Factors Affecting Learners' Attitudes to Peer Feedback from the Perspective of Activity Theory -- A Case Study of Non-corrective Feedback in Translation Teaching

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Abstract. In the field of second language teaching, many studies have confirmed the effectiveness of peer feedback in promoting learning. However, the practical effect is also influenced by learners' attitudes. The existing research conclusions in this regard are not consistent, and there are few studies on the factors that influence learners' attitudes from the learners' perspective. To fill the research gap, this paper focuses on non-corrective feedback in translation teaching with a feedback model of translating based on Activity Theory to investigate learners' attitudes towards peer feedback and to explore influencing factors through questionnaires and interviews. The finding suggests that, overall, today's learners have a positive attitude towards non-corrective feedback provided by peers. However, due to a series of factors in the feedback model, different learners hold different attitudes towards specific aspects of peer non-corrective feedback.

Keywords: Activity Theory, peer feedback, non-corrective feedback, learners' attitude, translation teaching.

1. Introduction

For a long time, teaching feedback in China is dominated by teacher feedback. With the development of the process approach and constructivism, many scholars have opposed traditional result-oriented teaching and advocated the process-oriented teaching model [1]. Therefore, peer feedback is widely applied in second language teaching as one means of the process approach [2]. Peer feedback requires learners to mutually evaluate the learning outcomes in pairs or groups to identify and make up for their gaps, and thereby learners pay more attention to their learning process and effectively improve their proficiency. In the field of second-language teaching, there have been many empirical studies on the effectiveness of peer feedback, but most of them focus on the teaching of second-language writing with fewer on the teaching of translation. In addition, most of these studies have discussed the advantage of peer feedback from the perspective of educators, while few have investigated learners' attitudes towards peer feedback or the factors that affect learners' attitudes.

In view of this, this study investigated 472 learners for their attitude to peer feedback in translation teaching. With Activity Theory as the theoretical framework, the study has explored the factors affecting learners' attitudes from the perspectives of the initiatives between feedback subjects, the difficulty and presentation of feedback objects, the form of tools, the restriction of feedback rules, the atmosphere of learning community and the division of labor. In light of the finding, this paper is expected to provide teaching suggestions so as to give full play to the advantages of peer feedback.

2. Literature Review of Peer Feedback

According to some empirical studies, peer feedback has positive effects on foreign language teaching. For example, learners show higher autonomous learning ability through interaction with peers [3], and their quality consciousness and proficiency can be improved [4]. In addition, peer feedback stimulates critical reflection and diversifies the form of feedback, which is beneficial for mutual learning [5]. These teaching effects that are conducive for learners are significant and sustaining [6]. Moreover, there are studies holding that peer feedback has an even greater impact than teacher feedback [7].

However, the actual teaching effect of peer feedback is lower than expected, and its advantages in promoting learning remain to be developed. First of all, current learners prefer teacher feedback. Surveys have found that students prefer to adopt teacher feedback to modify their essays [8] and have a lower acceptance of peer feedback [9]. Second, learners' adoption rate and successful revision rate of peer feedback are low. Li Guangfeng found that among teacher feedback, peer feedback and feedback from the Automated Writing Evaluation, learners' ignorance rate of peer feedback is the highest and the successful revision rate of it is the lowest [10]; Tian Lili and Zhou Yu studied the process of students' uptake of integrated feedbacks in an online English writing course and found that peers and Pigai, an Automated Writing Evaluation, offered the highest amount of feedback with the lowest uptake rate, while the teacher offered the least amount of feedback with the highest uptake rate [11].

Although most of the above studies have explained the relevant reasons that lead to the problems in implementing peer feedback, less attention is paid to the factors that affect learners' attitudes with systematic analysis and summary. In addition, it is worth noting that whether provided by teachers or peers, corrective feedback, such as grammar errors, spelling errors and improper collocation or punctuation [12] is generally accepted by learners, which also affects the statistics but is not considered by most of the existing research. Therefore, this paper did a case study on translation teaching to investigate learners' attitudes to non-corrective feedback provided by peers and explore the factors so as to answer two questions:

Q1: In translation teaching, what is learners' attitude towards non-corrective feedback from peers?

Q2: In translation teaching, what are the factors affecting students' attitudes to non-corrective feedback from peers?

3. Feedback model of translating: an Activity Theory perspective

The Activity Theory originates from the ideas of Vygotsky that humans acquire knowledge through culturally-based social interactions [13]. The framework of this theory has seven elements: subject, object, community, tool, rule, division of labor and outcomes. Among them, the subject, object and tool are the essences. Within the community, the subject acts on the object through the tool, follows specific rules and finally achieves certain outcomes through different divisions of labor [14]. The object is the motivation for the activity which is mediated by tools, and the realization of the goal is affected and restricted by rules, labor division and other factors. Therefore, it is possible for the outcome to be unintended and even undesired. Given that providing feedback for translation is a dynamic and complex process that takes place in a particular social and cultural context [15], Activity Theory can systematically and comprehensively demonstrate the interaction of various components and the dynamic process the subject achieves his goals. This paper constructs a feedback model for translating as shown in the following figure based on the framework of Activity Theory.

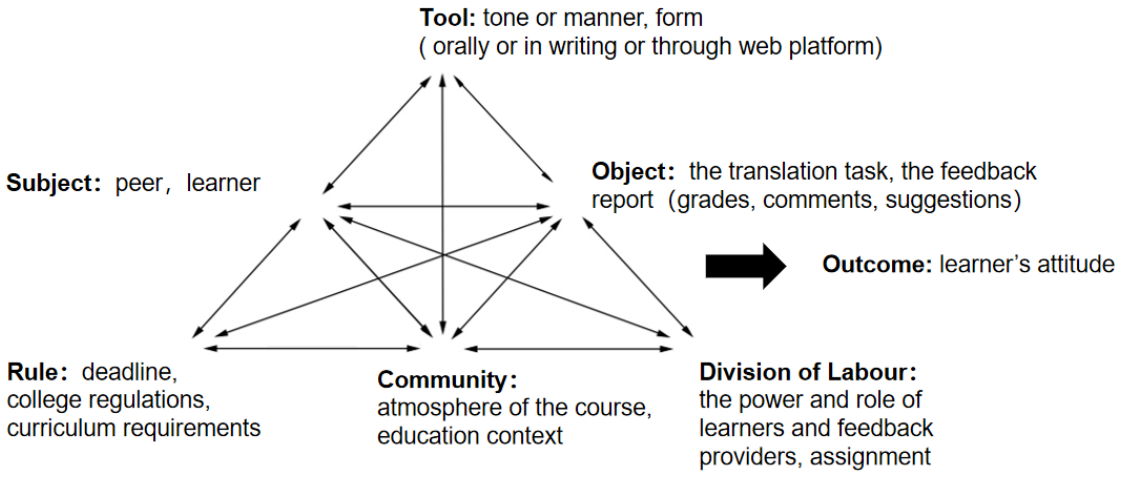

Figure 1. The feedback model for translating

The model contains feedback subject (peers and learners), feedback tools (language and form), feedback object (translation text, feedback report), feedback rules (deadline, college regulations and curriculum requirements), community (atmosphere of the course, education context), division of labor (the power and role of learners and feedback providers, assignment) and outcomes (learner's attitude). In the process of peer feedback, learners mutually comment on and score each other's translations with some suggestions orally or in written form. The learner's attitude is not only determined by their own initiative, but also by factors such as feedback tools, feedback rules, community and division of labor.

4. Research Design

In order to investigate learners' attitudes towards peer non-corrective feedback in translation teaching so as to answer the first research question, this study distributed questionnaires to students in translation majors who had received peer feedback in translating tasks and investigated their understanding and feelings about non-corrective feedback provided by peers in terms of comprehensibility, accuracy, persuasiveness and effectiveness of feedback. In order to answer the second research question, the researcher of this study interviewed some of these respondents to study the factors affecting learners' attitudes toward peer feedback.

Considering the confirmed effectiveness of peer feedback by some research and their discussion of the actual teaching effect, together with the participatory observation of the translation courses, this study puts forward the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: In translation teaching, most learners acknowledge the effectiveness of peer feedback. Therefore, on the whole, learners' attitude towards non-corrective feedback from peers is positive.

Hypothesis 2: In translation teaching, affected by many factors such as learners' initiatives, feedback, teaching environment, atmosphere etc., different learners have different attitudes towards non-corrective feedback proposed by peers.

To verify the above hypothesis, the research is designed as follows.

4.1. Research Objects and Materials

In this study, 472 Chinese students majoring in translation responded to the survey. All of them had received feedback from peers. These respondents were classified into group A, group B and group C according to their CET-8 grades from high to low, with 155 of them in Group A, 155 in Group B and 162 in Group C. As for the interview, 15 students from the three groups are selected according to the objective sampling method. Before starting the survey, in order to make sure the respondents can fully understand the questionnaire to guarantee the accuracy of the data collected, the researcher in this study explained the relevant concept, such as peer feedback and non-corrective feedback.

The questionnaire was designed according to relevant studies and consisted of 8 questions. Questions 1-3 investigate learners' overall attitude towards peer non-corrective feedback, and Questions 4-8 involve the learners' view on the comprehensibility, accuracy, reliability and validity of peer non-corrective feedback. The questionnaire adopts the form of the Likert five-level scale, which is made up of a 5-point rating scale ranging from one end to another with a neutral point in the middle. Options 1-5 respectively represent the attitudes from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Students were required to choose the options according to their experience. According to the reliability analysis, the Cronbach's α is 0.84, suggesting that the items of the questionnaire have relatively high internal consistency.

The questions for the interview were designed based on the data collected in the questionnaire. For example, the questionnaire data show that a considerable number of learners have a negative attitude towards some items in the questionnaire, and then such students are guided to share the relevant reasons or experiences in the interview.

4.2. Data collection and analysis

The data of this study are from the questionnaires and audio recordings and transcripts of interviews. The researcher in this study used SPSS 25.0 to make descriptive statistics on the data collected by the questionnaire to analyze learners' attitudes towards peer feedback.

The analysis of the interview adopts the meaning unit method. As long as the interviewee expresses one complete meaning word, phrase or sentence, or keeps talking about the same topic with one subject, the speech was regarded as one meaning unit. The interview is coded and analyzed through NVivo 11.0 whereby the author summarized the seven elements that affect learners' attitude to peer feedback: feedback subject, feedback tool, feedback object, feedback rules, learning community, division of labor and outcomes. In order to ensure the objectivity of the analysis, the author and another researcher engaged in relevant research independently coded the interview data and then conducted the consistency test. The results showed that the consistency reached 96%. As for the different coding, the two researchers reached an agreement after communication.

5. Results

Questionnaire data and interview results show that, on the whole, current learners expect to receive feedback from peers in translation teaching and acknowledge the effectiveness in improving their translation proficiency. Meanwhile, learners are willing to provide feedback to their peers and believe that this process is helpful to improve their translation skills. However, they may pay less attention to peer feedback and question its accuracy although peer feedback is easy to understand and accept. Factors affecting learners' attitudes can be summarized from seven aspects: feedback subject, feedback tool, feedback object, feedback rules, community and division of labor.

Specific analysis is discussed as follows.

5.1. Learners' attitudes towards non-corrective feedback from teacher and peer

The data collected by the questionnaire show that 58.47% of respondents hope to get non-corrective feedback from peers in translation teaching. The mean of this item is over 3 (see Table 1) which represents the neutral attitude, indicating that most learners hold a positive attitude towards non-corrective feedback provided by peers in translation teaching.

In addition, the mean of the item "the translation involved in peer non-corrective feedback should be revised as possible as I can" is close to 2 (2=disagree) and the proportion of respondents with agreement or strong agreement is only 28.17%, which indicates that current learners regard peer non-corrective feedback only as the reference or suggestion and that taking peer feedback is not a must task.

In terms of the willingness to provide non-corrective feedback, the mean is 3.31 (SD=1.40), and more than half of the learners are willing to provide feedback to their peers. Some studies believe that the willingness of learners to provide feedback is related to their proficiency level, and students who believe they are unqualified may lack the confidence to provide quality feedback to their peers. Therefore, this study takes the translation level as the influencing factor and the willingness to provide non-corrective feedback to peers as the dependent variable to conduct one-way ANOVA. The results shown in Table 2 suggest that there are significant differences in the willingness of students at different levels to provide feedback ($F=6.86$, $P<0.05$). According to the Post Hoc Test shown in Table 3, the willingness of students with low and medium translation levels is significantly lower than those with high translation levels. This confirms that the learner level is one factor that affects the willingness of learners to provide feedback.

Table 1. Learner's overall attitude

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
In translation teaching, I hope to receive non-corrective feedback from peers.	3.41	1.28
The translation involved in peer non-corrective feedback should be revised as possible as I can.	2.33	1.43
I am willing to provide non-corrective feedback to my peers.	3.31	1.40

Table 2. One-way ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Groups	26.23	2	13.12	6.86	0.00
Within Groups	897.36	469	1.913		
Total	923.59	471			

Table 3. Multiple Comparisons

	(I) level	(J) level	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
LSD	low	medium	-0.23	0.16	0.14	-0.53	0.08
		high	-0.57*	0.16	0.00	-0.88	-0.27
	medium	low	0.23	0.16	0.14	-0.08	0.53
		high	-0.34*	0.16	0.03	-0.65	-0.04
	high	low	0.57*	0.16	0.00	0.27	0.88
		medium	0.34*	0.16	0.03	0.04	0.65

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

According to Table 4, in terms of the comprehensibility of non-corrective feedback, students generally think that they know how to revise the translation according to peer feedback with the mean being 3.32 (SD=1.31), which indicates a positive foundation for implementing peer feedback in teaching. However, 69.70% of students tend to question the accuracy of non-corrective feedback from their peers and 62.28% are not very convinced of it, with the mean value of the two items lower than 3. This is consistent with the views of Hyland and Bai Liru that learners give less support for peer feedback than teacher feedback [16]. In addition, the mean value of feedback effectiveness is significantly higher than 3 and more than half of students have positive attitudes in this respect, indicating that most students acknowledge the effect of improving their second language proficiency through receiving peer feedback and providing feedback for peers.

Table 4. Learners' attitudes towards comprehensibility, accuracy, persuasiveness, and effectiveness of peer non-corrective feedback

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
Comprehensibility: According to the non-corrective feedback from peers, I know how to revise my translation.	3.32	1.31
Accuracy: The non-corrective feedback from peers is accurate.	2.70	1.16
Persuasiveness: The non-corrective feedback from peers convinces me.	2.91	1.37
Effectiveness: Receiving non-corrective feedback from peers is helpful to improve my translation skills.	3.55	1.29
Providing peers with non-corrective feedback is helpful to improve my translation skills.	3.24	1.23

According to the above data, on the whole, most learners hold a positive attitude towards the peer non-corrective feedback in translation teaching and believe that this process can help them realize deficiencies and modify the translation, which has a certain role in promoting their translation level. From the perspective of learners, most learners are active in providing suggestions to peers and accepting non-corrective feedback from peers but may question the accuracy of peer non-corrective feedback.

5.2. Factors that affect learners' attitudes

The analysis of interview data shows that students' attitudes to peer non-corrective feedback are affected by a variety of social and cultural factors. The following is a detailed description of these factors in combination with the translation feedback activity system model. In this section, interviewers are represented by the serial number S1-S15 according to their translation level from low to high.

(1) Feedback subject: initiative between the feedback provider and learner

The initiative of the feedback subject is mainly reflected in the language knowledge level and cognitive and emotional dimensions. Learners tend to accept the feedback provided by those with a higher level of language knowledge. As a result, they may be more inclined to adopt non-corrective feedback from peers with a higher proficiency level. On the cognitive dimension, learners will question the accuracy of feedback considering that their peers may lack experience or knowledge. For example, respondents with high translation levels said that one of the reasons why they dislike peer non-corrective feedback is that "the peer's translation is of low quality, and he always offers wrong feedback" (S12). Similarly, when learners act as feedback providers, they also lack confidence because they are afraid that they cannot find problems (S1), do not know how to express ideas (S4) and give undesired or wrong feedback (S7, S12). With respect to emotional factors, learners tend to adopt non-corrective feedback put forward by familiar peers (S5, S6) and are also more willing to be the feedback provider of these peers. This is because they have fewer worries to maintain relationships (S9) and have less anxiety when commenting on peers' translations as well as receiving comments from peers.

(2) Feedback object: the difficulty of the translation task, feedback quantity and the score

When the translation task is challenging, learners may expect more non-corrective feedback from teachers than those from peers. For one thing, the difficulty has greatly increased the learners' anxiety and hesitation when commenting on peers' translations. They may worry about giving wrong feedback (S2) or they have no idea about peers' translations (S6) because the task is beyond their ability. On the other thing, students are constrained by their translation level and knowledge, and they may find it hard to reach an agreement to solve problems through discussion. In this case, learners tend to seek more teacher feedback, which is more objective and authoritative. This indicates that learners still have a certain dependence on teacher feedback and believe that teacher feedback is irreplaceable.

The quantity of feedback that is out of the learners' expectations may reduce their motivation to take feedback. For example, one respondent said, "my translation script is full of comments and revisions, so I felt that my peer was picky. Facing so much feedback makes me reluctant to start" (S7). Another respondent with a high translation level said that "There was little feedback, so I thought revision was unnecessary" (S15). In this regard, peer feedback may numerous if the peer reviews the translation text critically but may also be insufficient due to knowledge level and cognitive factors.

The score of the feedback may affect the learners' attitude towards feedback. Although some studies hold that learning anxiety generated under the influence of performance-oriented goals can stimulate students' self-access learning capacity [17], some studies have found that some students' performance and anxiety are negatively correlated, and the relationship between anxiety and learning effect is depicted as an inverted U-shaped curve [18]. Therefore, proper scoring will generate learners' motivation so that they will take feedback more seriously. When the score of the translation is lower than the learner's expectation, the learner may feel resistant to adopting feedback. Still, if scores are

too high, learners may lack attention to feedback because they believe their translation is good enough.

(3) Feedback tool: the expression, manner and form of feedback.

Peer feedback is usually based on cooperative learning and the feedback giver puts forward suggestions on the student's position [19] so it can be more detailed and euphemistic, which is easier for learners to understand and accept compared with teacher feedback. In addition, 6 respondents suggested that they would be more inclined to adopt peer feedback in a suggestive manner. This confirms the research finding of Gao Ying and Wang Yi, who proposed that learners' adoption rate of feedback= "offering solutions" ×0.880+ "pointing out the problem" × 0.217+ "localization" × 0.088+ "giving suggestions" × 0.027 [20], wherein the feedback that gives the solution is most acceptable for learners.

In addition, if peer feedback is expressed in written form or conveyed in the classroom, learners will receive feedback passively and lack the opportunity to conduct reflection and discuss with peers. Nowadays, communication media is more diversified which enables learners to communicate timely through learning and social platforms, which stimulate learners' motivation and enthusiasm for adopting peer feedback.

(4) Feedback rules: curriculum requirements and feedback mechanism

Feedback rules include curriculum requirements, evaluation standards, etc. In today's translation teaching, the rules and standards of peer feedback are mainly under the requirements and regulations of teachers. Therefore, learners' attitudes towards feedback are affected by teachers' management. Studies have shown that training on peer evaluation will affect the effect of peer feedback [21], and peer feedback provided by trained students has a greater effect than those provided by untrained ones [22]. Therefore, teachers are supposed to conduct relevant training to inform students of the feedback form, focus and deadline, thereby ensuring the quality of peer feedback and raising students' attention to feedback.

(5) Feedback community: educational context and class atmosphere

Peer feedback providers are not only influenced by teachers' organization and training, teachers' requirements and demonstration but also consider peers' translation condition, feedback from peers and mutual evaluation model of other groups in class. These factors from the feedback community can largely affect the specific implementation of peer feedback and make a difference in learners' perception of feedback.

Peer translation can serve as a reference so that learners can easily understand and take in the suggestions of their peers. Inspired by excellent peer translation, learners can stimulate their initiative and learn from each other, thus creating a positive feedback atmosphere. In addition, those who are active and responsible for giving feedback, whether the learner's peer or other groups in the class, will encourage the learner to take the feedback seriously and strive to provide high-quality feedback to their peers. On the contrary, if the class atmosphere is slack or the peers are perfunctory, the learners will treat the feedback with a negative attitude. "Obviously my teammates treat my translation casually, so they didn't deserve my effort" (S6).

(6) Division of labor: learners' positioning of feedback and their own roles

In peer feedback, students have equal status, so the feedback proposed by students is more like reference advice, which is one factor that affects learners' attitudes and attention to non-corrective feedback. On the one hand, learners are aware that their translation is still to be improved, so they will pay attention to feedback and revise the translation for making progress. However, when acting as a feedback provider, they may lack confidence because of their learner status, and believe that their feedback "has no power (S2)" compared with teacher feedback. On the other hand, because both the feedback provider and the feedback receiver are students, some learners will also question peer feedback. Once they think that the feedback is biased, they will reject it. This negative attitude will also affect learners' adoption of other feedback. "She (the partner) is not good at translating at all. I don't think her feedback is persuasive. I will even be angry when I read some of her comments." (S9)

6. Conclusion

This study has investigated the attitudes of today's learners towards peer feedback in terms of non-corrective feedback. Based on the feedback model constructed from Activity Theory, this paper explored the factors that affect learners' attitudes and found that learners have positive attitudes towards the peer non-corrective feedback on the whole, but they will also be affected by factors from feedback subjects, feedback objects, tools, rules, communities and the division of labor. As a result, they have mixed attitudes towards the peer non-corrective feedback on some specific aspects.

According to the current learners' attitudes to peer feedback and influencing factors, the following teaching suggestions are proposed. First, before implementing peer feedback, teachers should consider students' proficiency level differences and interpersonal relationships as the basis for grouping, so as to maximize the effect of peer feedback. Second, in order to ensure the quality of peer non-corrective feedback, training should be conducted before implementing peer feedback. The teacher may discuss and negotiate with students on the rules and evaluation criteria of feedback and provide examples of how to provide effective feedback. Third, teachers are supposed to play guide and supervise the implementation of peer feedback through group presentation, cross-scoring and exhibition of excellent translation so as to raise students' attention to peer non-corrective feedback and maximize the effect of peer feedback.

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