Mitigation of Disagreement in Peer Review among L2 Learners and Native Speakers in a College Writing Class[1]

Mitigación del Impacto de las Opiniones de Desacuerdo en el Proceso de Revisión por Pares entre Estudiantes de una Segunda Lengua y Hablantes Nativos en una Clase de Escritura a Nivel Universitario

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Abstract

Peer review is now a commonplace practice in process-oriented writing instruction. A crucial aspect of peer review is assessing another classmate's work, which encompasses the act of disagreement. Given its prevalence in the classroom, it is necessary to analyze how L2 learners mitigate disagreement in the context of peer review with other L2 learners and native speakers. The present paper presents a qualitative analysis of action research from an introductory English writing class at the university level including native speakers of English and international students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The conversation-based peer review sessions were analyzed for various mitigation strategies including token agreement, hedging, prefacing positive remarks and requests for clarification. The analysis shows that L2 learners and native speakers of English use similar mitigation strategies, and it demonstrates the co-construction of meaning in peer review interactions.

Keywords: disagreement, mitigation, L2, peer review

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Resumen

Actualmente la revisión por pares es una práctica común en la instrucción que orienta los procesos de escritura. Un aspecto importante de la revisión por pares, es evaluar el trabajo de otro compañero de clase, lo cual puede provocar opiniones de desacuerdo. Dada la incidencia de esta situación en el aula de clase, es necesario analizar cómo los estudiantes de una segunda lengua pueden mitigar el impacto de las opiniones de desacuerdo generadas durante el ejercicio de revisión por pares con otros estudiantes de una segunda lengua y con hablantes nativos. Este artículo presenta un análisis cualitativo de un proyecto de investigación acción desarrollado en una clase introductoria de escritura de inglés a nivel universitario, con la participación de hablantes nativos de inglés y estudiantes universitarios de diferentes orígenes lingüísticos y culturales. El análisis de las conversaciones generadas durante el proceso de revisión por pares fue realizado teniendo en cuenta diversas estrategias de mitigación, entre ellas, llegar a acuerdos simbólicos, manifestar con cortesía la opinión de desacuerdo, realizar comentarios positivos, y solicitar clarificación. El análisis muestra que los estudiantes de una L2 y los hablantes nativos de inglés usan estrategias de mitigación similares y demuestra la construcción conjunta de significado en las interacciones del proceso de revisión por pares.

Palabras clave: Desacuerdo, Mitigación, L2, revisión por pares

Resumo

Atualmente a revisão por pares é uma prática comum na instrução que orienta os processos de escritura. Um aspecto importante da revisão por pares é avaliar o trabalho de outro companheiro de classe, o qual pode provocar opiniões de desacordo. Dada a incidência desta situação na sala de aula, é necessário analisar como os estudantes de uma segunda língua podem mitigar o impacto das opiniões de desacordo geradas durante o exercício de revisão por pares com outros estudantes de uma segunda língua e com falantes nativos. Este artigo apresenta uma análise qualitativa de um projeto de pesquisa ação, desenvolvido em uma classe introdutória de escritura de inglês a nível universitário, com a participação de falantes nativos de inglês e estudantes universitários de diferentes origens linguísticas e culturais. A análise das conversações geradas durante o processo de revisão por pares foi realizada tendo em conta diversas estratégias de mitigação, entre elas, chegar a acordos simbólicos, manifestar com cortesia a opinião de desacordo, realizar comentários positivos, e solicitar esclarecimento. A análise mostra que os estudantes de uma L2 e os falantes nativos de inglês usam estratégias de mitigação similares e demonstra a construção conjunta de significado nas interações do processo de revisão por pares.

Palavras chave: Desacordo, Mitigação, L2, revisão por pares

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Introduction

Since the 1970s, peer review has become a significant mainstay in the writing classroom (Elbow, 1973; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Mendoca & Johnson, 1994). Peer review, also referred to as *peer editing* or *peer response*, is defined as "use of learners as sources of information and interactants for each other in such a way that learners assume roles and responsibilities normally taken on by a formally trained teacher, tutor, or editor in commenting on and critiquing each other's drafts in both written and oral formats in the process of writing" (Liu & Hansen, 2002, p. 1). This collaborative revision technique stems from the change in perspective from writing as a product to a process (Emig, 1971), and is now a common feature of process-oriented writing instruction (Applebee & Langer, 2013; Caulk, 1994; Paulus, 1999). The teaching of writing as a process places emphasis on the stages of planning, revising, editing and working collaboratively with peers to improve a writing assignment.

From the perspective of pragmatics, assessing a peer's writing involves expressing disagreement which could potentially damage the hearer's *face* or esteem in some way as a face-threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In this situation, interlocutors often attempt to mitigate, or soften, a disagreement through a variety of strategies including token agreement (*I agree with you, but…*), hedges (*maybe, kind of, I think*), giving explanations, and requesting clarification. While research has investigated mitigation strategies in disagreement in a variety of contexts, relatively little research has explored mitigation among second language (L2) learners (Bardovi-Harlig & Salsbury, 2004), especially in naturally-occurring contexts combining native speakers and L2 learners.

The present study aims to fill this gap in the literature by providing a qualitative analysis of the strategies for mitigated disagreement employed by L2 learners and native speakers in an introductory English composition class at a university. In particular, this research seeks to shed light on how L2 learners and native speakers mitigate disagreement in peer review in L2 learner groups, native speaker groups and L2 learners with native speakers.

This paper first reviews the study of disagreement along with relevant literature followed by a detailed description of methodology. Then, the paper presents a description of relevant disagreement typologies and mitigation strategies as well as a description of the qualitative data analysis. Finally, it offers conclusions based on the findings from this data set.

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Literature Review

The analysis of disagreement is essentially a study of assessment. Pomerantz (1984) proposes that assessment is a routine feature of social interactions. In order to make her point, she presents the following example:

J: Let's feel the water. Oh, it …
R: It's wonderful. It's just right. It's like bathtub water.

(p. 57)

Furthermore, it depicts assessment as an interactional activity with a clear link between participation in an event and assessment of an event. The assessments are viewed as "products" of that participation. In the context of peer review, the "products" students have to offer are not always pleasant (expressions of agreement), rather oftentimes negative (expression of disagreement). The expression of disagreement in the case of peer review is a potentially *face-threatening* act (Brown & Levinson, 1978), since the hearer may lose esteem or *face*. One common way that interlocutors deal with potentially face-threatening acts is to mitigate the loss of face through a variety of mitigation strategies.

While there is substantial research on the topic of disagreement and mitigated disagreement, "relatively less research on agreements and disagreements has been conducted on the speech of learners and non-native speakers" (Bardovi-Harlig & Salsbury, 2004, p.200). The existing studies include written discourse completion tests (DCTs), conversational interviews, and online peer review collaborations. The following review of recent literature on L2 learner disagreement is organized by methodology.

Discourse completion tasks (DCTs) are one of the most common types of data collection on disagreements, consisting of written descriptions of specific scenarios followed by a conversational turn for the informant who is to write responses exactly as they would respond in the situation (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1993). Overall, studies have found important differences among L2 speakers of English and native speakers of English. For example, Behnam and Niroomand (2011) found that Iranian EFL leaners used a limited number of strategies due to proficiency level in English; however, Bavarsad et al. (2015) found that Persian EFL speakers used more mitigating strategies than American English speakers in expressing disagreement. In studies on Chinese English learners, Chen (2006) and Guodong and Jing (2005) found the tendency to over-perform non target-like linguistic features such as certain types of mitigation, due in part to pragmatic transfer from Chinese. In a study of ESL learners from a variety of different countries and English proficiency levels, Kreutel (2007) notes a tendency for L2 learners to use 'undesirable'

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strategies which she defines to include abandonment of the message, use of the performative *I disagree*, lack of mitigation, bare exclamation of *no* and blunt statements of the opposite.

Researchers have used audio-recorded interviews, role-plays and conversations to obtain similar types of information on disagreement. For example, Lawson (2009) audio-recorded responses to ten controversial statements by Japanese speakers of English, and the responses demonstrated expressions of mitigated disagreement were as frequent as NS of English, although NS of English used slightly more positive politeness including partial agreement, humor and positive comments, while Japanese speakers of English used more hedges. In a study on L2 learners of Spanish and native Spanish speakers, students discussed one of three issues on campus and ranked possible solutions, and were informed to defend their choice in an audio-recorded conversation with another student. In this study, Flores-Ferrán and Lovejoy (2014) witnessed redundant mitigation strategies from L2 learners compared to a wider variety of mitigation strategies from NS of Spanish. Bardovi-Harlig and Salsbury (2004) audio-recorded role-plays among L2 learners of English and native speakers of English during a longitudinal research project and found improvement in acquisition of pragmatic competence over time. While students began with open disagreements, that changed as time passed.

Finally, other research has examined naturalistic interactions in classroom environments, including online contexts. Bell (1998), for instance, recorded classroom interactions in an ESL class and revealed a tendency for Korean L2 learners to express disagreement in direct and unmitigated ways. Greek L2 learners of English also showed a tendency for unmitigated disagreement or disagreement at the beginning of a turn in an analysis of classroom discourse (Kakava, 1993). Shabaka Fernandez (2013) discovered conflicting results for DCT among Egyptian L2 speakers of English and their posts on Facebook; in the former, Egyptians used unmitigated disagreement, but Egyptians used more token agreements and hedges on Facebook. In a study of online disagreements among students in an English as a lingua franca class, Maíz-Arevalo (2014) discusses how students avoided strong agreement and favor mitigated disagreement, as well as the importance of proficiency as a factor in determining native-like patterns of disagreement. So, while there is evidence that certain cultures may prefer unmitigated styles, the context and proficiency levels also appear to be influential factors.

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Taken together, these findings demonstrate differences in L2 learners' expressions of disagreement compared to native English speakers. Since role-plays, tasks and DCTs may differ substantially from naturalistic conversations and activities (Shabaka Fernandez, 2013), it is imperative to further explore what is actually happening in the context of the classroom. The research on

classroom and online course contexts cited above demonstrate that Korean (Bell, 1998) and Greek (Kakava, 1993) L2 learners of English tend to express unmitigated disagreement, while a class of students from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds favors mitigated disagreement (Maíz-Arevalo, 2014). The present study furthers this line of research by providing a qualitative analysis of audio-recorded peer review sessions from a university English class consisting of native English speakers and international students from varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Methodology

Research Design

There were several important reasons for the research design chosen for the present study. The chief aim of the study was to analyze the act of disagreement embedded in the commonplace classroom task of peer review, especially how students negotiate this through oral conversation-based peer review. In order to heighten the reliability of the data, the peer-review for the second assignment was analyzed after students were more comfortable with the classmates and the peer review process. The peer review process in the students' own classroom with their own classmates embodies natural consequences of maintaining face with peers. The ipod recording kits using nano ipods provided a technology that was familiar to students as well as small and unobtrusive in the classroom. Finally, the classroom itself is well suited for this type of study given the mix of native speakers and non-native speakers. In particular, this study allows us to see how students engage in disagreement among L2 learners, between L2 learners and native speakers and between native speakers.

Context/Participants

The participants in the study include 21 first-year students at a large public university in the United States. Of these, eight students were native English speakers and the remaining thirteen were international students who were intermediate English speakers, having passed a test to enter the class. Of the students, 13 were males and 8 females. They ranged in age from 18 to 25 years old. The class itself was the second semester of first year composition, consisting of an introduction to writing for research. By this point in the year, students had been through the peer review process at least four times, including the previous introductory first year writing class. As such, students were well aware of the expectation to assess other students' writing and that other students

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would assess their writing, expressing disagreement with certain aspects. This understanding of the peer review process impacts the context of analysis greatly. In this way, students understood themselves to be working in a collaborative assignment to improve their papers for later submission for a grade. An additional important aspect of the class itself is the presence of native English speakers and L2 learners of English. It is likely that international students and native speakers of English may assign the native speakers a higher status in the context of the English writing classroom and the written English assignment. This certainly would impact patterns of disagreement and mitigation.

Table 1. Groups of students including pseudonyms, gender and countries of origin

Peer Review Group	Pseudonym	Gender	Country of Origin
NS-NS	Charles	M	U.S.
	Diana	F	U.S.
L2-L2	Nari	F	Korea
	Areom	F	Korea
L2-L2	Daiyu	F	China
	Chang	M	China
L2-L2	Ji	M	China
	Hwan	M	Korea
L2-L2	Aarav	M	India
	Ji-min	F	Korea
NS-L2-L2	Liling	F	China
	Thaksin	M	Thailand
	Tim	M	U.S.
NS-L2	Steve	M	U.S.
	Bin	M	India
NS-L2	Stephanie	F	U.S.
	Muqsit	M	Pakistan
NS-L2	Ai	M	China
	Nick	M	U.S.

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NS-L2	Yuan	M	China
	Evan	M	U.S.

Data Collection Instruments

The peer review session was based on students' second writing assignment for the class, a short research-based article incorporating at least three scholarly sources. The brief instructions for the written assignment are as follows:

> For this essay, you will focus on your country of origin and explore a current issue or controversy through gathering research. Investigate several positions of an issue or propose different solutions to an observed problem.

When students brought their full draft into the classroom, they were instructed, "Comment on what works and what doesn't work." Students first read the paper, commenting in pencil or pen on the copy, and then they began to discuss what they saw in an oral peer review session. I-pod recording kits were used to audio-record these conversation-based peer review sessions. These sessions amounted to 80 minutes of audio-recordings, which resulted in 13,239 words of transcript. Due to the limited data set, the subsequent data analysis is qualitative only.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Disagreement in the present study will be analyzed with regard to the linguistic realizations of disagreement, especially focusing on the mitigation of disagreement. This is first due to the absence of strong disagreement or unmitigated disagreement in the corpus. Secondly, and on a related note, it is also due to the context of the situation. Even as students were well accustomed to the context of peer review as a collaborative effort with the goal of improving their papers for better grade, and the use of negotiation to maintain their own and each other's face in their conversation, they were faced with a relatively pragmatically complex situation.

Various typologies or classifications have been developed throughout the literature on disagreement, including weak and strong disagreement (Pomerantz, 1984), strong, strong yet mitigated, and mitigated (Kakava, 1993), and softened, unmodified, and aggravated (Rees-Miller, 2000). Kreutel (2007) distinguished between desirable and undesirable features for ESL/EFL. Later, Maíz-Arevalo (2014) modified this classification system to be entitled strong and mitigated disagreement. As previously mentioned, the corpus of the present study was exempt of strong disagreement, and for this reason the attention will be solely on mitigation strategies, using Maíz-Arévalo's (2014)

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classification. Below both strong and mitigated disagreement strategies are listed, in order to provide the reader with a clear comparison.

Table 2. Strong and mitigated disagreement
(Maíz-Arévalo, 2014, p. 209)

Strong Disagreement	Mitigated Disagreement
Use of bare negative forms (e.g. "no" "no way" "of course not")	Token agreement (e.g. "yeah…but")
Use of the performative "I disagree"	Use of hedges (e.g. "I guess" "it seems" "I don't really know")
Use of the performative negation I didn´t agree" or "I can´t agree"	Requests for clarification (e.g. "Maybe I don't understand, could you explain it more clearly?")
Blunt statement of the opposite	Expressions of regret (e.g., "I'm sorry but I don't agree with you…")
Use of insults and negative judgments (e.g., "you are a moron)	Use of prefacing positive remarks toward the addressee (e.g., "that's a very good analysis") Suggestions (e.g., "How about doing this in a slightly different way?") Giving explanations

Results

Since there was an absence of strong agreements in the collected data, the following data analysis will focus on forms of mitigated disagreement. The qualitative analysis of linguistic forms of mitigated disagreement will be organized according to the participants in each peer review group: interactions among NS, interactions among L2 learners, and interactions between L2 learners and NS. This structure is relevant to the rationale for this study and how it may further inform the field in terms of how L2 leraners and NS perform disagreement in a naturalistic classroom learning task of peer review. The mitigated disagreement strategies will be discussed in the context of the particular examples.

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NS-NS Peer Review

The students were divided into groups randomly, as had been the practice during the course of the semester, and only one of the ten groups was composed of only NS of English. In the following examples, Charles is commenting on Diana's essay on PETA advertisements.

(1) Charles: Well uh I really liked the introduction, although I did find some grammatical errors.

(2) Charles: Cultural fear, then then maybe I was gonna say, add a little bit more or like, cuz your thesis is, um, is this one? "By looking at various sources, the aspects of how PETA uses feminist, feminine attributes//

(3) Charles: I was going to give a suggestion but there's only two days.

   Diana: Oh, it's okay, it's okay.

   Charles: I was going to say something like maybe talk about PETA's actions as well. But that's a whole nother, that could be a whole nother paper.

In these three examples, Charles mitigates disagreement in different ways. In (1), he uses a prefacing positive remark to the comment on grammatical errors. In (2), he uses hedges such as *maybe*, *a little bit*, and *I was gonna say*. Also interesting, Charles expresses hesitation to disagree (3), and even when encouraged by Diana backs down from his suggestion with "But that's a whole nother paper." Diana also uses prefacing positive remarks and hedges, along with questions for clarification (4) and explanations (5).

(4) Diana: And um the main question I was thinking was um why do you like pinpoint the US? Like, you mention how it will affect the US and why the US should not like ignore the situation, but what about like other countries? Like, you know, what about the US makes it like a main target to that it needs to, that the US also needs to focus on this issue.

(5) Diana: Pulling everybody out of Germany, whatever, whatever kind of caused this whole thing, so a paragraph kind of explaining how this all occurred. Cuz um you're really explaining the problems really well, like the problems are really in-depth. And with a map, it would be easier to understand but it it really, like I love how you word it. And you really like put the details in there it's very understandable. But you haven't really explained the problem as much.

In (4), Diana frames her disagreement as a question, stating "the main question I was thinking was…", followed but other related similar questions

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to demonstrate a hole in the paper's argument. Also, after suggesting that Charles explain the problem more thoroughly, Diana gives a long explanation including positive remarks (5).

L2-L2 Peer Review

In the four groups of L2 learners, disagreement was mitigated through a variety of strategies including questions for clarification, hedges, token agreement and prefacing with positive remarks. Examples of the question include:

(6)   Chang: I think uh your first paragraph is good. But I didn't know how or why you used this citation. So I didn't know.

(7)   Ji-min: Ok, I think the third pages, I think it's kind of off topic. So um I think so. So I don't know why you're mentioning about the corruptions. So I guess you have to make little changes why you're talking about the corruption.

Chang, a Chinese student, and Ji-min from Korea use questions for clarification. Although the "I don't know how" (6) and "I don't know why" (7) are couched as declarative statements, they are still in essence questioning aspects of their partner's papers, expressing a point that is unclear. As in the other examples, the mitigating strategies are not alone. For example, Chang uses several hedges in the same turn, *I think* and *So, I didn't know* (6), and Ji-min uses repetitions of *I think, I guess*, and *little* changes (7).

Hedges were very frequent throughout the recorded peer review sessions, including modifiers such as *really, probably, I think, and little bit.* The use of modals as a hedge was the least common, with just one instance (9).

(8)   Areom: And the thesis is not **that** clear. I can't **really** find it.

(9)   Daiyu: I think your introduction is too long, and I think you **might** want to use a hook to grab the attention.

(10) Nathan: And even if you want to bring in your opinion, you should **probably** bring in like last page or something. Because that's what she had said. You should **probably** continue with how people react to this stuff. Bring in the media of Korea.

(11) Ji-min: Ok, so on the second page you're also like keeps to keeping to talks about the background of the India. **I think** uh you reduce about it, just before the first paragraph. **Little bit**, because there are some parts that are not **really** necessary.

L2 learners also made use of token agreement and positive prefacing remarks during their peer review sessions, mentioning understanding certain

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points (12), a funny topic (13), or a "good" overall essay (14) before expressing disagreement.

> (12) Hwan: So I understand where your thesis and your main point **but I** do not understand the Chinese, the background of the Chinese background gender discrimination. So yeah, I want to know the- (..) the background. So you should add explanation of the background of China.

> (13) Areom: Hi Nari, I think your topic is pretty funny em **but I** think maybe you can make the hook more interesting.

> (14) Nathan: Yeah, I think it's in a **very good** shape with your essay. How you could make it even better is just try and keep your perspective out of here and try to make it more source-based. And you need to have more sources. Like where the different stars are suggesting in Korea.

The L2 learners also demonstrate usage of a wide variety of mitigated disagreement during their peer review sessions, including hedges, questions for clarification and prefacing positive remarks and token agreement.

NS-L2 Peer Review

Many similar strategies were characteristic of the peer review sessions between NS and L2 learners of English, such as hedges and modals, prefacing positive remarks and token agreement. Hedges were once again very frequent and evident in all transcripts.

> (15) Ai: **I think** you might want to put it in the conclusion. And this part is like **generally** your idea, you should make this decision, related to the topic.

> (16) Stephanie: Yeah, **I think I think** mostly that since you're like stating your thesis in this paragraph and kind of forming an outline **maybe** you should list the causes of inflation here instead of just saying and they're going to be listed later.

> (17) Muqsit: So your introduction, it **just**, it does not have a hook. So if you **could** write a hook, like how it all started and since how the immigrants from Mexico started increasing. That would be a good overview before the introduction, hook.

> (18) Tim: Uh, for that part. And there's **I think maybe** you meant to say drop out from school, not drop off.

> (19) Liling: I **think** it's a **little** too long the introduction, so you should short your introduction.

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Again NS and L2 learners use a variety of hedges; the NS use primarily *I think* and *maybe* (16, 18) while the L2 learners use *just* (17) and *little* (19) to hedge their disagreements. Modals are less frequent, although Muqsit from Pakistan does use the modal *could* (17).

Prefacing positive remarks and token agreement were once again common aspects of the interactions. An interesting difference surfaces, however, in the prefacing positive remarks among the two groups. NS Tim and Nick provide more lengthy positive remarks, a full three (20) and six (21) sentences before issuing their disagreement, while L2 learners tend to use just one sentence (22, 23).

(20)   Tim: Um, I **like** your beginning. The hook is very well developed. I like your thesis. You state the two arguments that you want to talk about, the part, the positive and negative of economic growth. I think **maybe** you need to shorten this statement **a little bit.**

(21)   Nick: Well, it's balanced. And it's really organized, so that's really **good**. It's organized a lot. There's an introduction and its preview. There's different viewpoint, there's moderate. And the conclusion comes right after that. The only thing that I think though was you say why you want to, why this should be changed, and it's mostly personal, which I mean, it's fine. But you **might** also what to say what it would do for the greater good.

(22) Muqsit: You did **excellent** job on this so far I think. The only thing that makes it weird is when you say "However, other studies show that it is not true."

(23) Liling: I **like** your point, because you always have clear point. Each//

Thaksin: //Your topic sentence really **clear and strong**.

   Liling: **But**

Thaksin: And you follow up really good on your illustration.

   Liling: **But**

    Tim: More explanation.

   Liling: And a quote.

    Tim: This is a quote, but I actually need to-

Thaksin: You need to cite.

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As the only three-person peer review group, (23) provides an interesting example of the co-construction of disagreement. L2 learners Liling and Thaksin take of the same mitigation strategy of a prefacing positive remarks, and then NS Tim adds in his own analysis of what is needed, issuing a self-assessment or disagreement with his own writing.

Another interesting aspect of the L2-NS peer review sessions, only NS used the explanation strategies, as exemplified below.

(24) Tim: I think in this last statement, it is a little too much negative. Uh, cuz you say, "Nobody is going nowhere it does not"

(25) Stephanie: I think that would make your conclusion sound a lot better, because you seem to be doing that a lot in your main paragraphs as I was reading, saying like the same thing in the first and last sentence.

Explanations were also a feature in the NS-NS peer review group. Larger scale studies would be needed to determine whether explanations are a feature of mitigation of disagreement among NS of English.

Conclusions

The present study provides a qualitative analysis of the strategies for mitigated disagreement employed by L2 learners of English and native English speakers in an introductory composition class at a university. In particular, this research sought to answer how L2 learners and native speakers mitigate disagreement in peer review in the context of L2 learner interactions, NS interactions, and L2-NS interactions.

Results demonstrate that L2 learners and NS use a variety of mitigated disagreement strategies including hedges, modals, questions for clarification, prefacing positive remarks, and token agreement. However, noticeably, NS tended to use lengthier and more specific prefacing positive remarks, similar to Lawson's (2009) findings that NS used more positive comments overall. Additionally, NS used explanations in their mitigation of disagreement, a strategy not found in L2 learners in this corpus. Since this is only a limited data set, further research is needed to determine whether explanation is indeed a mitigation pattern that is specific to NS of American English and uncommon among L2 learners of English.

The lack of strong or unmitigated disagreement in the corpus of peer review data and the L2 learners effective use of mitigating strategies (such as questions for clarification, hedges, token agreement and prefacing positive remarks) suggests that the students understood this as a collaborative learning task. Additionally, students' experience with peer review for the first two writing assignments as well the previous English composition course in the prior semester may have influenced international students (L2 learners) to adapt to cultural pragmatic norms for peer review interactions and disagreements. If this were the case, it would support findings which demonstrate how L2 learners

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adapt to cultural pragmatic norms over time (Bardovi-Harlig & Salsbury, 2004). The use of mitigation by L2 learners may also be related to interactions with NS peers who may be perceived as higher status in the English classroom. Other research has found that status is an important factor in disagreement (Lawson, 2009). Future research on a larger corpus of data is needed to corroborate these findings, and it would be beneficial as well to carry out a longitudinal study of students throughout the two-course series of first year English composition in order to observe changing patterns of mitigated disagreement in peer review.

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