



November 2021

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Recommended Citation

Illana-Mahiques, Emilia and Severino, Carol (2021) "Spanish Writing Learners' Stances as Peer Reviewers," *Journal of Response to Writing*: Vol. 7 : Iss. 2 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/journalrw/vol7/iss2/2>

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Spanish Writing Learners' Stances as Peer Reviewers

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Abstract: This study explores the attitudes and perceptions about online peer review of 18 Spanish learners enrolled in a third-year college Spanish writing course. Students participated in peer review training, wrote a personal narrative, and completed two online peer review sessions before submitting their final narrative. Using data from questionnaires, interviews, a peer review simulation task, and the first author's journal, this qualitative study investigates students' approaches to peer review and the different practices they employ when commenting on their peers' drafts. Results show that even though students receive the same training, they interpret and enact that training differently. Students position themselves into specific feedback-giving stances: critical, sensitive, interpretive, and supportive. Two case studies show how two students' particular stances as feedback givers (critical and sensitive, respectively) impact commenting practices and decision-making during the peer-review process. Based on these findings, recommendations for language teachers to enhance students' awareness of themselves as feedback givers are drawn.

Keywords: online peer review, peer review training, feedback giving, comment types, College FL Spanish writing

Foreign language (FL) educators face the challenges of deciding how to best implement writing in the classroom and which practices can maximize students' learning (Rollinson, 2005). Specifically, they have been exploring new ways of practicing writing that require not only assessing and assigning a grade to learners' performances, but also engaging and motivating learners by creating environments more conducive to learning FL writing (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2013; Hu, 2005). Common activities emphasized in FL writing pedagogy include collaborative writing, peer review, and peer assessment, as well as small-group brainstorming (Rollinson, 2005; Storch, 2013).

This study explores peer review in greater detail. Peer review is the process of working together in dyads or small groups to respond to one another's drafts (Cho & MacArthur, 2011). The present study employs an online peer review activity in a Spanish writing course to investigate an under-researched topic: the stances that students take on as feedback givers and how those stances influence their commenting practices.

While much research has focused on the feedback students receive, the revisions they make, and the subsequent improvement of their essays, little focus has been given to the feedback-giving perspective and how it may impact overall peer review practices. This study takes a comprehensive approach to explore the feedback-giving role and offers insights into how students approach peer review, how their stances may influence their comments and their feedback-giving practices, and how training should best respond to students' tendency to assume a fixed stance. Understanding these factors is relevant for optimizing students' success in peer review.

Literature Review

The increasing use of peer review practices in second-language (L2) writing courses has attracted the attention of researchers and educators. Its value in promoting L2 writing development has been recognized in the changing culture of L2 writing pedagogy; the field of English as a second language (ESL) was first to initiate change, followed by FL (Reichert et al.,

2012). While traditional approaches to L2 writing pedagogy focused on the finished product and assumed the teacher was the sole respondent to students' writing, more recent L2 approaches to writing have shifted the focus to the writing process, increasing the agency of students in responding to their peers' writing (Rollinson, 2005). Perceiving writing as a process involving multiple drafts and promoting student participation places peer review at the heart of L2 writing pedagogy (Berg, 1999).

Despite the widespread use of peer review and the growing body of research demonstrating its effectiveness, it remains an infrequently studied practice in FL college writing (O'Donnell, 2014). In the limited number of studies conducted, much research has investigated the reviewing stage (de Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Min, 2005), the revision phase (Villamil & de Guerrero, 1998; Yang et al., 2006), and the conditions under which learners perceive peer feedback to be helpful (Rollinson, 2005; Tsui & Ng, 2000). Specifically, topics such as the changes writers make based on the comments they receive (Paulus, 1999) and factors that may influence the effectiveness of student feedback (Allen & Mills, 2016) have garnered most of the attention in peer review research.

While the revising stage has been frequently researched, little attention has been devoted to the feedback-giving stage. Areas that remain largely unexplored include students' perceptions of their role as feedback givers, their ability to effectively carry out this role (Vorobel & Kim, 2014), and their ability to learn by reviewing (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). In particular, research analyzing learners' stances as feedback givers and how those stances influence peer review practices is scarce. Vorobel and Kim (2014) analyzed the feedback content of students' oral discourse and found that learners simultaneously assumed the roles of readers (feedback givers) and writers (feedback receivers) as they scaffolded one another and worked toward a common goal. Students' beliefs and perceptions about feedback giving, however, were not included in the study's analysis.

Lockhart and Ng (1995) conducted a similar analysis with 27 ESL dyads and, by comparing them with one another, identified four reader stances

(authoritative, interpretative, probing, and collaborative). The positioning of the students, however, was assigned based on their oral interaction only, ignoring the written comments they gave and overestimating factors such as students' lack of anonymity, power differences in the face-to-face interactions (Amores, 1997), and the complexity of orally conveying an FL message under time constraints (Min, 2005). Because these factors may shape both the types of comments made and the stances students assumed as feedback givers, more research is needed that explores whether students maintain the same roles when they perform anonymous FL peer review online.

Overall, the limited research on online FL peer review and prevailing assumptions regarding feedback-giving dynamics call for more research focusing on (a) written peer review interactions in an online FL context (Spanish), (b) the roles students assume as feedback givers, and (c) the strategies and procedures they follow when giving peer feedback.

First, this study addresses the need for more peer review studies in FL learning (e.g., Spanish). Unlike ESL, peer review research conducted in the FL context has been relatively sparse in languages other than English (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1992), and in particular in writing Spanish (Amores, 1997; O'Donnell, 2014; Rodríguez-González & Castañeda, 2018; Sánchez-Naranjo, 2019). Moreover, Spanish FL research seldom focuses on online peer review, unless it is through collaborative platforms such as forums and wikis (Díez-Bedmar & Pérez-Paredes, 2012).

Second, previous studies analyzing the roles students may assume as feedback givers are few (Lockhart & Ng, 1995; Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992), and the results of those studies interpret the oral comments students make. The present study fills a gap in that students' beliefs and self-perceptions are used to identify the roles students assume as feedback givers. Specifically, students' reflections about what peer review means to them and how they conceive of their goals and responsibilities when commenting constitute the main data for analysis.

Third, few studies verify students' self-perceived roles against their actual commenting performance in a text selected by the researcher. This

experimental condition, in which all participants are asked to review the same text, makes it possible to compare how students of different peer reviewer stances use strategies and approaches to fulfill their perceived feedback-giving responsibilities. Overall, this study aims to shed light on students' approaches to peer review, how their stances may influence their comments and their feedback-giving practices, and how training should best respond to students' tendency to assume a particular stance. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do students think they engage in peer review, and what are their self-perceived stances as feedback givers?
2. What procedures do students who assume different feedback-giving stances follow when giving specific types of comments?

Methods

Context and Setting

Spanish 2000, also known as *Spanish Language Skills: Writing* at the large midwestern university where the study was conducted, is a multisection, upper level course emphasizing skill development in writing, critical reading, and oral communication. An essential part of the course involves writing formal essays of different modes, including description, narration, exposition, and argumentation. This study was contextualized in one of these major writing assignments—a personal narrative. To promote similar content instruction and writing assignments, the same course module was embedded in all the Spanish writing sections. Moreover, to ensure a comparable teaching style, the first author taught the narrative-writing module with the support of the instructor of each section.

The online peer review sessions were carefully set up to be anonymous and randomized. That is, the identity of the reviewer remained undisclosed throughout the peer review sessions; and instead of dyads, students were randomly assigned to one another (A → B → C → D) by the course software's peer review program, PeerMark, a tool in Turnitin's Feedback

Studio. Students were also encouraged to use their L1 (English) to comment on the peer's text. Overall, this setup was designed to allow students to express themselves more fully and confidentially (Ho & Savignon, 2007; Yang et al., 2006).

Participants

This study is part of a larger research project conducted in six sections of the third-year Spanish writing course. After the initial pool of participants received training and completed the writing and peer review assignments, the first author, who assumed the role of a teacher–researcher, selected the four sections that were most similar in terms of number of students, students' linguistic skills, and classroom dynamics. From the 57 eligible students attending those four sections, a total of 18 students volunteered to participate in this study. The sample consisted of 16 females and two males. A higher ratio of females was expected since most students minoring or majoring in Spanish were female. Data collected from the 18 participants were analyzed to respond to the first research question regarding students' perceptions of their roles as reviewers.

To answer the second research question, two case study participants who responded well to the extreme-cases principle were selected. Specifically, the two students differed according to the feedback roles they assumed, the variety of feedback types they used, and the scores obtained on their final essays. Here, the two students, with their assigned pseudonyms, are introduced.

The first case study participant is Mark, a 20-year-old male junior who had recently switched majors from math to Spanish. The second study participant is Amaya, an 18-year-old female freshman who had not yet declared a major but had decided to pursue a minor in Spanish. Both students were born and raised in the United States and had never lived abroad or participated in a study-abroad program. For both, it was their first time taking a Spanish course in college, but they had studied Spanish in high school for at least four years and reported feeling very comfortable with

their reading abilities. The narrative peer review project for this study was not their first time participating in peer review, as they had done so with English writing, but it was their first time doing peer review for a Spanish course and within an online context.

Data Collection

As part of the required coursework, participants were to complete a 3-week FL writing project consisting of a personal narrative, an essay in which students write about a true event that impacted their lives (e.g., an adventure, an accident, a travel experience). Students' writing had to incorporate the key elements of a personal narrative (e.g., title, introduction, rising and falling action, conclusion), all of which were explained as part of the coursework.

Students first outlined and then fully drafted the personal narrative, and both versions (outline and draft) were peer reviewed and revised. After addressing the comments received in the draft version, students submitted their final versions to their instructor. The main sources of research data included all submitted drafts (outline, draft, and final) and the comments given and received during the two peer review sessions. During data collection, the first author also kept a reflective journal. The journal was used to reflect on positive and negative experiences with teaching and research processes, to ask questions and speculate about possible answers, and to jot down ideas that could be considered during the data analysis. The technique served as a source for triangulation and helped establish dependability, which refers to the extent to which the results are consistent with the data collected (Merriam, 2014).

Besides the data sources pertaining to the students' coursework, data from other sources were collected. Prior to the project, participants filled out a background questionnaire to confirm their eligibility to participate in the study. Then, as a follow-up to the project, they completed a peer review simulation activity and an interview with the first author.

The simulation consisted of a 25-minute online peer review task, completed individually, on a sample text selected by the first author. The text was written by a student who had completed the same project the previous semester, but major adaptations were made so that participants would more easily find issues to comment on. The simulation task was similar to what students had previously completed for their course, but each participant's performance (e.g., mouse moves, written feedback, verbalizations, commenting strategies) was screen-recorded with Panopto software to analyze the impact of students' self-perceived peer review roles.

As soon as students finished the peer review task, they completed a 30-minute semistructured interview with the first author. Questions from the interview focused on students' self-perceptions and the strategies they employed during peer review.

Data from each of the instruments were collected from all 18 participants. All data were analyzed, except for the peer review simulation activity, where only the two selected case studies were examined. The detailed data from this instrument allowed the researchers a more in-depth analysis in response to the second research question.

Data Analysis

Comment Analysis

The written comments generated by the participants in both the outline and the draft versions of the essay were analyzed, using a coding scheme similar to the feedback taxonomy employed in the peer review training. Comments, divided into feedback points, were coded as pertaining to the affective dimension, that is, comments that integrated patterns of emotion; or the cognitive dimension, that is, comments that targeted issues in the text that could be changed or improved in the revision (Lu & Law, 2012; Nelson & Schunn, 2009). Affective comments were further coded as praise and empathy (e.g., "very good"), explanation of praise comments (e.g., "I like how your title builds a little suspense for the reader"), or negative comments (e.g., "badly explained"). Similarly, cognitive comments

were categorized as (a) problem identification, (b) suggestion, (c) alteration, (d) justification, and (e) elaboration (Lu & Law, 2012; Min, 2005).

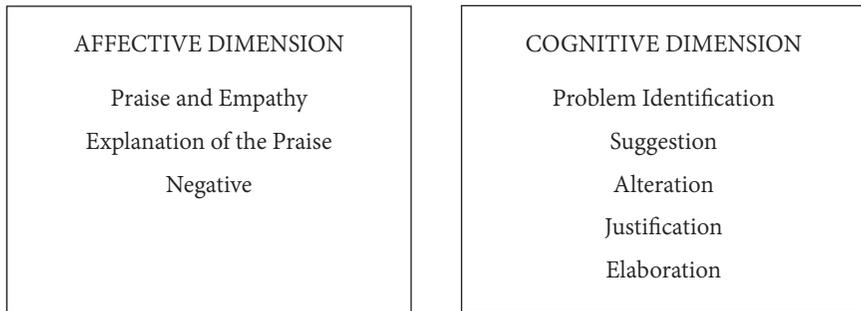
The following examples clarify the categories in the cognitive dimension: Problem-identification comments point out problematic issues in the text (e.g., “this sentence seems a little unclear”). Suggestion comments focus on helping the writer find appropriate solutions (e.g., “maybe you can provide some context here”). Alterations are direct corrections of the peer’s text, often related to issues of grammar, language, or style (e.g., “spell out the word instead of using the number”). Justification comments explain the reasoning behind a previous comment (e.g., “this will reduce the confusion readers may have”). Elaboration comments ask the writer for more information (e.g., “can you tell me more about the character?”). Figure 1 summarizes the coding scheme for the peer review comments.

Interview and Simulation Data Analyses

Interview data from each of the 18 participants were collected, transcribed, and de-identified. In response to the first research question, the first author highlighted in the interview transcripts all references to students’ self-perceptions as feedback givers. Through a process of coding, categorizing, and grouping the data into themes, participants were classified according to a specific set of roles emerging from the data. Tables of themes, codes, and corresponding interview quotes were manually created for each participant.

Similar steps were followed to analyze the simulation data for the two selected case studies. To respond to the second research question, all data from the two students, including verbalizations, descriptions of their behaviors during the peer review process, and the comments they gave were verified and put side by side in a chart, with the corresponding blocks of time (Meredith, 2016; Merriam, 2014). Data that referred to the students’ feedback-giving procedures, including the strategies and the steps they followed, were highlighted to facilitate the comparison within and between participants. To analyze students’ strategy use, points

Figure 1

Feedback Taxonomy Used to Classify Students' Comments

Note. Taxonomy is adapted from Lu and Law (2012), and Min (2005).

of agreement and disagreement between what students reported in the interviews and their behaviors in the simulation activity were analyzed. To analyze student's step-by-step sequence, the similarities and differences between the two participants were explored in terms of the procedures they followed in the peer review activities.

In obtaining, reflecting on, and confirming the results, all relevant information, including the patterns emerging from the data, was regularly shared and discussed with the second author. The findings were also triangulated with the first author's reflective journal entries, the reviewers' comments given on the various assignments, and the students' responses provided in the prestudy questionnaire. Finally, to establish internal validity (Merriam, 2014), several validation techniques including prolonged engagement, member checks, thick descriptions, and acknowledgment and reduction of bias were employed throughout the collection and analyses of data.

Results

The purpose of this study was to shed light on how students approach peer review, what roles they assume as feedback givers, and what strategies

and procedures they use in an L2 Spanish online peer review context. The first research question (i.e., how do students think they engage in peer review, and what are their self-perceived stances as feedback givers?) was addressed by identifying emerging themes that explained the students' feedback styles and philosophy, as well as their perspective and attitude toward peer review. The second research question (i.e., what procedures do students who assume different feedback-giving stances follow when giving specific types of comments?) was addressed by analyzing two case studies of students who had differing goals, roles, and views on how to conduct peer review. The results for each research question are reported below, in separate sections.

Students' Engagement and Their Perceived Stances as Feedback Givers.

The results obtained from analyzing the data of the 18 participants indicate that students use feedback to attain specific goals. Students adopted four goals for their feedback: (a) exerting control over the writer's performance, (b) empathizing with the writer, (c) acting as an objective reader, or (d) motivating the writer. These goals are interconnected with the students' personal stances, or their overall approach to peer review while working toward their goals. The stances that emerged from the data were: (a) critical, (b) sensitive, (c) interpretive, and (d) supportive. When comparing students' stances against the actual comments they gave in the Spanish writing project, the authors found that students adopting the same feedback-giving stance show common patterns in how they approach peer review. Table 1 summarizes these peer review goals, stances, and dimensions of each approach. Then, in the subsections that follow, each stance is described in greater detail.

The Critical Stance

Of the 18 participants, a total of five students, three females and the two males, adopted a critical stance. Even though it is possible gender played a role in the results, not enough male participants took part in the study

Table 1
Summary Chart of Students' Goals, Stances, and Dimensions

Peer review goals	Stances	Dimensions
Exerting control over the writer's performance	Critical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluative and critical attitude - Tendency to directly highlight weaknesses, flaws, or mistakes in the text - Excessive use of problem-identification comments - Little to no use of positive comments, as they are seen as useless
Empathizing with the writer	Sensitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Empathetic attitude - Criticism is important, but careful attention is paid to language so that problems are conveyed in a respectful tone - Strategic combination of different types of comments, with no preference for any particular type
Acting as an objective reader	Interpretive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Objective and neutral attitude - Adoption of the role of a general reader - Elaborative comments as well as short, general, and noncritical comments that are perceived as lower risk
Motivating the writer	Supportive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positive and encouraging attitude - Connections with the writer's experience, emotion, or voice - Excessive use of positive comments - Little to no use of problem-identification comments, as they are seen as unnecessary or not helpful in motivating writers

to confirm this. Overall, students with a critical stance adopt an evaluative attitude that judges the peer's text in terms of what it lacks. By being very direct about the parts of the text that they think their peers need to address, these reviewers aspire to exercise influence over the writer's performance.

They do not differentiate between giving criticism (offering change-oriented comments) and being critical (adding a judgmental attitude to the feedback). Critical students, therefore, often display little tolerance toward weaknesses, flaws, or mistakes in a text. As Katia affirmed in the interview, “When I do peer review, I think of things they need to fix.” Mark gave a similar response: “I think more about what specifically I would change.” Later, he added, “I’m thinking about what seemed off, or what I think it might need [. . .] every time I thought something was off or weird.”

The participants’ goal of exerting control over the writer’s performance was even more obvious when they were asked about how they wanted others to review their work. The question prompted students to describe their own preferences. For instance, Maggie affirmed, “I want that what I am saying comes off to you [as good], and if it doesn’t, I don’t want you to be scared to tell me that it doesn’t. [. . .] I would love having all these comments on my paper.” Minerva responded similarly: “If I give someone my essay, I want it to come back covered in marks, like tell me what I did wrong, what you would like to see better, because otherwise it doesn’t get any better.”

The predisposition of critical reviewers to focus on a text’s weaknesses shaped the types of feedback comments they prioritized. These reviewers used problem-identification comments the most. Conversely, they were reticent to give positive comments, judging them as trivial and aimless. Minerva explained this perspective: “I feel like my job was to read it [the text] and then give them honest responses to what I thought. Not just to be like ‘Oh, it’s wonderful,’ because that doesn’t help anyone.”

The Sensitive Stance

Students adopting a sensitive stance ($n = 4$) demonstrate a disposition to empathize with their peers without excluding the positive benefits of providing criticism and evaluating their work. They convey their criticism cautiously, using less direct and less judgmental language in order to avoid conflict or disagreement with their peers. This attitude of acting

cautiously when giving criticism is essentially different from that of critical reviewers. Amaya, for example, distanced herself from being critical when she affirmed, “I was not trying to be too critical; I don’t really like being critical.” Paula also avoided this approach: “I may be a little less critical just because I don’t want her to feel bad about what she is writing, so I try to phrase it [the comment] in a way that isn’t meant to be critical.” Helena further explained her habit of rereading all her comments at the end of her review in order to “go back and make sure I did not sound angry on anything in my comments.”

In addition to being highly respectful, students who assume a sensitive stance characterize themselves as empathizing with the writer. They report using at least two strategies: (a) balancing positive comments with criticism and (b) scaffolding their comments in order to better connect and engage with their audience. The former strategy (strategy a) allows them to offer insightful criticism while also motivating writers to keep improving their text. Paula, for example, expressed how “I just wanted her [my peer] to know that, even though I was critiquing, she did a really good job.” Then she concluded, “I was completely honest while also giving a positive attitude.” Students who assume a sensitive stance use the latter strategy (strategy b) to explain and justify their comments, seeking to be understood and to persuade the writer to make changes according to their suggestions. Helena, for example, described how she tried to justify and explain her comments, “just so that first, she [my peer] could understand where I was coming from, and second, would take my comments seriously [. . .]. I think being able to explain your point of view toward anything gets people to consider it rather than just ignoring it.”

The Interpretive Stance

Students with an interpretive stance ($n = 5$) strive to understand and review the text from the reader’s position. Their main goal is to act as an objective reader who seeks to interpret and understand the content of the text and its narrative elements (e.g., title, rising action, etc.) They reported

using several strategies to attain this goal, such as “focus on what was happening” and “think about the story in the content itself” (Kelly), or “draw attention to big things” and “reiterate the main points” (Jane), generally to confirm their understanding and present additional ideas if needed.

On the other hand, whenever reviewers with an interpretive stance perceive that the writer is not coming across as intended, they ask for clarification by making short, simple, and general comments toward a more complete and clear essay. They perceive that their responsibility is to point out specific elements of the text that, from a reader’s perspective, may need more elaboration or explanation. As Rachel explained, “I thought that I was helping the most by saying different areas that needed more detail, by pointing out some areas where I thought she [my peer] could use a little more explanation so that I understood better.”

Another pattern appeared among interpretive participants. Wanting to act as objective readers, they tend to hide behind the figure of the general reader and show a timid attitude toward peer review tasks. Their comments tend to be short, general, and never too critical of the writers. In speculating on the possible causes for this positioning, students commented on their skeptical attitude toward peer review, their lack of experience and confidence giving comments, or their self-perceptions as poor reviewers.

The Supportive Stance

Students who take a supportive stance ($n = 4$) show a positive attitude toward the writer. Unlike the other peer review roles, supportive reviewers aim to motivate the peer, building on the good elements of the essay and encouraging a positive view of revising and making the text more vivid. As Esther affirmed, “I don’t think my job was to point out weaknesses. That’s kind of like putting down someone. Instead, it’s kind of to support them and to help them.”

In giving encouragement to writers, supportive students not only respect the writers’ decisions but further understand that their recommendations are options rather than solutions. As Sophie explained, “I was

giving enough suggestions, so that the person writing the story could have as many options as possible to fix it.” In contrast to critical and sensitive reviewers, supportive reviewers fail to identify problems as such and to give straightforward solutions to specific weaknesses in the text.

When supportive reviewers were asked about the reasoning behind giving positive comments, they expressed their desire to connect with the text and the writer at three different levels: (a) with the topic of the essay, so that they are “in that mindset [. . .] in that zone” with the writer (Vicky); (b) with the feelings and emotions of the writer, showing them “that I know, [. . .] that I understand” (Esther); and (c) with the writer’s voice and perceptions, responding to “the style [of the writer] and how this person is writing it” (Sophie).

Understanding Feedback Giving from the Lenses of Two Case Studies

The case study analysis allowed the researchers to find similarities and differences in how two students of different stances, critical for Mark and sensitive for Amaya, performed during peer review. When contrasting the attitudes and behaviors of these two students, a number of themes emerged that corresponded to the first-, second-, and third-round reading phases of peer review. Completing the peer review in three reading phases was neither instructed in the assignment for data collection nor taught in the training sessions. Instead, it was these students’ own choice and what they found worked best for them when doing peer review.

For each reading round, the emerging themes specify the different roles the two students assumed during peer review. In the second-round reading, however, the two students assumed a similar role (i.e., evaluative), but three subthemes emerged that clarify their differing behavior in giving feedback of specific types. Table 2 summarizes all themes and subthemes obtained in the analyses, each of which is described next as they apply to Mark and Amaya.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes from the Data Analysis of Mark's and Amaya's Peer Review

Theme	Reading	Role
1	First-round	Diagnostic versus learner role
2	Second-round	Evaluative roles with differing behaviors in problem identification, justification, and positive comments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Subtheme 2.1. Problem-identification comments: Intrusive versus considerate approaches - Subtheme 2.2. Justification comments: Problem-oriented versus solution-oriented approaches - Subtheme 2.3. Positive commenting: Softening criticism versus endorsing quality work
3	Third-round	Preteacher role versus comment-refiner role

Theme 1. First-Round Reading: Diagnostic Versus Learner Role

The first time Mark and Amaya read the simulation-task essay, they did not make any comments, but the approaches they used differed. Mark's approach was that of a diagnostician, quickly examining the text for signs of weakness and making predictions about what it would take to comment on the problems. For example, he hovered the mouse over the essay, skimmed the text quickly and silently, and immediately upon finishing his first-round reading, declared, "Well, I guess, it wasn't great, wasn't super exciting. I guess I don't really understand the bullet marks [...]." This general judgement demonstrates Mark's tendency to immediately identify areas of weakness. As he explained, "The first time is mostly just [to] read it over and then figure out how much work I'm gonna have to do with it." He also clarified, "I kind of go over things that didn't make sense to me." This practice of assessing the work it will take to comment on a paper is evidence of Mark's diagnostic approach.

Unlike Mark, Amaya's approach to the first reading was that of a learner, cautiously reading the text aloud to ensure a better and more

complete understanding. Although she did not use additional resources in the simulation activity, she reported using the dictionary during the drafts' peer review sessions. As she explained, "I just read through it once and I looked up words as I needed to, just to make sure that I understood what she [my peer] was talking about." Therefore, Amaya's purpose during the first reading is to fully understand or learn about the text in order to move forward with the commenting phase.

Theme 2. Second-Round Reading: Evaluative Roles with Differing Behaviors in Problem Identification, Justification, and Positive Comments

Mark and Amaya used the second reading to assess the peer's text. When making judgments, both demonstrated acts of comparing their peer's essay against a variety of resources, including previous experiences, the peer review guidelines, and their own assignment submissions. Despite using similar resources to evaluate their peer's text, the two students differed in how they used specific types of comments, namely problem-identification, justification, and positive comments. For each feedback type, the subthemes that capture the differences between Mark and Amaya are explained next.

Subtheme 2.1. Problem-Identification Comments: Intrusive Versus Considerate Approaches. Mark's and Amaya's commenting performances were different when giving problem-identification comments. Mark took an intrusive approach, determined by three patterns or subcategories: (a) his holistic approach to peer review, (b) his use of judgmental language, and (c) his appropriation of reader and writer roles. First, Mark took a holistic approach in that he first read all the criteria from the peer review guidelines, and with those "in the back of [his] mind," he assessed the quality of the text. When he first sensed that something in the text was amiss, he highlighted the area where a problem was present. As shown in Figure 2, his comments covered entire sections of the draft, to the point that only a few lines were left without highlighting.

Figure 2

Mark's Use of the Highlighting Tool (Simulation Data)

La historia de la billetera perdida

Un día de Mayo del año pasado, yo estaba preparada para salir de mi dormitorio. Yo estaba emocionada porque era mi último semestre, pero también estaba triste porque yo amaba a mis compañeros de cuarto y mis amigos de escuela. Ese día tuve una mezcla de los sentimientos. Además, tenía que mover mis cosas y limpiar mi cuarto. Yo estaba muy estresada.

- Primero, aparqué mi coche afuera para mover mis cosas de mi cuarto del quinto piso
- Yo pase mis cosas en el coche
- Mi tía no llegó a tiempo para ayudarme
- Cuando terminé, empecé a sacar la basura
- Había mucha basura y tuve que hacer muchos viajes.
- Tuve que usar los escaleros para subir a mi cuarto

- No necesité mi billetera en mucho tiempo
- Al final del día, busqué mi billetera, pero no la encontré.
- Yo busqué mi billetera por todos los lugares

La billetera estaba perdida. Yo tuve que comprar una billetera nueva, una identificación nueva, una tarjeta crédito, y más cosas. La llave perdida del dormitorio me costó 125 dólares. Fue una mala suerte, pero yo estaba tranquila sobre la situación. En este día, yo no sé donde perdí la billetera, pero yo creo que la puse en la basura.

Second, regarding the language of his comments, Excerpt 1 exemplifies how Mark used direct, straightforward phrasing that included negative forms (e.g., “this isn’t”), absolute terms (e.g., “never”), the use of second person to suggest changes (e.g., “you should”), and expressions such as “doesn’t capture my interest” or “seems a little out of nowhere,” all of which could be taken as rude by the receiver. These features are underlined below.

Excerpt 1. Mark's Commenting Features (Simulation Data)

1. (Title): “This title does pertain to the story, but doesn't capture my interest, nor does it make me want to read the story.”
2. (Conflict): “It seems a little out of nowhere, and maybe not chronological.”

3. (Ending): “This could build some more tension, [. . .] the wallet just never being found again isn't the most exciting resolution, even though it's what happened.”

Third, Mark's judgmental commenting tendencies are also shown in that he simultaneously acted as a reader and as a writer, often wanting to solve the problems he identified according to his own preferences. For him, this is an act of “contributing to it [the story] myself.”

Taking a considerate approach, Amaya's behavior in identifying problems is almost the opposite of Mark's. Contrary to the patterns observed in Mark, Amaya's attitude is determined by (a) an analytical approach to peer review, (b) the use of respectful language, and (c) differentiation between her role as a reader and as a writer. First, Amaya's analytical approach entailed going paragraph by paragraph to compare each section of the text with its corresponding criteria in the guidelines. This technique allowed her to identify the discrepancies between the text and the guideline requirements. As shown in Figure 3, the discrepancies are expressed by locating the specific spots in which the writer could integrate changes.

Second, the examples in Excerpt 2 highlight the contrast between Mark's (Excerpt 1) and Amaya's (Excerpt 2) stances on the same textual elements. Amaya used respectful language by avoiding negative statements, including mitigating forms (e.g., “perhaps”), and using “I” to convey her view (e.g., “I think that [. . .]”). Questions, suggestions, or hedge expressions such as “maybe you could consider” or “I don't know if” also served as transitions to many of her problem-identification comments. These features are underlined below.

Excerpt 2. Amaya's Commenting Features (Simulation Data)

4. (Title): “The title makes the reader curious about how the wallet was lost, but maybe you could consider making the title a little bit more mysterious.”
5. (Conflict): “I don't know if this sentence should be included because it doesn't help to build your suspense.”

Figure 3

Amaya's Use of the Highlighting Tool (Simulation Data)

La historia de la billetera perdida

Un día de Mayo del año pasado, yo estaba preparada para salir de mi dormitorio. Yo estaba emocionada porque era mi último semestre, pero también estaba triste porque yo amaba a mis compañeros de cuarto y mis amigas de escuela. Ese día tuve una mezcla de los sentimientos. Además, tenía que mover mis cosas y limpiar mi cuarto. Yo estaba **muy estresada**.

- **Primero, aparqué mi coche afuera para mover mis cosas de mi cuarto del quinto piso**
- Yo puse mis cosas en el coche
- Mi tía no llegó a tiempo para ayudarme
- Cuando terminé, empecé a sacar la basura
- Había mucha basura y tuve que hacer muchos viajes.
- Traté de usar las escaleras para subir a mi cuarto
- No necesité mi billetera en mucho tiempo
- Al final del día, busqué mi billetera, pero **no la encontré**
- Yo busqué mi billetera por todos los **lugares**

La billetera estaba perdida. Yo tuve que comprar una billetera nueva, una identificación nueva, una tarjeta crédito, y más cosas. La llave perdida del dormitorio me costó 125 dólares. **Fue una mala suerte, pero yo estaba tranquila sobre la situación.** En este día, yo no sé dónde perdí la billetera, pero yo creo que la puse **en la basura**.

6. (Ending): “I think that it could be expanded a bit. Maybe talk about something that you will remember next time you are moving. In the moment, were you actually calm about losing your wallet?”

Third, Amaya acknowledged her responsibilities as a reader, which differ from those of the writer. For Amaya, the reader should avoid straightforward solutions and, instead, prompt the writer to think more deeply about their experience. Questions or elaboration comments such as the one used in Excerpt 2—“In the moment, were you actually calm?”—lead the writer to reflect and reconsider the text’s context.

Subtheme 2.2. Justification Comments: Problem-Oriented Versus Solution-Oriented Approaches. Mark and Amaya had different perceptions of what it means to justify or provide a rationale for a comment. For

Mark it meant expanding on a problem, explaining in detail “what I think is wrong,” and “narrow[ing] down why it’s weird.” Excerpt 3 displays some of Mark’s comments, and underlined are the justification comments that follow up an initial problematic point. These are problem-focused explanations because they help the writer understand the source of the problem.

Excerpt 3. Mark’s Approach to Justification Comments (Simulation Data)

7. (Conflict): “It seems a little out of nowhere, and maybe not chronological, as this whole time you’ve not needed your wallet, but you’re just mentioning it now.”

8. (Events of the narrative): “I would recommend this be a paragraph, and maybe a shorter one considering that this isn’t the story of the wallet being lost yet, it’s more of how you came to lose it, like an extension of the beginning.”

Contrary to Mark, Amaya’s justification comments were used not to explain the problems but to accompany suggestions that make her advice appealing to the writer. Excerpt 4 shows examples of her recommendations, such as adding more details about a character (Comment 9) or including dialogue (Comment 10). Then each recommendation is followed by a justification comment (underlined) that explains how the essay will improve if the advice is integrated. Specifically, the characters will acquire more depth (Comment 9), and the story will gain suspense and variety (Comment 10). These justification comments allow Amaya to validate her feedback and articulate her view, making her suggestion and elaboration comments more useful and convincing to the writer. These comments are solution-oriented because they expand on how the essay may benefit from the feedback.

Excerpt 4. Amaya’s Approach to Justification Comments (Simulation Data)

9. (Characters): “It might be a good idea to include more details about her [the aunt]. This would give her character more depth.”

10. (Scenes): “Throughout the body paragraphs, make sure to include dialogue [. . .]. These additions will help to create suspense and also add more variety to your story.”

Subtheme 2.3. Positive Commenting: Softening Criticism Versus Endorsing Quality Work. The analyses of Mark and Amaya's positive comments also yield important differences. Mark used positive feedback to soften criticism and make a problem or suggestion comment easier for the writer to accept. For example, in one of his comments on the draft, Mark first acknowledged what was good about the text: "You describe how you felt well." After praising, he used a contrasting conjunction to shift the direction of his comment: "but it would help if the reader knew what it was like to be lost in Chicago." As Mark admitted in the interview, for him, giving feedback in a peer review activity is "a good exercise [in] telling people that they're wrong nicely."

Conversely, for Amaya, positive comments aimed to encourage and motivate the writer. She combined positive comments with explanations of praise comments to convey her reactions to the text, specify what she thought was good, why it was good, and how it could influence the reader's overall perception. For example, on the peer review draft assignment for the course, Amaya praised the title of the essay—"I like your title"—and clarified that what made it good was "because it already hints at the fact that something is going to happen on the walk." This combination of praise comments with an explanation of the praise allowed Amaya to reinforce effective features of text, a practice compatible with Amaya's purpose of providing encouragement and maintaining a positive tone throughout her comments.

Theme 3. Third-Round Reading: Preteacher Versus Comment Refiner

Mark's and Amaya's goal of the third reading was to revise their comments before submitting the peer review. The two students, however, had different purposes for reading over their comments. Taking the role of a preteacher, Mark found himself responsible for "catching everything," making sure he "didn't miss anything." Aiming to help his peer "get a good grade," he strived to replicate the procedures that instructors would

follow—reading through the essay and explaining or restating the areas that he thought should be addressed.

Amaya took the role of a comment-refiner, ensuring that her comments “made sense” and were relevant to the peer’s text. Unlike Mark, she did not read the essay all the way through on this third round. Instead, she took her own comments as a starting point and made sure they were comprehensible and “actually made sense.” She checked for coherence between the text and her comments, and also reread her comments many times, probably “more times than I needed to,” to proofread and check for language “mistakes.”

Discussion

The study investigated the perceptions of 18 students over a 3-week online peer review project carried out in an upper-level Spanish writing course. It drew on data from two selected case-study students from whom screen recordings of the procedures and strategies they employed in a peer review simulation activity were analyzed.

Results from the 18 participants identify the four stances that students assume when giving feedback: critical, sensitive, interpretive, and supportive. Each stance corresponds to a set of goals students seek to attain during peer review. Furthermore, the results demonstrate a tendency for students of the same approach to develop similar commenting patterns and give similar types of feedback. Students’ stances and what they reported doing during the reviewing sessions correspond well to their actual performances.

The four stances are consistent with what is found in previous literature. Students’ critical attitude was identified in previous research studies by the term *authoritative stance* (Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992). Similarly, the *supportive stance* category parallels what other researchers labelled a *collaborative stance* (Lockhart & Ng, 1995; Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992). Regarding the sensitive and interpretive stances, in other studies similar categories have been pointed out but often vary in

terms of labels, definitions, and their corresponding features (Lockhart & Ng, 1995; Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992).

Learning about the stances is vital because they correspond to students' self-perceptions as feedback reviewers and further guide the students' use of the different feedback types. The four stances also help practitioners understand that participants bring different goals and perspectives to peer review activities. Assuming that peer review training leads students to give richer and yet similar feedback comments underestimates the range of roles students assume when giving comments. This study has demonstrated that students receiving the same peer review training may differ in their approach to peer review in terms of the four stances: critical, sensitive, interpretive, and supportive. It is possible that students develop these stances based on their beliefs and perceptions about peer review, their views of their particular responsibilities as a feedback giver, and their past experiences with the types of feedback they have found most helpful for their writing.

Using the extreme-case selection technique, two students who had differing stances as feedback givers were selected. The relationship between the two students' stances, the types of comments they prioritized, and the strategies they used during peer review were explored in detail. Results from the case studies confirm that the stances students assume as feedback givers play an essential role in how they choose and formulate their comments. Thus, students' feedback and commenting practices are stance driven rather than text driven (i.e., driven by the quality of the peer's text).

Results of the analysis further confirm how, despite receiving the same peer review training, there were dramatic differences in the strategies employed during peer review and how Mark and Amaya identified problems, added justifications, and gave positive feedback, especially in the simulation task. Even though they both reviewed the same text, followed a similar commenting sequence, and used the same types of comments, there were still substantial differences in their commenting practices that related to their stance as feedback givers.

Overall, Amaya's role as a sensitive reviewer is evident in that she uses and combines her comments, demonstrating her peer-centered perspective while guiding the writer to evaluate and improve the text. Conversely, and from a critical stance, Mark's practice of emphasizing problem identification not only contradicts the purpose of offering peers a variety of feedback types, a principle emphasized in the training, but may also be detrimental to writers concerned about improving their final performance. In support of this claim, previous literature has confirmed that justification comments from peers improve writers' performance (Gielen et al., 2010), but lengthy explanations of problems damage not only students' perceptions of themselves as writers but also their performance on their revised drafts (Nelson & Schunn, 2009).

In line with these findings, future studies could explore the effectiveness of teaching students to assess their comments for variety and sequencing of feedback types. For instance, a possible approach to encouraging learners to give a wider variety of feedback comments would be discussing with them the variety of feedback-giving roles, helping them identify their own roles and tendencies, and incorporating analytical practices that encourage them to make informed choices about the feedback they give to peers. Another study could investigate the results of raising students' awareness about how the wording of comments not only affects a writer's morale but further conveys the reviewer's own stance and beliefs toward peer review. Finally, awareness-enhancing instructional interventions of this type could also be studied from the perspective of students receiving peer feedback.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to explore in detail how students give comments in L2 online peer review sessions. By comparing interview data and screen recordings of a peer review simulation, preliminary findings were obtained and further triangulated with students' comment data, the background questionnaire, and the first author's journal. Results of

the analyses confirm that students' comments are not text driven (i.e., written according to the quality of the peer's text) but stance driven. That is, students' self-perceived stance as feedback givers is consistently expressed during the commenting process. Moreover, the stance students take is accurately represented in the strategies they employed during the screen-recorded simulated peer review session. Thus, strong connections exist among students' beliefs, the procedures they say they follow during online peer review, and the types of feedback they prioritize when giving comments to peers.

The findings also point out the relevant commonalities between the stances identified in this study (critical, sensitive, interpretive, and supportive) and the ones found in the literature. The results, however, should be taken with caution because stance categories, even when given the same terminology, cannot always be considered identical. Future studies should analyze whether other FL college-Spanish writing students assume similar stances during peer review.

Focusing on the role of the students as givers of feedback, future peer review training sessions should consider enhancing students' awareness about the different stances, helping them reflect on their tendencies to use specific strategies, and presenting other options they can adopt. For example, teachers can model how to combine the different feedback types and how to create richer and more helpful comments. Also, sample comments like Amaya's and Mark's could be used to show students how the different stances come across to their peers. Finally, teachers should point out the advantages associated with well-balanced responses that employ varied types of comments. This instruction will help students self-assess their practices and, ultimately, guide them toward more helpful peer feedback on L2 writing.

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