The Effects of Online Peer Feedback with TrackChanges and Synchronous Computer-Mediated Communication*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Within the writing process considered as a dynamic and recursive process of planning, drafting, and revising/editing, there is no single procedure that can be taken into account frivolously. Feedback is one of the stages that should be cautiously implemented since it can contribute to the quality of writing, and also research findings have constantly expressed that teacher commentary is appreciated by student writers (Ferris, 1995; Saito, 1994; Straub, 1997). Despite the value of teacher commentary on student writing, the reality indicates that writing teachers find the abundant loads of commentary work burdensome.

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Peer feedback activities, therefore, have been suggested to reduce the writing teachers' workload. In fact, not only does peer response lighten the teachers' arduous responsibility, but also it can "impart to the teacher important information about individual students' literacy skills and their understanding of what constitutes good writing" (Ferris and Hedgecock, 2005, p. 226). As in teacher feedback, peer feedback can be carried out in a conventional way, and also technology makes it possible for students to construct commentary for peer writing. Indeed, technology can lead peer response to a blend of written and spoken commentary, which is common in a conventional environment.

This study examined online peer feedback that students conducted by using TrackChanges in MS Word and synchronous online chat. The research foci were on the feedback areas that students indicated with TrackChanges and on students' interactions in Synchronous Computer-Mediated Communication (SCMC). The guiding research questions are: 1) What types of feedback did students formulate with the tool of TrackChanges? 2) What types of feedback did the students focus on in SCMC?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of researchers have given their scholarly attention to peer feedback in L2 writing. The first group of researchers was advocates for peer feedback. For instance, Keh (1990), in her comparison of three different types of feedback—peer feedback, conferencing, and written comments, reported the effectiveness of peer feedback. She further argued that peer feedback resulted in the improvement of students' critical literacy skills. Chaudron (1983) compared peer feedback with teacher feedback by rating a total of 23 ESL learners' compositions and found that none of them was superior in promoting improvement in revision; that is to say, peer feedback was as effective as teacher feedback. Paulus (1999) also explored the