
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Metapragmatic Expressions as Relation-oriented Strategies in Peer Feedback: A Case Study of Business English Writing

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| ABSTRACT

This paper explores the interpersonal functions of *metapragmatic expressions* (MPEs) in peer feedback, where students were assigned a business English writing task, and examines the metapragmatic awareness revealed in this context from the metapragmatics perspective. It is shown in the data that the use of MPEs in peer feedback not only helps students to deliver information by creating common ground but also reflects their concern for their interpersonal relations. Data analysis indicates that students in peer feedback use MPEs as relation-oriented strategies such as hedging, complementing, repairing, inducing, and transferring strategies to manage and regulate their relations so that effective feedback can be achieved, which reflects their consideration of relational factors, including face work and emotion management on both sides of feedback. The present study deepens our understanding of the mechanisms of MPEs in peer feedback and advances our knowledge of metapragmatic awareness in classroom discourse, providing some implications for foreign language teaching.

| KEYWORDS

metapragmatic expressions (MPEs), peer feedback, relation-oriented strategies, business English writing

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Peer feedback is widely applied in foreign language teaching, especially language writing, and has become increasingly popular and practical. Feedback plays a significant part in teaching with the purpose of helping students correct their writing (Lidz, 2003; Lantolf & Poehner, 2004). Peer feedback refers to the activity of evaluating the quantity, level, value, and quality of peer work (Yu & Lee, 2016; Topping, 2010), and its effectiveness in English writing teaching has been consistently demonstrated (e.g., Nelson & Murphy, 1993; Liu & Hansen, 2002; Cho & MacArthur, 2011). In other words, the so-called “feedback for learning” can enhance learners’ awareness and ability to carry out independent learning tasks (Askew, 2000). Research has shown that peer feedback, as an effective formative assessment tool, can not only develop students’ reader awareness and English writing skills (e.g., Carless & Boud, 2018) but also prompt them to communicate over their writing, improve revision, and enhance their social interactions (e.g., Hyland, 2006; Yu & Lee, 2016). Zhang (2018) holds that peer feedback is a crucial means of achieving interactive communication between students in second/foreign language teaching. In peer feedback of English writing teaching, students are both feedback providers and receivers (Liu & Hansen, 2002), engaging in multiple cognitive activities (Yu & Lee, 2016). This dual role can motivate students to think critically, apply standards to evaluate others’ work based on relevant criteria, and reflect on their writing (Nicol et al., 2014), making writing and revising more effective.

Metapragmatic awareness contributes to effective peer feedback in English writing. Metapragmatics evaluates how communicators choose linguistic devices to achieve self-monitoring and manage the appropriateness of communicative content and behavior

(Caffi, 1994; Verschueren, 1999), signaling the self-reflexivity about language use. *Metapragmatic expressions* (MPEs) are a manifestation of metapragmatics in specific contexts, which can manage and regulate interactions. It is made salient in the present study that MPEs influence the process of peer feedback and eventually affect the effectiveness of writing. This paper argues that MPEs, regarded as relation-oriented strategies, are an essential component of the potential mediator between feedback and adoption (cf. Nelson & Schunn, 2009; Patchan et al., 2016). Appropriate use of MPEs makes a difference to the relations between both parties of peer feedback, which means that MPEs serve as relation-oriented strategies that take interpersonal relations into account and improve the effectiveness of peer feedback and the quality of revision.

This paper explores the interpersonal functions of MPEs in peer feedback in business English writing from the metapragmatics perspective. In peer feedback, interpersonal relations are a critical factor that influences students' implementation of evaluation of others' work, where factors such as students' identification with their peers and emotional involvement (e.g., Wang, 2014; Zhou et al., 2019) affect their participation and attitude towards the feedback. Therefore, students modify the feedback process by applying MPEs as relation-oriented strategies to manage and regulate their involvement of emotion and obligation between the two parties in order to care for their interpersonal relations and facilitate the successful completion of peer feedback. However, early work on peer feedback based on the use of MPEs is limited, and even less research has been conducted on relations in this context.

The present study aims to enhance our understanding of metapragmatic awareness in peer feedback by investigating the interpersonal roles of MPEs in this context. This paper is expected to provide some suggestions for business English teaching and training, especially in writing, as well as for the use of pragmatic strategies in interactions between students.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Peer feedback

2.1.1 An overview of peer feedback

Compared with teacher feedback, peer feedback is of equal necessity for English teaching. Peer feedback and teacher feedback are independent of and complementary to each other within formative assessment (Black & William, 2010). In the university, peer feedback can increase the frequency of reflection and improve the actionability of formative assessment without increasing teachers' workload (Wang, 2014). Scholars (e.g., Yu & Lee, 2016) have noticed and promoted the advantages of this approach, which has become widely used in English writing teaching.

Students can effectively improve their English writing when providing and receiving feedback. Peer feedback is a crucial mode of assessment in collaborative writing, which is enhanced by learner-centered awareness and can significantly improve students' academic achievement and self-directed learning (Topping et al., 2000; Komaraju & Nadler, 2013). During peer feedback, students are prone to invest in a deeper level of critical thinking and seek to provide feedback in different ways at both the micro level (grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics) and the macro level (content and organization) (cf. Storch, 2002; Storch & Aldosari, 2013; Dobao & Blum, 2013; Swain & Lapkin, 2013). They are also more willing to reflect on their limitations by comparing their manuscripts with others (Tsui & Ng, 2000) to polish their own work further (Richards, 1990; Bailey, 2016). In other words, students can improve their writing by providing feedback to their peers (cf. Rahimi, 2013; Schunn et al., 2016; Berggren, 2015). The active learning behavior of providing feedback presents more opportunities for students to train their comprehensive writing skills, such as identifying problems in writing, than receiving feedback (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Chen, 2010). Rahimi (2013) also argues that providing feedback helps to motivate students to perform at a higher level, i.e., the content level of their writing, which raises students' awareness of readership and evaluation. This was extended in Berggren's (2015) study that students are motivated and inspired when providing feedback to take the initiative in revising problems and thus improve their writing skills. It has also been found in other studies (e.g., Cho & Cho, 2011; Topping et al., 2013) that the quality of feedback provided by students is also positively correlated with students' writing performance in making objective evaluation and effective revision (also cf. Schunn et al., 2016). This shows that providing peer feedback fosters students' motivation and initiative in learning and contributes to their English writing proficiency.

Students' ability to provide peer feedback cannot be achieved "overnight" (Han & Xu, 2020) since the quality of peer feedback is influenced by some factors. For one thing, providing feedback requires a high level of learner engagement, categorized as constructive and active learning (Cho & Cho, 2011), and active learning engagement can improve the quality of learning (Chi & Wylie, 2014). Therefore, the effectiveness of peer feedback is closely associated with students' active engagement with the task (Ellis, 2010). The more students engage in feedback activities, the more frequently they revise their essays and improve their writing (Zhang & Hyland, 2018). Patchan & Schunn (2015) argues that peer feedback is influenced by the ability of the feedback provider, such as his/her level of the second language and writing anxiety (Jiang, 2016). Some scholars (e.g., Zheng & Yu, 2018) suggest that students' second language level has a strong influence on the depth of cognitive processing of feedback, which relates to whether students can make accurate judgments about the quality of the writing and thus influence the effectiveness of peer feedback (Sadler, 2010; Boud & Molloy, 2013). For another, Tsao et al.'s (2017) experimental study of 158 tertiary students found that the

more fearful and nervous students are about writing, the more likely they are to accept and adopt the feedback. Also, along with a drop in students' writing anxiety during peer feedback, students' overall writing performance increased (Jiang, 2016), demonstrating that the level of their writing anxiety is a significant factor influencing the effectiveness of peer feedback. In summary, in terms of the quality of peer feedback, there is a need to analyze different factors and take corresponding measures from several aspects.

2.1.2 Interpersonal relations in peer feedback

Peer feedback focuses on the effectiveness of enhancing the quality of writing after being provided feedback, yet its interpersonal meaning and contextualization have not received sufficient attention (cf. Allen & Mills, 2014; Yu & Hu, 2017). Peer feedback exerts a specific effect on the relations of students and creates an environment for quality learning, i.e., a learning community, by facilitating peer interaction and collaboration. Previous studies show that students can demonstrate and feel respect from their peers during peer feedback (e.g., Zhu & Carless, 2018; Zhou et al., 2019); on this basis, the present study argues that relations in peer feedback can be and should be managed between feedback providers and receivers.

Meanwhile, relations between feedback providers and receivers influence the quality of feedback, determining how much social support students can receive from their peers versus how much they rely on them to scaffold their learning (Hu & Lam, 2010). It has been noted that factors such as students' identification with the feedback provider (Wang, 2014), emotional elements in the feedback (Zhou et al., 2019), and the application of feedback results (Sridharan et al., 2019) can influence students' attitudes and engagement with peer feedback. For example, Carson & Nelson (1996) argues that Chinese learners, influenced by traditional Chinese culture (e.g., face and harmony), tend to provide positive and ambiguous feedback, sometimes to maintain harmony at the expense of providing critical feedback needed for revision. After surveying Australian undergraduate students, Patton (2012) found that while students accept peer feedback, they are opposed to including its results in the overall course assessment. This is because when peer feedback is directly or indirectly associated with marks or levels, the complexity of interpersonal relations is likely to exacerbate mistrust between students and a tendency to give low marks (Wilson et al., 2015) or deliberately inflate peer marks (Sridharan et al., 2019). To a certain degree, interpersonal relations can impose some complex prior influences on peer feedback, with students adapting their expressions by using pragmatic strategies when providing feedback, depending on the social context they are in and the interpersonal relations they have. Therefore, the interplay of interpersonal relations and peer feedback is worth further investigation.

2.2 Metapragmatics and metapragmatic expressions

Communication is a language selection, negotiation, and accommodation process that reflects speakers' metapragmatic awareness (Verschueren, 1999). The adaptation theory (cf. Verschueren, 1999) views language use as a process guided and mediated by metapragmatic awareness. Linguistic and non-linguistic devices that reflect metapragmatic awareness are identified by Verschueren (2000) as metapragmatic markers. These markers add no or little propositional content but display the "double-voiced" (Bakhtin, 1981) and "therapeutic potential" (Watzlawick et al., 1967) of language, reflecting the awareness of problems (Caffi, 1984), discourse management (Caffi, 1994), intervention (Bublitz & Hübler, 2007) and monitoring (Verschueren, 1999) in language use. Among these markers, *metapragmatic expressions* (MPEs) are explicit metapragmatic indicators, defined by Smith & Liang (2007:172) as "expressions which referred not to the content but to how the audience might understand, use, or orient themselves to it." They are semantically self-reflexive, in which the communicator temporarily interrupts the transmission of the content of the message and directs the focus to the communicative activity itself, describing, evaluating, or annotating the message or the speech act in its content, i.e., representations about how to process information about conceptual representations (Blakemore, 2002). From a linguistic-cognitive perspective, MPEs guide and constrain information processing, upgrade the salience of relevant information (cf. Kecskes, 2013), and reduce cognitive difficulty (Sperber & Wilson, 1995), which contribute to the comprehension and acceptance of information.

Caffi's (1994) three-sense dimension of metapragmatics paves the way for relevant research. Initially, metapragmatic research focused on the different aspects and dimensions from a macro perspective (cf. Mey, 1993; Caffi, 2006; Hübler, 2011), the salience and hierarchy of metapragmatic awareness (Verschueren, 1999, 2000), and markers that reflect metapragmatic awareness (Grundy, 2000; Verschueren, 1999, 2000). Recently, researchers also conducted a metapragmatic analysis of specific linguistic structures (e.g., Bublitz & Hübler, 2007; Ran, 2013). Current metapragmatics studies mostly explore the self-reflexive, self-monitoring, and intervening nature of language in general or from a micro perspective (e.g., Caffi, 1984, 1994; Lucy, 1993; Silverstein, 1993; Hübler & Bulitz, 2007; Hübler, 2011). There is also a focus on the types and functions of linguistic representations of metapragmatic markers in specific contexts, such as everyday communication, institutional and online environments, from the perspective of pragmatic, discursive, and even cultural perspectives (e.g., Verschueren, 2000; Silverstein, 1993; Overstreet & Yule, 2002; Spencer-Oatey, 2011; Ran, 2013; Kádár & Ran, 2015; Kleinke & Ba, 2015; Liu & Ran, 2016a, 2016b; Liu & Liu, 2017a, 2017b, 2021), but fewer studies have touched on metapragmatic markers in classroom discourse.

3. Data and Method

3.1 Data source

This experiment targets 42 students majoring in business English at a university in South China. Before this experiment, they had completed introductory English writing courses using the same textbook. An IELTS test, including reading and writing, was administered to these students before the experiment. Results showed that the gap between the best and worst performances was 1, indicating no significant difference between students' scores. It can be tentatively concluded that their English and writing skills can be considered at a similar level. Hence, there were no considerable differences if they were required to provide and receive peer feedback.

In the experiment, these 42 students were assigned the same writing task and completed the first draft independently within a limited time in class. The instruction of the task is "express your opinion towards job hopping, especially on whether job hopping would benefit your career development." In the peer feedback stage, each student randomly selected two peers that would provide feedback and two that would receive feedback. Peer feedback and corresponding responses can be divided into two interactive processes. In the first process, peers provided feedback on the article, and receivers adopted suggestions for modifications and responses. In the second process, peers read receivers' responses and their new writing and then provided feedback a second time. Receivers finally revised their writing again and gave relevant responses. In this interactive process, what students wrote in the feedback and response was collected as a temporary corpus. A total of 84 interactions were collected, and after the screening, 60 turns of interactions were selected as research data. Only a few strategies are used in the responses with limited roles in the interactions, so the present study mainly focuses on strategies used in the feedback section.

3.2 Data identification and classification

MPEs are categorized into different types based on previous studies (cf. Liu & Ran, 2016a, 2016b; Liu & Liu, 2017a, 2017b, 2021; Chaemsaitong & Simuang, 2022). Four types of MPEs are identified in the data. Guided by Verschueren's (2000:447) work, speech-action descriptions and evidentials were coded as MPEs containing speech-action verbs, and MPEs containing descriptions of the source of information and message are named evidentials. Also, grounding a series of studies from Kopple (1985), Overstreet & Yule (2002), Hyland (2005/2008:32), Hongladarom (2007), and Ciliberti & Anderson (2007), message glosses and commentaries were identified, which respectively refer to MPEs containing reformulating or exemplifying expressions, and MPEs containing adjectives or negations describing personal judgments, evaluations, attitudes, and feelings. Table 1 shows the classification, working definitions, and examples of these four types of MPEs.

Table 1 Types, working definitions, and examples of MPEs

Types	Working Definitions	Examples	Frequency
speech-action descriptions	MPEs containing speech-action verbs	I will explain to you; I will refer to some details; I have three points to share	53
evidentials	MPEs containing descriptions of the source of information and message	according to the teacher; from your response; with the help of a dictionary	27
message glosses	MPEs containing reformulating or exemplifying expressions	for example; I mean; this means	36
commentaries	MPEs containing adjectives or negations describing personal judgments, evaluations, attitudes, and feelings	it would be better if; I'm not very sure; that's my personal understanding	89

4. Results and Discussion: MPEs in Peer Feedback

While peer feedback is carried out online, students still adopt strategies to maintain their interpersonal relations, i.e., relation-oriented strategies. This is because they are mindful of the effect of peer feedback on their interpersonal relations in real life. So, they will use different relation-oriented strategies, i.e., MPEs in the present study, to "package" the negative evaluation so as to manage and regulate interpersonal relations by saving face and managing emotions. Relation-oriented strategies in peer feedback involve many types, and students will not simply use one strategy but a combination of different strategies to provide peer feedback. Data analysis reveals that these strategies are embodied via MPEs, including hedging, complementing, repairing, inducing, and transferring strategies. The following excerpts explore how MPEs serve as different relation-oriented strategies to manage and regulate interpersonal relations in peer feedback.

4.1 Hedging strategies

Hedging strategies refer to relation-oriented strategies that involve hedges in feedback. They regulate interpersonal relations by reducing the coercion of feedback and enhancing the ambiguity of negative evaluation, that is, by lowering the potential adverse effect of the feedback.

Excerpt 1: (from *Interaction 12*, peer feedback on the first draft)

I think your article is a little less persuasive. You do not provide enough facts to support your point of view from your articles. In addition, the logical order of your views needs to be strengthened. In your first version, job hopping appears suddenly. I don't think you can directly say that many young people choose to change jobs because of management problems. **I am not very sure about that.** From the perspective of a reader, I would be curious about the relationship between the two and what kind of management problems led to job hopping. **Maybe you can add something to the essay**, like taking the example of management ahead and then indicating the importance for young employees to improve their professional skills, finally showing that job hopping is a good way and the benefits of the job hopping. If so, the connection and development between views will be more reasonable. Readers will read more easily and be more convinced of what you say.

The provider expresses his opinion with a commentary, "I am not very sure about that," and a speech-action description, "Maybe you can add something to the essay." These two MPEs can be identified as hedging strategies, which show the provider's uncertainty about his perspective. These hedging strategies reduce the coercion of feedback suggestions, provide space for the receiver to decide whether to accept the suggestion and make pre-defense for the possibility of the provider being denied. Moreover, they reduce the compelling force of the provider's opinion to care for their mutual face and realize the management of interpersonal relations of both sides.

Excerpt 2: (from *Interaction 45*, peer feedback on the first draft)

The overall article is relatively excellent. It is able to use subject sentences, examples, classification and other writing methods in each paragraph. There are also a lot of new words which are used to help optimize the expression of the article. Besides, the reader can also quickly extract the general idea which means the article is very clear and concise. Data is also used in the branch to enhance the scientific nature and convince readers. But there is something ambiguous in the article. **And I'm sort of confused** as I cannot very well understand the logic of the last two paragraphs, which looks like a causal relationship, and like a relationship between analysis and summary. **I think it is a little hard to understand.** The reason may be in the structure of the paragraph. It is suggested to clear your mind before writing. But the words and sentence patterns show the advantages of the article. The diversity of vocabulary also reflects the author's basic English skills, which is very rare.

After some direct negative evaluations, the provider supplements his feedback with two commentaries "And I'm sort of confused" and "I think it is a little hard to understand." These two MPEs that shift the position to the first pronoun are also hedging strategies. Using hedging strategies can reduce the compulsion of the evaluation by shifting the position. These strategies mitigate the provider's negative evaluation and thus reduce the possibility of interpersonal threat.

4.2 Complementing strategies

Complementary strategies are relation-oriented strategies that complement the core content and views of feedback. They can manage interpersonal relations by activating common ground and strengthening the credibility of information to make feedback easier to be accepted.

Excerpt 3: (from *Interaction 38*, peer feedback on the first draft)

First of all, the title of the article is well thought out, well-crafted and intriguing, and it made me very curious as to what the article was about. Plus, the essay is clearly structured and is complete. It flows well and is coherent from paragraph to paragraph. The basic skills of this writing are solid, as evidenced by the rich vocabulary and the varied sentence patterns. However, I found it hard to understand some sentences even if **with the help of a dictionary**. Another shortcoming I found in the article was that you put forward a new solution in the conclusion part. I think it is confusing and repeated because **according to our teacher**, it may be inappropriate to have new ideas in the last paragraph. This is because the last paragraph serves as a summary of the whole essay, i.e., it summarises and paraphrases the main ideas of the text. I think it would have been better to delete the new points and then streamline the whole paragraph.

In the negative evaluation, the provider uses two evidentials, "with the help of a dictionary" and "according to our teacher," to supplement the source of information to his feedback, which can be identified as complementing strategies. In this example, the provider intends to transfer his stance to an authoritative third party to improve the credibility of his feedback and weaken the influence of his/her identity on the delivery of information. In peer feedback, these MPEs highlight the critical information and

improve the possibility of being adopted by activating common ground and weakening the degree of face threat, so interpersonal relations will not be virtually affected.

Excerpt 4: (from *Interaction 28*, peer feedback on the second draft)

First of all, I think the opening paragraph of this article is well written. After quoting with data, the writer clearly presents the central argument. But there is a lot of room for improvement in both the body paragraphs and the concluding paragraph. The first problem with the body paragraphs is that I found something that is too hard for me to understand. **For example**, your supporting content of the first point is not very closely linked to the topic, **which means** you might be in the risk of straying from the point. Also, the paragraph ends without a concluding sentence, which seems incomplete and therefore confusing to me. Besides, the data cited in the third paragraph should be cited as the source. **That is to say**, it still needs some effort to improve the completeness of the essay. Meanwhile, the topic sentence of the essay includes three parts, but only the first two are mentioned in the body part as if the last sub-theme is omitted. Overall, the essay could have done better in terms of completeness and coherence.

Message glosses such as “for example,” “which means,” and “That is to say” are also subordinate to complementing strategies that support the delivery evaluation. These MPEs provide specific examples or add more details to the provider’s view, which can help the receiver understand the feedback better while seeking common ground and improving the authenticity of the evaluation. At the same time, using complementing strategies can consolidate the evaluation status and reflect the provider’s cooperative attitude toward managing their relationship.

4.3 Repairing strategies

Repairing strategies point to relation-oriented strategies that possess positive evaluation before or after negative evaluation. They alleviate the face threat caused by negative evaluation with a positive one relevant to other contents or aspects, aiming to repair possible damage to interpersonal relations.

Excerpt 5: (from *Interaction 24*, peer feedback on the first draft)

Your thesis is good and you make it clear what you’re talking about. However, I find that the connection between paragraphs in your article is not smooth enough. Maybe you can add some transitional sentences to make the transformation of ideas less abrupt. Also pay attention to the use of transitional words. For example, you can use words like “First, then, and finally”. They will help your language flow more smoothly and make it more comfortable and easy for the reader to read. **But overall it was written in a great way except these problems.** Some of your comments and statements are little bit boring and slightly less persuasive, not supported by facts and data. I think you can try adding examples or data to make your argument more effective, convincing, and interesting. That’s my own opinion, haha~ **All in all, you have done a good job!** It will be more attractive if you add some examples or statistics as evidence to support your idea.

After a series of negative evaluations, the provider uses two commentaries, “But overall it was written in a great way except these problems.” and “All in all, you have done a good job!” to deliver positive evaluations, so they can be identified as repairing strategies. The provider uses these MPEs to repair their negative opinions through positive evaluations, which play a role in stabilizing emotions and maintaining the face of the other side. To some extent, these repairing strategies can show the provider’s emotional support and maintain interpersonal relations between the two parties.

Excerpt 6: (from *Interaction 55*, peer feedback on the second draft)

I think your second draft has some problems in the logical relationship of the narration. You discussed the different working situations in China’s job markets, including the influence of policies, the demand for some industries, etc. You also talked about different job requirements. But these sub arguments are not parallel. However, as for the aspect of coherence from paragraph to paragraph, **you have done a good job so far!** Nevertheless, some examples may seem very distant to me and I cannot understand them very well. This makes your article look confusing. You should reconsider the sub arguments. For example, you can discuss the reasons why many people choose job hopping, and some examples about job hopping with your critical comments to show your idea. Besides what I found above, **I am going to mention some excellent points.** I think your content and ideas are really fantastic. You even used a lot of detailed data as well as facts to make your argument more trustworthy.

The provider elicits positive evaluation through a commentary, “you have done a good job so far,” and a speech-action description, “I am going to mention some excellent points.” After a series of opposing opinions, these two positive expressions are regarded as repairing strategies in the corpus. These MPEs mainly raise positive evaluations before and after negative evaluation, and the transfer of evaluation objects repairs the possible damage of negative evaluation. These strategies can preserve interpersonal relations that may be damaged and realize face concern and emotional management in interpersonal relations.

4.4 Inducing Strategies

Inducing strategies means providing feedback based on a positive future expectation, intended to induce the receiver with a better result after modification. This strategy helps improve the degree of accepting feedback and reduces the influence of negative feedback on interpersonal relations.

Excerpt 7: (from *Interaction 4*, peer feedback on the first draft)

A good job! Your essay follows the key steps of writing. First, you use a concise definition as lead-in, which allows readers to catch the idea more clearly and quickly. Second, you give the topic sentence. At last, you reiterate your opinion and standance to emphasize it. All these are impressive and attractive. However, I would like to give you some suggestions and hope these can help you do better. At first, **it can be more structured if** you divide the first paragraph into three paragraphs, because the first paragraph is too tediously long. After reading several seconds, I distracted myself from it. Second, pay attention to details. Although you give thesis statement, the evidence is not enough to support your view. **It may be more convictive to** provide other evidence. In a word, I think your writing is well-organized but **it also will be more perfect if** you organize your evidence more logically.

After negative evaluation, the provider uses commentaries "it can be more structured if," "It may be more convictive to," and "it also will be more perfect if" containing conditions to implement inducing strategies. These strategies are usually guided by bright results for the future (cf. "more structured," "more convictive," and "more perfect"). These three MPEs use conditions to provide opinions so that the receiver's attention can quickly shift from negative evaluation to suggestions and reduce the impact of negative evaluation on emotions. These inducing strategies can help achieve the effect of caring for interpersonal relations, thus enabling the adoption of feedback.

Excerpt 8: (from *Interaction 15*, peer feedback on the second draft)

The framework of the article is clear, and we can see the author's unique views on the topic. Each paragraph can also show the thematic sentences to enhance the logic. However, **it may be more convincing to** help increasing the science and credibility of the article if you can add famous quotes to the paragraph analysis. At the same time, accumulating more analytical topics can also expand our thinking and help us write faster, rather than being limited to a few parts. **And I think it may be better if** you can mention more social phenomena in your first idea. Increasing the diversity of vocabulary and sentence patterns in the article is conducive to improve the level of the article and help us improve the score of the composition. The words and sentence patterns we read in magazines and textbooks can be used in compositions. What's more, reviewing several times after finishing writing can avoid grammatical mistakes, which is very important in English writing.

The provider uses two commentaries, "it may be more convincing to" and "And I think it may be better if," geared to future expectations, namely "more convincing" and "better," which can be identified as inducing strategies. These MPEs are used to draw the receiver's attention to good results, thus reducing the emotional impact of negative evaluations and the possibility of damaging interpersonal relations in the feedback. These inducing strategies signal that suggestions raised in a manner that is not easy to cause conflict are more likely to be accepted.

4.5 Transferring Strategies

Transferring strategies emerge when the feedback provider reduces the conflict of views by lessening the reliability of the information, such as emphasizing the non-teacher status to involve face work and avoid unnecessary responsibility.

Excerpt 9: (from *Interaction 44*, peer feedback on the first draft)

Honestly speaking, the essay is remarkable. You used a well-known model to illustrate your opinion. With this model, I can catch the idea more quickly and think it vivid. Besides, you used helpful conjunctions to organize your essay so that readers can follow the logic you present. More important, each paragraph has the topic sentence. I like it. The major part of essay is good, but there is something needing to refine. First, it would be better if you intergrate the first three paragraphs into one paragraph, or the structure seems too scattered. **Definitely, this is just my idea.** Second, there is some mistakes about grammar and spelling. I have pointed out in your essay and you can check it. Third, the last paragraph presented too much information, especially new ideas. Maybe it's unnecessary and it can be deleted to keep the consistancy of your essay. **That's my personal feeling~ Maybe it is incorrect~** All in all, you present a so wonderful task that I want to revise my own writing after learning from your work. ...

After a series of opinions, the provider uses three commentaries "Definitely, this is just my idea.", "That's my personal feeling~," and "Maybe it is incorrect~" to transfer opinions. These MPEs lower the provider's responsibility for the correctness of the feedback and weaken the evaluation status by reducing the coercion of his own opinion. These transferring strategies are mandatory to mitigate previous negative evaluations, reduce the receiver's burden in peer feedback, and play a role in regulating interpersonal relations.

Excerpt 10: (from *Interaction 25*, peer feedback on the second draft)

Your writing's structure is very clear and the expressions are fluent. However, some of the arguments are not strong enough, and you may need to add some celebrity stories or scholars' research to support your ideas. For example, you can search the Internet to get some relevant research about your topic. With these additional extensions, your writing will be more persuasive and the content can be richer. **But of course, maybe my idea is not applicable, so it is just for your reference~** In addition, you can make some improvements on the transitional words. You can change "First, second, third" into "To begin with, what's more, more importantly". These words can make a difference of your writing in detail. **Anyway, all of these are my personal opinions** and I think your content and ideas are really fantastic.

At the end of the feedback, the provider implements two transferring strategies by using two commentaries "But of course, maybe my idea is not applicable, so it is just for your reference~" and "All in all, all of these are my personal opinions." These two MPEs reveal that the provider explains to the receiver that the evaluation is just based on personal judgment, which highlights the non-teacher status of the provider, weakens the mandatory strength of the evaluation and the authority of opinions, and reduces the emotional impact brought by evaluation. These transferring strategies can lessen the obligation to provide feedback and, at the same time, help to realize the face management of both sides, thus reducing the possibility of affecting their interpersonal relations.

5. Concluding remarks

This paper examines the interpersonal functions of MPEs in peer feedback and explores the metapragmatic awareness they reveal from the metapragmatics perspective. In peer feedback, various factors should be considered, such as the need for both parties to save face, relevant responsibility, and emotion management. These factors make it more challenging for both parties to deliver information in an English context as they are non-native English speakers. Therefore, to provide and receive informative feedback, providers will use MPEs to manage and regulate interpersonal relations so as to realize more effective feedback. This paper analyses MPEs as relation-oriented strategies, demonstrating the mechanisms of MPEs in peer feedback and the importance of metapragmatic awareness in this context. However, data analysis reveals that the use of strategies is less frequent and varied than in other contexts. There are only some examples of relation-oriented strategies, which are not as diversified or plentiful as expected. Also, there are just a few interactions in which feedback is provided along with strategies, such as MPEs, which involve various factors. Perhaps this is due to the perfunctory attitude of some participants in this activity, which discloses a need for teachers to create common ground in their teaching regarding relational management. Future teaching practices can design activities to help students focus on the context of English use and its communicative needs in order to improve their language skills, i.e., (meta)pragmatic competence. Future research is expected to investigate data on student feedback and responses, such as multiple turns of written or oral feedback, to tap into the use of MPEs or other pragmatic strategies to guide students in collaborative language learning.

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