widely, as in national culture, and narrowly, as in the culture of a specific teacher-training programme or classroom. Recent work questions national culture as an easy answer to differences between groups' approaches to peer feedback. Chang (2016), for example, emphasizes that “learners, regardless of their collectivist or individualist background,” share a similar resistance to peer feedback because they conflict with the “face-saving” impulse which allows group harmony (p. 2). Nonetheless, Yu and Lee (2016) identify cultural issues as key areas for future research in peer response in EFL contexts, as student stances are likely influenced by local factors. Overall, however, there is a dearth of perspectives from various cultural situations, as well as a lack of reflection upon issues of culture in peer feedback research.

² *Collectivism* is here understood as placing the needs of the group and the harmony of interpersonal relations above individual gain, while *individualism* focuses on and prizes difference, individual reward, and competition.

3. Categorization of Peer Feedback Activity and Study Subjects

The present study analysed 118 written peer feedback texts produced in first- and second-year undergraduate teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) classes undertaken at a Norwegian teacher training institution. All but five students had a Scandinavian language as their mother tongue. The classes were provided for future primary (Grades 1–7) and middle school (Grades 5–10) EFL teachers. All students were informed of the purpose of the study; participants provided written consent.

Prior to the activity, students took part in a seminar on peer feedback and how to provide useful formative responses. The seminar demonstrated formative feedback best practices and provided a space for the discussion and evaluation of sample feedback. Following the seminar, students were asked to read and respond to drafts of each other's papers in class using a sheet with guiding prompts (Appendix A). This form was formulated like a grading rubric. Each class had a different paper topic, but they were asked to use the same response sheet. Responders filled in these forms during class, and respondees were later encouraged to clarify unclear written responses orally; however, these discussions are not included in the data set analysed in the present paper. Only the written peer feedback provided on the feedback form has been analysed. The peer feedback task was designed with several goals in mind: (a) that students could help each other to improve their papers prior to final submission, (b) that students could further develop their academic writing competence through response and comparison, and (c) that students could practice giving formative feedback, taught to them as part of the TEFL program.

4. Method and Methodology

The present study aimed to analyse participants' written responses to their peers' work from two perspectives: pedagogic approach—that is, their approaches to providing feedback on peer texts—and responders' positioning of themselves relative to the respondee—that is, their interpersonal positioning. It used a mixed-methods approach. Data were first analysed qualitatively using social-constructionist discourse analysis, which is, as Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) suggest, particularly useful “to investigate and analyse power relations” within specific contexts (p. 2); both researchers coded the data independently; the codes were then compared,

and discrepancies were resolved by the researchers together. Coded data were assessed for correlative significance using a two-tailed Mann-Whitney U test.

The data were first coded using a priori themes determined from Mangelsdorf and Schlumberger (1992) and Villamil and de Guerrero (1996). Like Villamil and de Guerrero (1996), we use only two categories, *collaborative* and *prescriptive*, to describe participants' approaches to giving response. We have used Mangelsdorf and Schlumberger's (1992) definitions of these approaches as a basis for our own: *prescriptive* responses focus on surface-level issues, like structure and grammar, and try to fit the resposdee's paper into a pre-conceived notion of essay form, while *collaborative* responses "anticipate the problems readers will have" and try to "meet the needs of the same audience the author has in mind," with responders giving "a rationale for their suggestions" (p. 242). We thus define prescriptive responses as those which focus more on form than meaning, more on surface-level errors than errors in content, more on structure, and more on the requirements of the assignment, while collaborative responses focus on the development of content and ideas, the clarity and quality of the main argument, and the needs of the implied reader.

The data were then coded again using a posteriori themes derived from the data. While the past studies compared by Ferris (2003) consider responders' positioning of themselves as less qualified than, equal to, or superior to the resposdee to be an element of pedagogic approach, we chose to examine interpersonal positioning separately for two reasons. The first is that responders can take an authoritative position and still provide a collaborative, content-focused response to their peers' work—a collaborative or prescriptive approach, then, implies neither an authoritative or subordinated tone in responders' written responses. The second is that we determined that there were multiple ways in which responders tried to negotiate their position relative to the resposdees, and this element was particularly intriguing not only in light of their future profession as EFL teachers but also in light of the sociocultural concerns outlined above. Responders' positioning of themselves relative to resposdees' are therefore categorised using the following categories: *professional*, *professional friend*, *friend*, *underqualified friend*, *underqualified*, and *unclear position*. These positions were considered to be on a scale indicating responders' authority or inferiority relative to the resposdee and were thus assigned a numerical

value of one through six. Illustrative quotes from participants' peer feedback texts are included below to allow transparency of practice by making visible the data coding process.

The two sets of coded data were then tested for correlation. A two-tailed Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine if there was any statistically significant correlation between participants' pedagogic approaches, where the participants' texts were separated into two independent samples based on their assignment to one of two categories of approach, and positioning, assigned a numerical value of one through six as described above.

Our analysis of participants' written response texts therefore relates to responder/respondee relationships and how these relationships manifest themselves in the language used to give critique, as well as the pedagogic approaches chosen by participants. This allows us to examine whether participants' interpersonal positioning of themselves may relate to the pedagogic approach chosen. Furthermore, these six categories allowed us to explore the power distance (Hofstede, 2011) responders felt between themselves and the respondee, as well as to consider the ways in which participants perceived their pedagogic role as a responder.

5. Data and Results

Our study collected 119 peer response forms. One form was excluded from analysis because it was a duplicate. Of the total 118 responses analysed, 72 (61.02%) were coded as prescriptive and 46 (38.98%) collaborative in their approach, while responder/respondee positioning was distributed as follows:

Table 1. Positioning distribution

Category	Number	Percent
Professional	38	32.30
Professional Friend	15	12.71
Friend	34	28.81
Underqualified Friend	5	4.24
Underqualified	6	5.08
Unclear Position	20	16.95
Total	118	100.00

Correlation between approach (prescriptive or collaborative) and position (professional, professional friend, friend, underqualified friend, underqualified, unclear position) was determined using a two-tailed Mann-Whitney U test. The medians of the two approaches were assumed to be different, and this was confirmed by the test (Z -score 4.13565; p -value < 0.00001). The difference in the median positioning of the prescriptive and collaborative groups was found to be significant ($p < 0.05$).

Table 2. Distribution of results, integers, percentage of total responses, percentage of responses within each approach category

	Number (Integers)		Percentage of Total Responses (%)		Percentage of Each Approach (%)	
	Prescriptive	Collaborative	Prescriptive	Collaborative	Prescriptive	Collaborative
Professional	15	23	12.7	19.5	20.8	50.0
Professional Friend	9	6	7.6	5.1	12.5	13.0
Friend	20	14	16.9	11.9	27.8	30.4
Underqualified Friend	3	2	2.5	1.7	4.2	4.3
Underqualified	5	1	4.2	0.8	6.9	2.2
Unknown	20	0	16.9	0.0	27.8	0.0
Total	72	46	61.0	39.0	100	100

Correlations between approach and position are especially clear when comparing the percentage of responses within each approach category (Table 2). While there were no statistically significant differences between students' approaches and the positions *professional friend*, *friend*, or *underqualified friend*, students who took a collaborative approach were more than twice as likely to position themselves as professionals. Those who took a prescriptivist approach were three times more likely to style themselves as underqualified than those who took a collaborative approach.

There is a slight positive correlation between the three friend categories—*professional friend*, *friend*, and *underqualified friend*—and a prescriptive approach, with 27% of total responses and 44.5% of prescriptive responses falling within these categories. Most intriguing is that all 20 students whose position was unknown took a prescriptivist approach (16.9% of total

respondents and 27.8% of respondents categorized as prescriptive). Possible reasons for this are discussed below.

5.1 Professional (38.32%)

Students who took a collaborative approach to responding were more than twice as likely to position themselves as professionals. These students displayed confidence and authority in their responses. This is reflected in their acknowledgement of the potential of the draft they read and through their providing suggestions for improvement, as is evident in the following comment: “The paragraphs where he summarizes gender in each of the fairy tales could include a quote or a reference from the actual work.” Here, the responder focuses on whether the resondee has provided enough support for his/her arguments.

Furthermore, collaborative professionals often phrased critiques as questions: “The thesis is clear, focusing on gender issues, but maybe narrow it down by looking at f.ex. the relationship of two of the characters presented?” Phrasing the critique as a question appears to aim both to encourage further reflection on the part of the resondee and to prevent possible offence.

Collaborative professional responders’ sense of authority and expertise is also evidenced by their awareness of the intended audience of the assessed texts. They often bring writers’ attention to aspects of the text with which readers might struggle: “Is there a need of a comparison with another work that sheds light upon ‘the gender binary in our society in full?’” Here, the responder provides a suggestion that might help readers of the final version of the text to better understand the argument. In contrast, “professionals” who took a prescriptivist approach usually pointed to elements they found to be missing from the draft and often used the imperative: “Include activity directly into the text.”

5.2 Professional/Friend (15.13%)

There was no significant difference in the correlation of a prescriptive or collaborative approach and responders’ positioning themselves somewhere between a professional and a friend, with 12.5% of all prescriptive responses and 13% of all collaborative responses falling in this category.

The responders' dual position as friend and professional is evident in their attempts to provide feedback while simultaneously trying to emphasize comradery with the writer. On the one hand, these responders both specified academic elements that could be improved and suggested how such improvements could be achieved: "I . . . recommend focusing on Perrault's or the Grimms' version, as including both may make it harder to compare them to a modern adaption." On the other hand, these responders shared with friend category responders a certain hesitancy to give critique. Their criticisms were often marked by extensive use of hedging: "A little unclear what versions [of the fairy tales] are being discussed—perhaps make it more clear." Furthermore, a technique we call "sandwich hedging" was often used by these respondents, where a critique is sandwiched between two compliments in an effort to "soften the blow" of the critique: "A very good and positive start. Perhaps you can tie the different parts together to create more flow. I look forward to read the finished text."

5.3 Friend (28.8%)

Making up the second largest category of total responses, there was no clear correlation between approach and this position: 28.7% of students who took a prescriptive approach positioned themselves as friends, as did 30.4% of students who took a collaborative approach.

Responses in this category tended to provide general comments with very little, if any, critical focus on content. Rather, these responses were affirming, reflecting only what the responders enjoyed about the draft, to bolster their peers' confidence. These responses usually also included many exclamation marks, emojis and superlatives: "I really like the great use of language" and "Well done! 😊".

Likewise, attempts at criticism tended to be very general and rarely specified problems or provided suggestions for improvement. Critiques were almost always accompanied by extensive use of hedging, particularly through the use of emojis, to mitigate possible offence: "Could improve in the last page otherwise perfect! <3"; and "Make your thesis more clear. 😊". Moreover, these responses were characterized by an informal tone, perhaps in an effort to minimize the severity of criticism or to demonstrate equality between responder and resposdee: "There is no need to make a big deal about it"; and "you know your stuff."

All this suggests that the responders did not feel secure in their own knowledge and that they did not wish to criticize the respondees, whom they saw as equals. This further suggests that these responders felt they could not inhabit a position of power or take an authoritative stance towards the respondees.

5.4 Friend/Underqualified (5.4%)

This category shared some characteristics of the friend category. Many of the responders commented on their own enjoyment of what they had read rather than providing constructive feedback: “I liked that you were ‘kort og godt’ [brief and to the point]. You just said it how it was and that’s it. I like it. 😊”. Moreover, the majority of the responders in this category did not see themselves as qualified to give response on elements related to academic writing and articulated this throughout their responses: “I think so [that it is correct]. APA is not really my thing.” Others guessed at whether they thought the paper fulfilled the academic requirements of the assignment: “The language in the paper is not in an oral way, so I would say it is academic.”

These responses reflected responders’ insecurities, which caused them to take a position somewhat subordinate to the respondee. While some respondents in this category took on a certain degree of power by stating what they liked about the draft, they were also hesitant to claim knowledge about a number of subjects and exhibited a desire to avoid implying that they were in any way more knowledgeable than the respondees. More often than not, they deferred to the respondees’ knowledge.

5.5 Underqualified (6.5%)

These responders self-identified as inexperienced and underqualified in the context of giving response; they usually apologized for their self-perceived lack of expertise: “I can’t say that I know better than you, about things that can be improved. So, I’m sorry, but I don’t know. :S”; and “There are a few words that I do not understand, but that is not because they are used wrong, it is just me. 😊”.

These quotes indicate that the responders did not consider themselves to have anything to contribute which could improve respondees’ texts; they position themselves as not having the

knowledge to do so. Here, too, emojis were used extensively, perhaps in an effort to minimize power distance and show that the responders empathized with respondees. Apology was frequently used to indicate overt subordination.

5.6 Unclear Position (20.17%)

Students who fell into this category provided no specific feedback to their peers, often simply writing “yes” or “no” on the feedback form. As such, there was not enough written on their feedback forms to determine how they positioned themselves relative to the respondee. The responses given were not formative in any way.

6. Discussion

The majority of students included in the study clearly wish to maintain collegiality and equality with their peers when providing peer feedback: 45.4% of responses fell within the categories professional friend, friend, or underqualified friend. Moreover, as exemplified above, even those responses that fell within the two categories professional and underqualified often made attempts to display friendliness and equality through use of hedging or the inclusion of emojis. This suggests that the findings of earlier research undertaken in other contexts is largely applicable in Norwegian HE settings. For example, the use of emojis reflects Chang’s (2016) finding that emoticons tend to be used by responders in EFL peer feedback activities to mark solidarity with respondees, as “hedge-strengtheners” (p. 15), or to reduce the formality of the task.

There were multiple ways in which responders tried to negotiate their position relative to the respondees, and this element was particularly intriguing not only in light of their future profession as English teachers but also in light of the sociocultural concerns outlined above. This allowed us to examine the feedback texts as “constructed in relation to social action, how people construct their understandings of the world in social interaction, and how these understandings work ideologically to support forms of social organisation based on unequal relations of power” (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 106–107), reflecting the constant renegotiation of power relations between students described by Reichert and Liebscher (2012). Students who positioned themselves as professionals were more likely to take a collaborative approach and more likely to

comment on content rather than on their subjective experiences of the paper. Student responders in the three “friend” categories focused mostly on affirming the quality of the respondees’ work rather than discussing what could be improved; maintaining good interpersonal relations was prioritised. Finally, those who positioned themselves as underqualified were more likely to take a prescriptivist approach, to use emojis and other hedging techniques, and to purposefully subordinate themselves using apologetic language; these techniques also suggest a desire to maintain good interpersonal relations with the resposdee.

The majority of responders used a prescriptivist approach. It is unclear whether this was due to their relative lack of training in peer feedback (Min, 2008), due to their concerns about fluency and accuracy in the foreign language being used (Duggan & Ofte, 2016), or due to cultural and social concerns (Carson & Nelson, 1994; Johnson, 1992; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1994, 1996). It is likely that all three of these concerns influenced the students’ stances and approaches to the texts to which they were responding. Further research exploring this would benefit the field.

Previous research has found that students with limited training in peer feedback tend to take a prescriptivist rather than a collaborative stance, belying their discomfort in giving feedback (Min, 2008). Min (2008) has found that experienced feedback providers are more likely to provide collaborative responses, while those new to peer feedback are likely to focus on aspects of a text that are easily categorized as (in)correct. That a majority of the participants used the prescriptivist approach corroborates earlier findings by Mangelsdorf and Schlumberger (1992), who argue that students take a prescriptivist approach because they are more concerned with that is demonstrably “correct,” such as the use of APA, than with the reviewed text’s ability to communicate clearly. However, in this instance, we feel that the students’ reliance on prescriptivism may instead hint at their own insecurities. The students in this study were first- and second-year undergraduates with limited experience in peer feedback and in the English subject. More, the results of a previous study (Duggan & Ofte, 2016), in which these same students reported that they were worried about their level of subject-specific knowledge and their ability to give effective feedback, suggest that lack of training likely influenced responders’ positioning of themselves relative to respondees, supporting Min’s (2008) findings. It is therefore

likely that insecurity has affected these students' stances and approaches. It is possible that the students who positioned themselves as professionals—and were therefore more likely to give collaborative feedback—had some previous experience in giving peer feedback (Min, 2008), but this requires corroboration in future research.

Another aspect of providing feedback that may have influenced the students' stances and approach is their confidence in using English. None of the students in the class had English as a first language, and some had it as a third or fourth language. Many of these students reported, in a previous study (Duggan & Ofte, 2016), that they felt their English skills were not developed enough to give effective feedback to their peers. Moreover, as shown above, many underscored their uncertainty regarding, for example, word choice, as they were unsure what the words used by their peers meant. While this could arguably also be true of students in monolingual settings, it is likely more pronounced in EFL settings. Further research which explicitly explores the effects of linguistic ability and/or confidence on peer feedback would therefore be a welcome addition to the field.

Sociocultural concerns were also likely to have influenced the responses given and the students' stances towards each other. In a previous study (Duggan & Ofte, 2016), these students reported that they were worried about offending their peers and were uncomfortable taking on authority. Interpersonal variables have been shown to influence peer feedback: A lack of trust in the self as an assessor or in peers' ability to assess (Duggan & Ofte, 2016; Mulder et al., 2014; van Gennip et al., 2010) or concerns for peers' feelings (see, e.g., Duggan & Ofte, 2016; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996) may limit response efficacy. An emphasis on equality, or "mutuality" (Zhao, 2018, p. 270), between the responder and resposdee has been shown to result in better learning opportunities for both. However, whether participants' stances in the current study reflected the emphasis on equality, inclusion, and community in the classroom cultures of the Nordic region (Telhaug et al., 2006; Welle-Strand & Tjeldvoll, 2002), elements specific to this specific teacher training program, or insecurity is unclear. We can infer that sociocultural concerns influenced responders' positioning of themselves relative to resposdees, but further study is required. Moreover, whether the stances taken influenced resposdees' revisions to their

texts (e.g., Zhao, 2018) was not explored in the current study and would be an interesting subject of future study.

The results of a previous study carried out with a subset of the same group of students found that 94% felt the peer feedback activity had improved their texts (Duggan & Ofte, 2016). In the present study, only 39% of peer feedback texts were coded as collaborative in pedagogic approach, but hedging strategies were widespread across all categories of responder-respondee positioning. This appears to suggest that interpersonal positioning and feedback tone, more than pedagogic approach, influences students' perception of the feedback's helpfulness. Thus, it may be that students perceive affirmation as "useful" regardless of response content. This may suggest that the students privilege collectivist approaches when receiving response, but whether this is limited to the present context or more widespread is difficult to say. The correlation between interpersonal position, feedback tone, and perceived helpfulness requires further study. Nevertheless, these students appear to focus on group harmony above other concerns in their feedback. Low power distance between the students may have influenced how participants positioned themselves relative to their peers. This confirms the findings of our previous study (Duggan & Ofte, 2016), in which students self-reported as uncomfortable when asked to provide peers with critical commentary, listing a lack of authority as a prime concern (Duggan & Ofte, 2016).

7. Limitations

In the present study, participants were given a form (Appendix A) containing prompts to help them reflect on specific issues. This format of feedback may have elicited a more authoritative stance, prompting participants to position themselves as professionals, or encouraged students to answer in a prescriptivist manner. More, because these response forms were filled out in class and respondees could clarify written feedback orally, participants may have provided less detailed written responses than they would have if they were not given the opportunity for further oral response. Further studies, and in particular, comparative studies, are required to test whether different feedback formats might elicit a different distribution of positions and approaches.

8. Conclusions

As participants were undergraduate students who had not yet completed their study of English, and as they were working in a foreign language, their insecurities may have been magnified by their context. Although the results of this study are not generalizable to the larger Norwegian student population, it nonetheless provided a number of interesting findings. First, the study suggested that students who take a collaborative rather than a prescriptive approach to giving feedback are more likely to position themselves as professionals, while those who approach their peers' texts in a prescriptive manner are more likely to view themselves as underqualified and/or to provide limited, surface-level feedback. This finding appears to correlate Min's (2008) earlier finding that more experienced givers of feedback are more likely to provide collaborative responses. Future studies employing multi-regression analysis are required to confirm this correlation. In particular, long-term studies comparing students' changing approaches to peer feedback throughout their studies would be beneficial.

Second, sociocultural context appears to influence students' approaches to the task of peer response and their positioning of themselves relative to each other. It is unclear whether the majority of responders in the present study chose a prescriptive approach due to their relative lack of training in peer response (Min, 2008), due to context, or due to sociocultural concerns (Carson & Nelson, 1994; Johnson, 1992; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996). However, in a previous study, these students self-reported worrying about group harmony and their own authority (Duggan & Ofte, 2016). As a collaborative approach was positively correlated, in this study, with an interpersonal position of power over the respondee, we can infer that both experience and sociocultural concerns influenced responders' positioning of themselves relative to respondees, supporting both Min's (2008) and Villamil and de Guerrero's (1996) earlier findings. More, it is possible that students' lack of confidence in the language being used affected their choices (Duggan & Ofte, 2016). Further research is required.

Finally, this study suggests that affirmation, rather than response content, influences respondees' experience of feedback as "useful." This may reflect a collectivist approach to group work as well as the low power distance between students, or it may simply reflect students' overall desire to have their work affirmed as "good." Overall, however, the study suggests that

providing critical feedback may be more difficult for students in foreign language learning settings in which group harmony is seen as highly important, something that teacher educators ought to take into account when designing peer feedback training and tasks.

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Appendix A

<i>Question</i>	<i>Feedback</i>
Does the paper have an introduction?	
Does the paper have a clear thesis?	
Is the thesis argued in all sections of the paper? If no, where could it be improved?	
Is the argument supported with clearly stated evidence?	
Is the evidence cited properly? If not, what's wrong?	
Do the verbs and subjects agree throughout?	
Is the paper written in a consistent tense?	
Is the tone of the paper formal (academic) or are informal terms used throughout?	
Does the paper answer the following questions and bring the answers together to support a thesis?	

[INSERT LIST OF CENTRAL QUESTIONS FROM ASSIGNMENT]	
Are the sentences clear and concise, or are they a little hard to read?	
Has the author used varied sentence structure throughout?	
Has the author used varied vocabulary throughout, or is there too much repetition?	
Are words spelled correctly, and are the correct words used? Note any major problems.	
Is spelling consistent (e.g., always <i>mom</i> , not a mix of <i>mum</i> and <i>mom</i>)?	
Is the punctuation correct and consistent?	
Are there any major problems with grammar you need to note?	
Name at least one thing you think could be improved in this essay.	
Name at least one thing you really like about this essay.	
Do you have any other comments?	