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Refining the Definition of Student Peer Feedback: The Role of Roles

Abstract

Refining the definition of student peer feedback in text production pedagogy and extending the definition to include the concept of peer-feedback roles, this article roots in higher education and explores definitions of peer feedback based on multiple characteristics. Its primary objective is to contribute to the landscape of student peer-feedback research in writing and translation studies. Its secondary objective is to provide a discourse-sensitive definition of student peer feedback at the crossroads of symbolic interactionism and social constructivism. This article reconceptualizes the role that peer-feedback roles play in student peer-feedback settings, drawing on peer-feedback research to cut across the disciplines. It broadens the perspective on the perceived dichotomy of the roles of feedback provider and receiver, based on role theory as a critical framework to synthesize theoretical approaches. This article suggests future conceptualization and theorization of roles as a framework for educators and researchers.

Keywords

peer-feedback roles; role theory; social constructivism; student peer feedback; symbolic interactionism; text production pedagogy; translation studies; writing studies

1 Introduction

Watson proposed that "Ultimately, definition permits a powerful use of language, that is to stipulate possible, theoretical worlds rather than to simply describe the world of experience" (Watson, 1985, p. 195). While conceptualizations to encapsulate the process and practice of giving and receiving constructive criticism and insights – peer feedback – are plenty and differ greatly, theorization of the concepts and descriptive categories across disciplines are not particularly common. This may be related to the data-driven nature of studies in neighboring pedagogical disciplines or pertain to the diversity and complexity of peer feedback and its contents, elements, and relations. The fuzziness of this interactive method and practice can also be a cause. Conceptualizations have been used interchangeably within e.g. higher education studies, writing studies, translation studies, communication studies, and across the disciplines, and have been approached from divergent philosophies of science backgrounds. Some characteristics of peer-feedback definitions have been more thoroughly investigated than others.

In an attempt to further clarify and to enhance the theoretical discussion, we refine the definition of student peer feedback. Adding the agent to the definition fulfills two purposes. First, it opens up a discussion about the participants of social interaction and places the definition firmly in the institutional context of higher education. Second, it allows a conceptualization of their roles in the peer-feedback process that goes beyond a distinction into feedback providers and receivers. In the following, we provide a cross-disciplinary literature review of conceptualizations of peer feedback in definitions, we suggest our definition, and discuss its characteristics. Among the characteristics of our definition, we single out one – roles – to elaborate on an under-researched aspect of peer interaction, to suggest their potential for further theorization, and to highlight the important role they play in peer-feedback settings.

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2 Defining peer feedback

We review the neighboring disciplines of higher education pedagogy, writing studies, technical and business communication, and translations studies to explore how peer feedback – the processes used to evaluate and improve work of peers – is conceptualized and defined in these arenas of theoretical development, teaching, and practical experience. Given their shared origin and similar contexts, we assume the definitions lend themselves to comparison. While researchers, teachers, and practitioners in different disciplines share assumptions as to the description of peer feedback and as to what peer feedback entails, fundamental meanings, salient characteristics, functions, and categories (DeCapua & Marshall, 2020, p. 1) used to describe it differ.

Researchers approach the description of the core concept of their research in various ways. Some assume that the inexplicit meaning of a term or concept renders it sufficiently and do not attempt a definition. Others provide a mere statement or brief description. Other researchers render explicit the implicit meanings underlying the use of the terminology and concepts used and define the boundaries or exclusions of a concept, object, or idea, thus fulfilling the explicative function of definition (Watson, 1985, p. 194). The latter allows for analysis and revision to fulfil the epistemic function of definition, which, in turn, allows for stipulation of new meanings, the constitutive function of definition (Watson, 1985, p. 194).

When looking at the forms and functions of definitional expressions – the definiendum, the definiens, and the relation between the two marked by the copula "is" (Watson, 1985, p. 184) – a given definition of "*peer feedback is x*" requires scrutiny. The definiendum (the superordinate category) peer feedback contains both peer and feedback *and* forms the noun phrase "peer feedback".

The components of this definiendum are described below. In addition, the definiendum "peer feedback" and its counterparts "peer review" and "peer assessment" will be compared and discussed across the research and application fields, where applicable.

2.1 Definiendum: "Peer"

In educational and scholarly contexts, "peer" implies a level of equality or similarity and shared perspectives and understandings of a text production task and underlying expectations, even an equal "status" (Topping, 2009, pp. 20–21) or "ability" (Patchan et al., 2013, p. 381). It also implies that individuals who are deemed as peers may share experiences, face similar challenges, meet at eye level, yet can offer perspectives unique enough to provide helpful insights in often reciprocal situations. In educational settings, peer commenting is often seen as complementary (Philp, 2016, p. 379) to that of learning goals as well as assessment-oriented teacher commenting. "Peer" does not explicitly clarify multiple agency, and varying roles and responsibilities of individuals performing peer work. While peers may share learning or working environments, their experiences, perspectives, and levels of expertise can vary significantly. This undermines the notion of equality in feedback exchange and makes analysis of roles performed a complex endeavor.

2.2 Definiendum "Feedback"

Feedback, also, is a varied concept in the three linguistic fields. At its core, feedback is written or spoken (sometimes dialogical) response (evaluative or otherwise) about another individual's text production performance. A definition of feedback must therefore reflect upon the properties and boundaries of the concept and be inclusive of and derived from the use of language in the area or domain. A definiens "feedback" will necessarily be associated with prototypical characteristics and functions, related with researchers' areas of interest, such as purpose, feedback types (e.g. feed up, feedback, and feed forward, famously introduced by Hattie and Timperley, 2007), error types, feedback comment types, revision types, and implementation types (cf. Cho & MacArthur, 2010), feedback performed by the actors in feedback processes (Carless, 2022), feedback interaction

(Carless, 2019), quality (Gielen et al., 2009), feedback literacy (Man et al., 2022), the influence of feedback on learning and performance (Nicol, 2019), and multiple other aspects of the concept in various constellations, contexts, and scenarios.

2.3 Definiendum "Peer feedback" and its counterparts

Peer feedback, then, is not a set concept or simple definiendum either. It is used interchangeably with peer review, which, in turn, is used interchangeably with peer assessment. Neither of these three forms of peer interaction (Tajabadi et al., 2023, p. 690) can be attributed to a particular field. Underlying concepts and notions are used interchangeably, defined or not, by researchers across the disciplines. At a rather general level of comparison, based on conventional form out of ordinary oral discourse (Watson, 1985, p. 181), peer feedback and peer review involve peers providing input on each other's work. Peer feedback emphasizes offering constructive criticism (Ching, 2014) and suggestions for improvement, whereas peer review emphasizes qualitative evaluation. Peer assessment – introduced as evaluative judgement (Boud, 2007) – that does not always lead to improvements (Boud, 2000) focuses on assigning grades or scores to evaluate the quality of work or achievement of learning objectives based on predefined criteria (Nicol, 2011, p. 3). Besides these purposes, further general comparisons can be drawn. Peer feedback can be given at any text production process phase, while peer review and peer assessment occur after work is completed. Peer feedback is often less structured, less formal, and broader than peer review. Peer review and peer assessment are often more professional, specific, formal, and criteria-based than peer feedback. All three forms of peer commenting may be reciprocal.

2.4 Peer feedback, peer review and peer assessment and their definiens

A definiens is the defining expression of the definition following the copula "is", for example the x in "peer feedback is x". It contains the differentiating characteristics (Watson, 1985, p. 184) of the definiendum and describes it by providing essential information to clarify its meaning and by providing context or attributes of it in a given nomenclature. When defining peer assessment in 1998, Topping has stated what still holds today: "The varying nomenclature adopted by different authors in the literature can prove confusing and needs careful scrutiny" (Topping, 1998, p. 250).

Following his lead, a selection of definitions from different disciplines, rooted in multiple philosophies of sciences, has been collected to understand underlying concepts of peer feedback. The discussion of cross-disciplinary definitions and conceptualizations of peer feedback strives to exceed what is mistakenly deemed to be a common understanding across the disciplines. We hope to clarify and specify stances as well as deduce features, characteristics, and functions – as groundwork for our definition of "student peer feedback" that includes the concept of roles.

2.5 Concepts defined and undefined - a nomenclature convolution

From the viewpoint of phenomenological analysis, Li et al., based on Hansen and Liu (2005), discuss peer assessment in translation studies to yield "a positive impact on student's learning performance, self-regulated learning and social skills development" (Li et al., 2023, p. 586). They link this notion to a definition by Topping, which states that peer assessment is "an arrangement for learners to consider and specify the level, value, or quality of a product or performance of other equal-status learners" (Topping, 2009, pp. 20–21). They stress that the essential part of peer assessment is feedback "through which peers engage in PA activities with a learning purpose" (Li et al., 2023, p. 586). To them, it is apparently feedback that leads to assessment, which leads to collaborative learning, possibly the subjective experience of the individual. Their focus is the impact of product quality assessment through a peer. We take away from these merged concepts that peer assessment requires the social element of peer feedback to help students improve their learning performance on their way to professionalization.

Li and Ke (2022) establish their translation studies research as social constructivist to highlight the interdependence of individual and social processes in knowledge co-construction. Leaning on a higher education didactics study by Boud and Molloy (2013), they conceptualize peer feedback as "a process where students evaluate each other's work, generate feedback, and revise their own work with reference to comments from peers" (Li & Ke, 2022, p. 1232). This study contains the feedback process perspective and explicitly mentions an evaluation component, a rare phenomenon, as more often peer feedback is conceptualized to be included in peer assessment. It implicitly references reciprocity and role changing in the process.

In their translation studies paper, Sha et al. (2022) mention the differences between two concepts: They use the peer-feedback definition by Liu and Carless, who define peer feedback as a communicative process through which learners engage in dialogue on performance and standards (Liu & Carless, 2006, p. 280). Without establishing the relevance of their arguably contradictory view, they also mention Simonsmeier et al. (2020) to comment on examiner and examinee roles in peer-feedback activities, where the roles are to be understood as provider and receiver of detailed comments without grades or marks. From this we take away the communicative process, and the dialogical aspect and performance standards, as well as role relevance – that of examiner/examinee.

Simonsmeier et al. themselves, also rooted in higher education didactics, describe the difference more in line with Falchikov's (2001, pp. 2–3) seminal notion of peers using "relevant criteria" in peer assessment. Their discussion of the difference between peer assessment and peer feedback stresses understanding as learning rather than evaluation: "Peer feedback therefore differs from peer assessment in that no formal grades are awarded and that the focus lies on understanding and enhancing learning rather than providing a summative assessment of performance" (Simonsmeier et al., 2020, p. 707). In addition, the educational psychologists, Liu and Carless, in fact, also compare and emphasize the difference, likewise drawing on Falchikov's "relevant criteria". We take from this definition the focus on understanding and learning rather than assessment performance.

Liu and Carless make this distinction: "Peer feedback is primarily about rich detailed comments but without formal grades, whilst peer assessment denotes grading (irrespective of whether comments are also included)" (Liu & Carless, 2006, p. 280). The take-away from their interpretation is the use of standards and the relevance of peer interaction for learning improvement: "Whether grades are awarded or not, the emphasis is on standards and how peer interaction can lead to enhanced understandings and improved learning" (Liu & Carless, 2006, p. 280). While implicit here, this explanation is in line with Carless' later research about feedback as a dialogue (cf. Zhu & Carless, 2018). With this general process and quality-based notion of feedback, learners' sense-making of comments is linked to the "development of future performance or learning strategies" (Carless, 2019, p. 706).

Studying differential effects of online peer-assessment roles, Çevik (2015) investigates assessors' and assessees' development of problem-solving skills in relation to peer assessment. Her definition of peer assessment is a process-oriented one based on Topping (2009, p. 20): "Peer assessment is defined as an assessment process in which students make judgements to each other about the quality of their work performances" (Çevik, 2015, p. 250). We adopt from this approach the necessity to integrate peer interaction and process levels.

Kim examines student-involved assessment used to monitor students' progress. The study investigates an elaborated assessee's role in peer assessment and explores peer assessment as a learning method under scrutiny. She describes peer assessment as follows: "Students use their knowledge and skills to review, clarify and correct other's work" (Kim, 2009, p. 105), which necessitates the inclusion of notions of fundamental competence concepts into a peer-feedback definition that specifies a human agent – here, students – and their roles.

This human agent aspect and method link is underscored by Simonsmeier et al. They explain that giving feedback involves students engaging actively in their learning process, while they take both the "roles of an examiner and examinee". We derive from their argumentation that peer feedback as a teaching method initiates an "active and self-directed learning process" that "includes social interaction and reciprocal teaching" (Simonsmeier et al., 2020, p. 706).

Incorporating the peer-review perspective, Carless uses peer feedback and peer review interchangeably, based on the rationales that a) students make judgements usually in relation to a task that they have already attempted and that "being exposed to work of peers supports students in self-monitoring their own progress" (Carless, 2022, p. 146) due to comparisons, and b) that learning from peer review "is mainly due to the internal feedback that students generate on their own work during reviewing" (Carless, 2022, p. 146). For rationale a), Carless draws on McConlogue (2015) and for b), on Nicol et al. (2014). We glean from the merged conceptualization the aspect of tasks already attempted and the aspects of internal feedback and self-monitoring during feedback processes.

For higher education didactics, Nicol et al. define peer review as "a reciprocal process whereby students produce feedback reviews on the work of peers and receive feedback reviews from peers on their own work" (Nicol et al., 2014, p.102) and as "an arrangement whereby students evaluate and make judgements about the work of their peers and construct a written feedback commentary" (Nicol et al., 2014, p. 103). Written feedback comments are a feedback process advantage, as students can promptly apply and directly utilize feedback for reworking and resubmitting. Similar in its constructivist perspective, yet different from the rationale presented by Carless above, it is not the participatory dialogue that is the take-away regarding the differences, but the reciprocity of the written communication and the directness of implementation.

At the crossroads of writing research and educational psychology, Cho and MacArthur generalize and specify a broader notion of peer review: "Peer review takes many forms: it may be face-to-face or written, may involve numerical ratings as well as comments, and may supplement or replace instructor evaluations" (Cho & MacArthur, 2010, p. 328). We deduce the distinction between interaction modes, feedback modes (ratings vs. comments), and the explicit inclusion of an additional agent – the instructor – and their evaluator role.

Cho and Cho explain peer reviewing to be "where student writers receive comments from peer reviewers and then act as reviewers to provide comments to peer writers" (Cho & Cho, 2011, pp. 629–630). The authors critically compare peer review with peer assessment: "Studies of peer assessment have shown that students did not learn very much from simply grading peer papers" (Cho & Cho, 2011, p. 631). We glean from this conceptualization the interactivity and role aspects of peer interaction.

Roles in the form of role-playing effects on peer feedback in a learning activity are investigated by Ching, based on an online case in instructional design. In her study, role-playing provides a means to anchor analysis, interpret and evaluate peers' work, which may "result in more directed and constructive feedback", allows more in-depth and critical feedback, and may result in more comprehensive problem solutions (Ching, 2014, pp. 295–296). Her baseline definition reads: "Peer feedback can be part of peer assessment" (Ching, 2014, p. 293). Rotsaert et al. add "active involvement" to their peer assessment definition and explain peer-assessment activities as a "reflection of the quality of peers' work" and in correspondence with "goals or criteria" (Rotsaert et al., 2018, p. 76). Like Ching (2014), the authors deem that "one of the central components of peer assessment is peer feedback". Besides the pragmatic functions of roles and their potential link with and effect on feedback quality and the component of active involvement, we note these authors' distinctively inclusive stance that runs counter to Rieber (2006), see below.

Zhu and To (2022) focus on receiver roles in peer-feedback dialogue and investigate self-regulation and co-regulation of feedback providers' learning. They reframe Nicol (2010) and Carless'

(2022) dialogic process conceptualization into "a collaborative dialogue between feedback providers and receivers" (Zhu & To, 2022, p. 1200). Their definition of peer feedback is based on Er et al. (2021) and includes a formulation that excludes feedback providers. They focus on how receivers "are expected to participate actively to evoke different levels of regulation, for example, planning and coordinating feedback activities, discussing feedback to support its uptake, and applying it for performance improvement" (Zhu & To, 2022, p. 1200). This one-sided perspective is counterbalanced by this comment: "In the light of reciprocity in peer interaction, co-regulated learning (CoRL) could also occur as a result for effective feedback exchanges between providers and receivers" (Zhu & To, 2022, p. 1200). We credit the authors for their innovative inclusion of collaborative, self-regulatory and co-regulatory approaches to the role discussion in peer-feedback research in higher education settings. Yet, the probability expression "expected to" and hypothetical assumption "could occur" do their approach injustice.

For business communication, Rieber addresses interchangeable uses of peer review, peer editing, peer assessment and peer evaluation and explains that the latter includes peer grading (Rieber, 2006, p. 322). At the crossroads between writing research and English as a foreign language studies, Ting and Qian reiterate the interchangeable use issue to state that in their discipline, despite benefits and drawbacks, peer review has been widely employed in writing classrooms over the last two decades (Ting & Qian, 2010, p. 88). Their study of academic writing of undergraduate students' peer-feedback role, perceptions, and essay performance does not define the concept. For ESL-writing studies, Rollinson hones into communicative behaviors and the complex socio-cognitive interactions involving arguing, explaining, clarifying, and justifying and provides this definition: "Peer feedback, with its potentially high level of response and interaction between reader and writer can encourage a collaborative dialogue in which two-way feedback is established, and meaning is negotiated between the two parties" (Rollinson, 2005, p. 25). Besides the socio-cognitive exchanges and cooperation in feedback-dialogues, we draw from this definition the relevance of two-way feedback, communication (skills), and critical thinking (skills) for our definition.

For web-based communication, Flanagan and Heine recommend the use of peer feedback with its central characteristic, the skill to judge quality (Flanagan & Heine, 2015). They second Nicol's evaluation that it is "fundamental for life beyond university, where graduates will be exposed to complex information and events in personal, professional and global contexts" (Nicol, 2011, pp. 1–2). A writing-in-the-disciplines paper by Cho and Schunn (2007) uses a reciprocal peer review system for scaffolded writing and rewriting without defining peer review. In a cross-disciplinary study, Zou et al. share a socio-cognitive view that "peer assessment is an inherently social and collaborative process" (Zou et al, 2018, p. 807). In a similar author group, Zong et al. conceptualize peer review as "a teaching method that can address insufficient teaching resources in higher education while also using an effective pedagogical technique" (Zong et al., 2023, p. 977). Their stance here is that "peer review is often called peer assessment when focusing on the peers' numerical ratings and peer feedback when focusing on peers' comments" (Zong et al., 2023, p. 978). While we deem numerical rating processes as less social and less collaborative than engagement with peer comments (especially when dialogical in nature), we deduce the necessity of clear concept inclusion or exclusion for our own definition.

3   Re-defining student peer feedback

Based on our experience with peer feedback as an essential pedagogical practice in text production classes of multi-lingual communication and applied linguistics courses, and based on deductions of the feedback literature above, we arrive at the following "discourse-sensitive" definition (Watson 1985, p. 185). The diverse research disciplines and philosophies of science perspectives we integrate allow an attempt at a nuanced redefinition of student peer feedback, acknowledging its complex nature.

Student peer feedback is a pedagogical method to foster self-regulatory and co-regulatory learning as well as a multifaceted social interaction and reciprocal commenting and evaluating process, assigned in institutional contexts, in written and/or oral scenarios; where individuals apply acquired competencies and scaffolding to evaluate, comment and suggest changes, in a participatory dialogue, to make sense of comments and reflect on suggestions for implementation, against prospective performance standards, while assuming multiple roles.

This definition is at the crossroads of two philosophies of science that help understand the construction and interpretation of reality through social interactions. Both oral and written comments of peer feedback involve students in the give-and-take of social interactions, where the exchange lays in explanation and apprehension. Symbolic Interactionism is characterized by such interpretation and negotiation and includes a focus on the self, on role-taking, and sense-making. Interpretation of the social process, in which peer-feedback interactions occur in a cultural context and by knowledge construction, is achieved through shared meaning and consensus-building, key features of Social Constructivism.

The definium and its elements described below consist of the following descriptive characteristics of student peer feedback that take a point of departure in two intertwined concepts, peer feedback as a pedagogical method and as a process.

Method/agency

Peer feedback is a pedagogical method of self and other reflection and a process of social interaction. Agency is closely linked to both methods, as student peer feedback is first and foremost about the parties involved, typically students in higher education, who are challenged to perform peer-feedback tasks with various underlying functions, but it also involves their teacher.

Teachers

Providing reciprocal (or even multiple) feedback to each other might arguably be a means to unburden the teachers in their institutional context. In this definition, the teacher, as an agent, is purposely implicit, as it focusses on agency of students. Yet, the teacher is more often than not the initiator of the peer-feedback process and the facilitator of peer feedback used as a pedagogical method in the institutional context in which the peer feedback is performed. Teachers' decisions regarding peer-feedback activities and teacher guidance have an impact on student autonomous learning and are likely to help increase the effectiveness of peer interaction. While teachers can influence peer-feedback behavior through task instruction, encouragement, scaffolding, or pairing, multiple aspects of the pedagogical method remain beyond teacher's control.

Teaching

Teaching is implicitly referenced in the definition in "acquired competencies and scaffolding". With their teaching and instruction, teachers provide resources and aid students to master activities. Scaffolded peer feedback can include explicit instruction, process and content prompts and cues, templates, and quality criteria. The characteristic of "prospective performance standards" of the definition explicitly refers to scaffolding in peer-feedback tasks that support the learning journey of acquiring knowledge and skills incrementally – towards gaining proficiency that mirrors industry standards.

Students

Students who participate in peer-feedback activities may or may not share demographics, cultural backgrounds and life experiences, knowledge, status, and similar characteristics. They may be paired by their teacher or randomly chosen to carry out a task together. They may be engaged and inclined to perform as best as possible to help their counterpart(s) with feed forward, mitigating comments

including praise and problem solution approaches, and they may be willing to share responsibility for their partner's work. Or, on a continuum of desirable and non-desirable involvement, they might do anything in between. They may or may not be interested in consensus-building, self-regulating feedback comments by pairs, and engaged in co-regulating dialogues. Feedback behavior is deeply idiosyncratic, yet prone to change based on experience and proficiency.

Process

The definition adopts a prototypical, reciprocal process of mutual commenting and evaluation of one or more individuals who are each other's feedback partner(s), as they find themselves in the same social context. The partner may be known or anonymous, based on teacher choices, with multiple consequences for process, feedback performance of sharing and consensus-building, and uptake and product quality. The scenario may encourage written and oral feedback only. From a symbolic interactionism perspective, in non-dialogical peer feedback, students are likely to internalize and interpret comments and evaluations of others to shape their text products and to adjust, implement, and improve.

Dialogue

A combination of the written and oral comments that allows for the characteristic "participatory dialogue" of the definition is also common. From a social constructivist perspective, pooling of knowledge, knowledge (co-)construction and collaborative knowledge building allows for reflective response regarding the comments, explanations, and cognitive rendering of comments and their interpretation by the students involved in peer-feedback roles.

Roles

The definition contains the characteristic of "assuming multiple roles". Peer feedback involves a minimum of two roles being enacted. Given the complexity of acts performed in feedback sessions, we believe that multiple roles are being performed, both consciously and subconsciously during peer-feedback processes. Further examination is warranted to delve into the nuances and intricacies of the characteristics of roles.

4   Roles in the disciplines

The refined definition highlights the social behavior performed in peer-feedback situations as well as knowledge construction and co-construction, activities that are socio-cognitive in nature. Role theory uses this philosophy of science framework to emphasize that roles are defined as "any set of behaviors that has a socially agreed-upon function and accepted code of norms" (Biddle et al., as cited in Newman & Newman, 1995). The discipline (which began on the theatrical metaphor) investigates how role behavior is learned in social interaction and follows social scripts or expectations associated with certain roles (Georgas, 2004, p. 18). It is presumed that expectations are the major generators of roles and that actors of roles are socially aware humans, whose behavior is determined by the role(s) they perform (Biddle, 1986, p. 68).

What is valid for pragmatic descriptions of roles is also relevant for roles in peer feedback: They are associated with status, rights, and duties that are consciously performed (Hare, 1994, p. 434). They refer to social positions and provide directions for behavior in otherwise uncertain situations (Aartsen & Hansen, 2020, p. 250) through role expectations or social norms, that is, "the unwritten rules" (Legros & Cislaghi, 2020, p. 62) associated with a particular role. Love and Davis highlight this as a central tenet of social-psychological theories: "interactants' expectations condition responses" (Love & Davis, 2014, p. 852). They also explain the central concept of role-taking that is "variable and manifests behaviorally in predictions about other's responses" (Love & Davis, 2014, p. 852). Therefore, roles set "the limits within which we may legitimately act" (Scott, 2001, p. 435).

Roles cannot only be taken, they can also be made. Role-making includes innovation and improvisatory behavior (Turner, 1962) rather than imitation and templating. The Goffmann perspective that individuals are never merely actors following a script but authors as well (Scott, 2001, p. 437) can directly be transferred to peer-feedback situations in the classroom, where students are likely to perform multiple roles by means of role-taking and role-making. While humans are able to role-play multiple roles, they may have to deal with incompatible sets of expectations from different sets of others, e.g. superiors, peers, and subordinates (Hare, 1994, pp. 434–435). However, role-play as a strategy is often used in the educational field to enhance cognitive learning and the interpersonal aspect of peer-feedback interactions. Ching and Hsu argue that role-playing gives the feedback providers a position to more focused responses and reduced cognitive burden of addressing every strength and weakness they see. Interpersonally, role-playing can potentially address the issues of lacking psychological safety and trust (Ching & Hsu, 2016, p. 109). In role-playing, students can adopt perspectives separated from their own critique and can worry less about hurting relationships (Ching & Hsu, 2016, p. 109). According to Bell, role-play "provides an imaginary context in which issues and behaviors may be explored by participants who take on a specific role or character" (Bell, 2001, p. 256). Thus, role-playing can augment the authenticity of the task when learners review their peers' work from an important stakeholder's perspective (Ching & Hsu, 2016, p. 109).

The conceptualization of "role" in peer-feedback settings in the disciplines touched upon in this article are – indeed – multiple. Also, there are notable similarities and overlaps across the disciplines as well as notable differences.

4.1 Translation studies

In the pedagogical and didactical strands of translation studies, the didactic focus of paired activities lies on language proficiency, source and target text and culture, skopos (Vermeer 1989/2004), application of various translation types (interlingual, intersemiotic, and intralingual translation (Jakobson, 2021)) and translation strategies, and on translation quality assessment (Lauscher, 2000). The latter is a crucial aspect of translation training in higher education. Translation quality is linked with all other knowledge and skills that trainee translators learn. More importantly, it is linked with attitudes and behavior characteristics associated with the ability to adhere to quality standards of the profession (Mossop, 2020, p. 115) – including ethical standards – expectations of translation commissioners, and various industry standards, which is crucial for the professional success of translators. Peer-feedback skills are highlighted by employer panel advisors as important elements of the hard and soft-skill package required for successful recruitment.

Student peer-feedback assignments are thus a fitting exercise type for training. They provide students with opportunities to practice for future industry realities. They also have the potential to enhance the teaching experience for the teacher, as multiple feedback loops (including that of the teacher) may impact student uptake and implementation, which can, in turn, improve translation quality. In addition, trainee translator training involves the knowledge of both processes of translation (translation proper) and their recursive and reciprocate nature, as well as the corporate processes into which translations are integrated. This includes knowledge of roles performed by translators.

Kiraly's work to integrate the constructionist perspective into translation studies pedagogy suggests moving away from pedagogical tasks to (real) case studies that involve taking responsibility for one's own learning in authentic projects (Kiraly, 2000/2010, p. 196). Such task settings allow students to act in professional roles, such as translator, reviser, post-editor, or quality assurance specialist (Chen et al., 2023). They also pinpoint the relevance of corporate processes, bring role dependencies to the forefront, and highlight aspects of trust, reliability, and mutual responsibility for peers' work that are empowering (Kiraly, 2000/2010, p. 194) and transferable to when they become full-fledged members of the industry.

The conceptualization of peer-feedback roles in translation studies is still more often than not dichotomic, with the two main roles feedback provider and feedback receiver (Li et al., 2023) implicitly or explicitly placed at two opposite ends of the spectrum. As for peer assessment tasks, the possibility of intermediacy and overlap are more distinct when evaluation and qualitative judgement are encouraged in the assessor and assessee roles (Li et al., 2012, for inclusion, Belland et al., 2009 for problem-based learning in educational psychology). Translation classroom situations, of course, offer far more complex realities. Acting in a role, one can typically not act in its polar opposite simultaneously. Yet, students often provide and receive feedback based on the same task they did themselves, share background knowledge of the task, task requirements, or the institutional framework provided by the teacher. These shared characteristics establish both tangible relations (physical, such as translation, translation brief, task description, scaffolding guidelines) and intangible (cognitive and social) relations between the roles that make them less distinct. Existing relationships outside assigned roles may exert influence on both processes and roles. In pedagogical settings, performing both roles within a short period of time while using the same material may blur the boundaries of roles even further.

Moving on from summative and formative written comments and adding the prominent pedagogical method of dialogical peer feedback (Carless, 2013) to the mix may change the conceptualization of roles as distinct opposites to less static entities and instead inspire a conceptualization along a continuum.

4.2 Writing studies, higher education and educational psychology

Areas where peer feedback is used as a pedagogical method in writing studies span from the educational field (learning-to-write) to further educational institutions (writing-to-learn) to higher education (academic writing and writing in and across the disciplines). Regarding role conceptualization, as in translation studies, the focus is didactical and dichotomic. Feedback provider and feedback receiver are the most commonly used roles (Cho & Schunn, 2007). Many studies are interested in how learning, the learning process, and outcome quality (revised versions of text, implemented feedback comments) are affected by or have an effect on the individual who performs the roles. Influential aspects are examined in isolation or to differentiate between providers and receivers. Given that the peer-feedback process is an often-used underlying element of the role description, the relation between roles in the process appears underexplained. A dominant research interest is which of the roles in a given peer-feedback context is more beneficial for the actor or for the process result (implemented feedback). Evaluation is carried out based on process aspects, number of (implemented) corrections, feedback types, revision types, implementation types, qualitative third-party evaluation (e.g. the teacher), and learner perceptions of the peer-feedback task, peer and own performance in context. The latter is at times based on evaluation ranges where teacher-like feedback is an aspect of comparison or benchmark of excellency.

The provider/receiver roles are largely characterized by their reactions, responses, activities, and behavior. The importance of the provider role is especially highlighted with claims that providing feedback is often more beneficial than receiving feedback (e.g. Choi, 2013; Winstone & Carless, 2019) because the former involves more cognitive engagement, involving higher-order cognitive processes (Winstone & Carless, 2019, p. 133).

Zhu and To (2022) elaborate on such mere descriptive categories to arrive at a description of six receiver roles based on their data of 21 participants: respondent, verifier, explicator, negotiator, seeker (also in Webb & Mastergeorge, 2003), and generator. Their approach is based on the current absence of systematic elaboration of receiver proactivity and the receivers' portrayal as passive and disempowered in peer-feedback processes. Their study presents these roles with a view to self-regulation and co-regulation in dialogic peer feedback.

Wakabayashi, based on her perception that "peer-feedback research has placed more attention on the writer's role than on the reviewer's" (Wakabayashi, 2013, p. 179), investigates learner writing and highlights the necessarily dual role of writer and reviewer in the writing process in a study at the crossroads of language learning and learner writing.

An under-researched element of peer-feedback roles is that of the fields of tension in collaborative and negotiation situations, as modeled by Nordmark for collective and individual writing. Her roles extend to four: independent writer, mentor, social performer, and help-seeking writer. They are rooted in ethnography and incorporate aspects of identity social positioning, as well as networking (Nordmark, 2017, p. 69). We deem her understanding of "writing roles that determine the extent of other people's participation in composition" (Nordmark, 2017, p. 70) as transferable to peer-feedback roles (in text production scenarios), because of the situatedness of the approach and the participatory dimension which lends itself to adoption.

5   Conclusion

Our exploration of peer feedback, peer review, and peer assessment across various disciplines provides a diverse array of definitions and conceptualizations that underscore the multifaceted nature of peer feedback and its characteristics. One characteristic – roles of peer feedback – was theoretically explored in this article to highlight the dynamic nature of roles and to reason for the decision to characterize roles as "multiple" in our definition of student peer feedback. Moving forward in theorizing roles in peer feedback in higher education, role theory can be used to explain concepts such as role-taking and role-making, which may, in turn, be utilized to explain social and situational norms, expectations, and behavior in peer- feedback settings.

Unfortunately, roles as crucial elements of peer-feedback processes often tend to be dichotomized in the literature, which undermines their importance for didactical application and their theoretical value. In reality, roles often exist on a spectrum, rather than as distinct elements or categories.

We suggest that there are multiple intermediate or overlapping roles at play – or being played – in peer-feedback processes. Not only because of the reciprocal nature of prototypical peer-feedback situations, but also because the complexity of peer-feedback interactions (be it textual or dialogical, personal, or distant social interaction) naturally evokes transitions between roles and allows for varied role behavior. Future theoretical contributions should continue to establish a common terminology and definitions of roles and their application, preferably based on role theory. Role multiplicity could be addressed by organizing peer-feedback roles in a taxonomy and/or along an open-ended continuum that helps identify patterns and relationships among them, to allow for comparative analysis and to develop more nuanced theoretical frameworks that account for the complexities of peer-interaction dynamics.

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