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Maximizing the Effectiveness of Peer Interaction in the English-Language Classroom

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Maximizing the Effectiveness of Peer Interaction

in the English-Language Classroom

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Research Question

The question I hope to explore answers to through my capstone project is the following: *How can teachers maximize the effectiveness of peer-to-peer interactions in an English Language classroom at the secondary or post-secondary level?* The next sections will detail the personal and professional context of this research interest and provide the rationale for why it is an important area to explore for the profession and me personally.

Personal Context

I arrived in Vietnam in 2013 as a young college graduate with no experience or training for teaching English as a foreign or second language. As a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant, we were not supposed to have any particular teaching expertise, but instead we were meant to rely on our English fluency as native speakers to hopefully be helpful as volunteers leading speaking-focused classes at schools around the country. I probably had even less experience with speaking-focused language classrooms than most, since I had taken Latin in high school and college and had never actually learned how to speak another language to even an intermediate level. In short, I did not know what I was doing. However, I held an intuition that I've since learned is probably close to the mark, which was that maximizing the amount of actual speaking time and conversational interaction during class time for each individual learner would help them grow as English speakers. Indeed, Mackey and Gass (2012) asserted that many researchers and studies have proved a robust connection between interaction and second-language learning, and a common position in the literature is that engaging in collaborative dialogues is an

essential condition for second-language acquisition. When I was placed in charge of classrooms full to the brim with 30-40 students, the only clear way to have everyone speaking consistently was to have students talk in pairs or small groups. During whole-class activities, I would be able to call on a few students to interact with me or with each other in front of the class, but even in a four-hour class period each student would only get the chance to speak once or twice if everyone was rotated through. And so I turned to partner and small group interactions as the bedrock of my English Speaking and Listening classes.

Personal Experiences with Peer Interactions as a Learner

Moving back in time to reflect on my own peer-to-peer interactions as a student in high school and college, the first thing that jumps out at me is that learning Latin was a lonely endeavor. There was endless memorizing of vocabulary and morphological forms, all to the end of written translation. My high school Latin teacher probably missed many opportunities to have students work together to try to crack the codes of Ovid or Catullus, and for whatever reason we always worked alone or as a whole class in a teacher-student interaction mode (and my one college Latin class only just continued on in the same vein). Group work in other classes such as social studies would sometimes be invigorating and collaborative, where the group produced something greater than any of us would have been able to do on our own (especially when the product involved something creative like a skit or poster). Other times with little structure provided or due to the interpersonal dynamics of the group, the collaborative ideal would devolve into one person (usually me) taking on the brunt of the work with others knowing someone would pick up the slack. Or maybe we would divide up responsibilities and so complete pieces

individually and combine them into a disunited whole, where we would not have to actually engage with each other at all as partners. All in all, my experiences with peer-to-peer interactions as a student were a mixed bag.

It was not until I took an introductory workshop for beginning Vietnamese with the other new Fulbright teachers in Vietnam that I first experienced the immense value of peer interaction for language learning. As soon as we learned the most basic of words and introductory conversations from our Vietnamese instructor, we would then be tasked with acting them out with a peer for practice. This was both very fun but also felt like a necessary part of acquiring actual listening and speaking skills in the new target language. I wish the workshop had lasted longer than the brief two weeks, as the question and answer formulas I learned and practiced then would be the only ones I could confidently use with native Vietnamese speakers in my subsequent months in Vietnam. I could accomplish language functions such as asking for someone's name and age while giving mine in return, saying I was very happy to meet someone, and telling them where I was from. Without the repeated practice of these conversations with a peer, I am not sure I would have been as confident to go out in the world and re-use the phrases and sentences to the point where they eventually became close to second-nature. With only a few weeks of personal experience of learning to speak another language out loud under my belt, something clicked about the absolute importance of peer-to-peer interactions for language learners. I knew my own students would benefit from that same type of classroom as my workshop where everyone was continually active in practicing using the target language in a low-stakes environment with peers—where the energy of the room would feel dynamic and bursting with positivity.

Peer Interactions in my Teaching

When I finally got in front of my university-level English classes at Tra Vinh University, I did not hesitate to direct the students to turn to their partners to practice English conversations. I relied on the course textbooks to structure my lessons, and often there would be a particular language function as the target of a particular unit, such as introducing oneself, asking for a favor, giving a compliment, etc. My default teaching approach would be to introduce the function to the whole class, have students practice it with their partners, and then call on a few groups to demonstrate the mini conversation in front of everyone. In my more advanced-proficiency classes, I sometimes had students engage in free-form discussion with partners and then the whole class about important cultural topics such as the effects of social media, gender norms and expectations, urban vs. rural life. For my Listening and Speaking classes with English majors, each textbook chapter started with a scripted conversation that demonstrated a language function and used certain target vocabulary words, and I would always have my students act out these scripts with their partners.

Occasionally I had classes split up into small groups to perform skits, and one fruitful activity involved having each group act out both a positive and negative example of a job interview (I don't think I have ever laughed so hard in a classroom as during some of the negative skits showing what not to do). When students got the word to turn to their partner or group-mates, I would be free to float around to hear what everyone was up to and to answer any questions or give corrective feedback. Indeed, my students in Vietnam seemed to thrive with these kinds of peer-to-peer interactions, and the activities always seemed to enliven the room and bring the positive energy and language output I

was largely hoping for. Inevitably though I would observe some students speaking much more than others in their groups, or some groups would finish the task much sooner than others before sitting quietly or reverting to chit-chat. I have no doubts that some learners got much more out of certain peer-to-peer activities than others.

Reflecting back on my two years teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Vietnam, I am proud of the amount of peer-to-peer interaction that I facilitated and the way I tried to avoid being the main speaker in the room. However, I cannot help but wonder if there were ways I could have made these interactions more effective and productive for all the students. This thought of mine begs the question of how the quality or effectiveness of a peer-to-peer interaction is even determined. Is it about aspects like the percentage of time each partner spends speaking and the number of language-related episodes experienced by the group? I had no clue what the ideal interactions actually looked like, so I did very little scaffolding or explicit instruction around interacting itself. Thus, through this project I hope to learn about what constitutes evidence of a quality peer-to-peer interaction and how teachers can facilitate high quality interactions more frequently.

For example, I rarely took an active hand in pairing or grouping the students, always letting them choose their own partners. This understandably resulted in close friends at the same desk partnering up with each other. With my crowded classrooms of crammed-together rows, for time and convenience reasons I figured it wasn't worth the hassle of having people move around for our frequent group work. I was not sure, however, if this was indeed the best practice and if it would be better for more unfamiliar partners to work together or for there to at least be some kind of partner rotation. Would it

be better for me to pair up experts with experts and intermediates with intermediates or to split them into expert-intermediate (or expert-novice) pairs? How a language teacher should approach pairing of students is just one aspect of facilitating peer-to-peer interactions I wanted to become more of an expert on. I also wanted to explore if there are particular methods of scaffolding and introducing group work that could maximize the effectiveness of that time in the classroom for the students. And lastly, the specific type of activity employed in the classroom I figured may also have an outsized effect on the quality of peer-to-peer interactions. As a new EFL teacher in Vietnam with no training, I improvised a bit but mostly stuck to scripted or highly structured conversations from the textbook or completely unstructured discussion prompts. I was not aware of the kinds of activities that are more inherently designed to encourage the negotiation of meaning, such as information-gap or dictogloss activities (Swain & Lapkin, 1998). Exploring the effectiveness of these and hopefully other kinds of classroom activities could hopefully help me build a large repertoire of things to try with my future students for peer-to-peer work that I had not even known were possibilities before.

Rationale

On a personal professional level, I feel that becoming more of an expert on effective peer-to-peer interactions in the language classroom will make me a much better EFL teacher going forward and benefit my future students tremendously. These interactions will inevitably form the centerpiece of my classes, and I don’t want to be approaching them in a way that might squander what could be extremely valuable learning and practice time for all the learners. Indeed, I truly want to maximize the quality of these moments since my students in Vietnam in particular may not have much

of an opportunity outside of class to actually speak and converse with someone in the target language. In my context in Vietnam, I noticed that even the English-major students rarely used English outside of their dedicated English *Listening and Speaking* class (a once-a-week four-hour class block) or the once-a-week English-Speaking Club. Outside of class in Vietnam it also seemed atypical for students to be using languages other than their first languages unless directly interacting with a foreigner, which meant the interactions I could facilitate during class might have been the learners' only guided and independent English speaking practice in the whole course of their school semester.

While maximizing the effectiveness of peer-to-peer interactions in an English Language classroom might be of particular importance to me, it is an aspect of pedagogy that should be extremely relevant to any language teacher (and possibly to any kind of teacher regardless of subject). I doubt I am alone in wishing to build upon my expertise and pedagogical repertoire when it comes to facilitating student group work. I would ideally want to be an active part of encouraging the sea change toward more learner-centered classrooms where student voices get heard more often than the teacher's, and where the classroom can be a place of practice and discovery instead of just the venue for passive lecturing.

To that end, my capstone project is centered on creating a three-part professional development seminar to build language teachers' skills and expertise around peer interaction in their classrooms. The research and professional development series that will emerge from this capstone could help support teachers in knowing current best practices that they could actually use in their classrooms. Professional development seminars are very common in Vietnam, and I can also envision being in a position to

deliver these seminars to other English teachers in Vietnam or to new inexperienced foreigners who come to teach with not a day of language-teacher training in their lives—just as I had once done myself.

Summary

This chapter has presented my personal and professional context and rationale for my capstone research question: *How can teachers maximize the effectiveness of peer-to-peer interactions in an English Language classroom at the secondary or post-secondary level?*

Chapter Two will review relevant literature related to peer-to-peer interactions in language classrooms and factors that can affect the effectiveness and quality of these interactions. Chapter Three will describe the professional development series capstone project that could help teachers learn tools and try out activities for increasing the quality of peer-to-peer interactions in their classrooms. Lastly, Chapter Four will offer a conclusion with reflections on takeaways from the project and ideas for future related research and projects.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The overarching question being explored in this project is the following: *How can teachers maximize the effectiveness of peer-to-peer interactions in an English Language classroom at the secondary or post-secondary level?*

The literature review that follows will first discuss the two most relevant second-language acquisition theories related to peer interaction including the interactionist and sociocultural theories. These theories provide a basis for why peer-to-peer interaction could be useful in the English language classroom and why peer interaction might result in language learning gains.

In order to understand what “effective” peer interaction in a language classroom actually means and looks like, I will next look at research that has tried to establish how to determine the quality of peer interactions. Does it have to do with the way in which the interlocutors approach interacting with peers in general? What observable measures of peer interaction can we note that indicate the degree of quality and language learning taking place? This section will explore the notion of particular patterns of interaction identified by Storch (2002) that individuals take on when interacting with particular peers (such as collaborative, dominant, or passive). Each pattern will be analyzed and studies elaborated on that reveal the effects of learners taking on each pattern. The second section will look at the concept of *language-related episodes* as an observable measure of the negotiation of meaning happening in real time and why this concerns the quality of interactions. A *language-related episode* is “any part of a

dialogue where the students talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, or correct themselves or others" (Swain & Lapkin, 1998, p. 326). The results of research discussed in the later subsections of the chapter will only take on meaning when understood in the context of patterns of interaction and measures such as language-related episodes.

The next subsection of the chapter will focus on ways that teachers group students and the effects of various individual factors. One of the goals of my project is to understand how language teachers can improve peer interaction in their classrooms through methods within their control, such as how they group/pair students for classroom tasks. If certain grouping factors cannot be avoided, then it would still be helpful for teachers to know what kinds of pairings might result in a higher or lower chance of high-quality interactions in case that would encourage more scaffolding or feedback. The first part of this section will review research on the effect of L2 (defined as any second language learned after a first or native language) proficiency on dyad interactions, and what results when dyads consist of similar-proficiency or mixed-proficiency pairs. The next section will explore the effects of learners' linguistic background and L1 (defined as any first or native language) vis-à-vis their collaborative partner. A third subsection will explore the effects of peer familiarity on the dynamics of peer interaction.

The final section of the literature review will explore certain teacher-related actions that could affect the quality of peer interaction. The first part will explore research on teacher scaffolding of peer interaction including the effects of pre-task modeling or discussion focusing on collaborative talk. The next section will look at the effect of task type on the quality of the peer interactions, as there are many different types of classroom

activities language teachers can deploy with some possibly being more or less likely to lead to quality peer interaction.

Second Language Acquisition Theory

Interactionist Theory

According to Lightbown and Spada (2013) and Gass and Mackey (2012), many researchers have argued that conversational interaction is an essential condition for acquiring a second language and that there is a robust connection between interaction and second-language learning. Gass and Mackey traced the foundations of the current interactionist theory to Krashen's Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1980), which stated that comprehensible input that is slightly above the learner's current proficiency level was necessary for second-language acquisition. Long (1983) built upon this idea in his Interaction Hypothesis by exploring how input is made to be comprehensible, and he argued that conversational modifications or interactional adjustments made by interlocutors are key mechanisms that promote L2 acquisition (Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Gass & Mackey, 2012). There is a negotiation for meaning that takes place when a communication breakdown or difficulty emerges, and helpful modifications could include simplification, elaboration, slower speech rate, comprehension checks, clarification requests, self-paraphrasing, or repetition (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

Swain (1985) built upon these ideas with her comprehensible output hypothesis, which posited that getting opportunities to produce comprehensible output that an interlocutor could understand was critical for L2 acquisition as it pushed learners ahead in their language development by helping automatize their language production, encouraging the noticing of gaps or limits in their L2 ability, providing chances to test

hypotheses, and leading to a focus on language structure (Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Gass & Mackey, 2012). Schmidt (1990) introduced the Noticing Hypothesis, which put forth that L2 learners must consciously notice certain language features of the input in order for there to be any uptake and acquisition. Gass and Mackey (2012) put the previous work together for a modern interactionist approach that focuses not only on the way that interacting with an interlocutor leads to modified input/output for negotiation of meaning during a communication breakdown, but also how interacting draws a learner's attention to a gap between their interlanguage and the target language. Noticing a challenging language feature, the learner might pay closer attention to the input that follows, and similarly their attention may be drawn to certain features through explicit or implicit feedback as well.

Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory is one of the primary theories of second-language acquisition that relates to peer interaction. This theory posits that language is the tool that facilitates human development and that learning is socially mediated (Lantolf et al., 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky proposed the idea of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), whereby a learner can make gains beyond their current level of understanding by being guided by someone of higher capability in an asymmetrical relationship. In this conception, what is important is not an individual's capability unaided, but what is possible when there is guidance available. Vygotsky also extended who can help someone expand their ZPD as he included a peer who is more advanced than the other interlocutor as someone who could facilitate learning. Fernandez et al. (2015) disagree that there needs to be an asymmetrical relationship for learning to occur and instead propose that

learning can also occur in symmetrical relationships among peers who share a similar level of understanding.

Wood et al. (1976) used the metaphor of *scaffolding* to visualize the idea behind the way tutors can support the learning of their students. Fernandez et al. (2015) disagree with the way Wood et al. conceived of scaffolding only asymmetrically where the tutor has a solution in mind that they are guiding the student toward. This conception, they said, was limiting in that it did not account for the kind of scaffolding that might occur in symmetrical peer groups where an answer is not known in advance but discovered together. In Fernandez et al.'s study of students doing problem-solving tests alone and in groups, they found that students were able to solve more of the problems in groups than when alone when engaging in exploratory talk about the problems, consisting of sharing reasoning and opinions on the problems and collaborating to solve them. Thus, the peers in the study served to expand the ZPDs of one another, providing a kind of unconscious scaffolding that did not require the presence of a teacher.

Swain et al. (2015) built on Vygotsky and discussed collaborative dialogue, which they define as "dialogue in which speakers engage jointly in problem solving and knowledge building" (p. 39). They differentiate collaborative dialogue from the 'negotiation of meaning' which concerns when there is a comprehensibility challenge that gets repaired. Collaborative dialogue on the other hand is when interlocutors build on what the other has said to "grow the meaning" (Swain et al., 2015, p. 39), which supports Fernandez et al.'s conclusion that peers can expand each other's ZPD. Swain et al. also explored the notion of *languaging*, whereby language mediates thinking both internally through thought or externally through speech. By talking about something, the authors

argued, people can achieve a greater understanding of the matter at hand. Swain et al. (2015) argued that the implications of languaging and ZPDs for language teachers revolve around ensuring that learners are challenged in their tasks and encouraged to play around with language with peers in the spirit of the way Vygotsky conceived of play as important for children's development.

Interaction Quality

Patterns of Interaction

Much of the current research on dyadic interactions is based on the analysis of patterns of interaction identified by Storch (2002). Storch identified four patterns of interaction for student dyads in the classroom, which is a framework that later researchers used to base their own studies on (Chen, 2018; Tajabadi et al., 2020). The four patterns discussed by Storch (2002) are based on a matrix that places a dyad's level of equality of contribution and mutuality. The equality of contribution measure has to do with the level of equality over controlling the direction of the task and how it is to be completed. Thus, high equality would be present if both members of a dyad exert some control over the direction of the task and take directions from each other. Low equality, on the other hand, would be evidenced by one member controlling the direction of the task. The mutuality measure concerns the level of engagement each member shows toward their partner's contributions. A high level of mutuality might be evidenced by the continual sharing of feedback and ideas, including conversational moves such as confirmations, repairs, and explanations (Storch, 2004).

The following four patterns of interaction were named and described by Storch (2002, 2004) and are summarized in the table below:

Table 1
Storch's patterns of interaction

	Low Equality	High Equality
High Mutuality	*Expert/Novice pattern*	*Collaborative pattern*
Low Mutuality	*Dominant/Passive pattern*	*Dominant/Dominant pattern*

If a dyad has high equality and high mutuality, it was labeled as a *collaborative* pattern. Collaborative pairs pool knowledge to solve problems and come to solutions that are acceptable to both members; in addition, these pairs tend to spend a longer time on tasks relative to other types of dyads. Dyads with high mutuality but low equality were called *expert/novice* pairs. Expert/novice pairs exist when the 'expert' member actively tries to involve the 'novice' or more reserved member through actions like questions or requests for confirmation. Dyads with high equality and low mutuality were named *dominant/dominant* groupings. These dyads are marked by each member trying to control the interaction, few questions or confirmations, and high amounts of disagreement with little mutual resolution of problems. Lastly, dyads with low equality and low mutuality were labeled *dominant/passive*. These pairings involved one member who controlled the task while the other contributed in a very limited way (Storch, 2002, 2004).

Storch (2002) investigated the patterns of interaction of ten dyads (who self-selected) as they interacted in three separate tasks. One of the key findings was that within each dyad, the pattern of interaction evidenced remained the same across the three tasks. Tajabadi et al. (2020) and Chen (2018), however, found less stability in the patterns of interaction identified for the same dyad across multiple tasks, as many of the dyads that were not initially collaborative became more collaborative over time. In Storch's study, pairs that were labeled as collaborative and expert/novice were found to have a

higher transfer of knowledge from the interactions to post-test measures. Dominant/dominant dyads were found to have more instances of no transfer of knowledge, and dominant/passive dyads were found to have the highest number of missed opportunities for knowledge transfer. These results were echoed by Watanabe and Swain (2007), who found that pairs with a more collaborative orientation—the *collaborative* or *expert/novice* patterns—scored significantly higher on post-test scores measuring learning than the pairs who were deemed to have one of the two less collaborative patterns of interaction. Sato (2017) and Tajabadi et al. (2020) found similar results of more successful learning outcomes for individuals who were coded as engaging collaboratively during pair work.

In order to explore why dyads experience a certain pattern of interaction, Storch (2004) and Sato (2017) conducted qualitative studies of learners' mindsets with regard to peer interaction using surveys and interviews. Storch concluded that the overriding factors that determine a dyad's pattern of interaction are the members' individual goals related to group work: learners either viewed peer interaction as a valuable learning process on its own or as a means to demonstrate their ability/knowledge to achieve desired performance results. How individual goals interacted within the dyads determined the specific pattern of interaction that emerged. For example, the dominant/dominant pair both viewed pair tasks as a chance to display their individual knowledge. The dominant member of the dominant/passive dyad viewed the group work as providing a chance to finish more quickly and with less effort by leveraging a partner, while the passive member viewed group work negatively due to her perceived inadequacies. For the collaborative dyad and the expert/novice dyad, the individuals' goals for group work

instead revolved around the learning process and how peer interaction provided a chance to pool resources, engage with their partner, and provide and receive help. Storch concluded that teachers should not assume that partners in dyads will share learning goals, and that teachers should have discussions with students about the reasons for group work to try to align everyone's goals so more collaborative interactions can occur.

Sato (2017) came to a similar but slightly different conclusion than Storch with regard to learners' interaction mindsets. Sato also found that the mindsets that learners brought with them into the peer interaction causally affected the quality of the interaction and which type of pattern their dyads exhibited. However, Sato posited that a defining feature of a collaborative mindset comes from a belief in the tenets of social interdependence theory, which proposes that "the social relationship between group members and the psychological processes that individuals experience while engaging in a group task define the individual learning outcomes" (Sato, 2017, p. 257). So unlike how Storch divided learners into two camps based on who primarily cared about task performance versus the learning process, Sato found that collaborative partners believe that interacting collaboratively is essential for successful task performance, and that they can only achieve their individual goals if their partners achieve their own goals as well. Sato also concluded that there was an affective component to interaction mindsets, where learners who expressed enjoyment about peer interaction beforehand went on to interact collaboratively, while learners who expressed skepticism about the merits of peer interaction or who were reserved about speaking in the L2 displayed less collaborative behaviors in the study. Storch, on the other hand, concluded that the affective component of interaction mindsets played little role in the patterns of interaction displayed since

nearly every learner expressed a positive attitude toward peer interaction. Combining the results of the two studies, it seems like a broadly positive attitude toward peer interaction is not sufficient for collaborative interaction behaviors in group work; instead, students who had learning goals focused on the learning process of engaging with a peer and who held a deep belief in the efficacy of peer interaction displayed collaborative patterns of interaction.

Language-Related Episodes

In order to measure and quantify instances of negotiation of meaning that occur during peer interaction, Swain and Lapkin (1998) created the notion of *language-related episodes* (LREs), which they defined as "any part of a dialogue where the students talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, or correct themselves or others" (p. 326). The authors then divided LREs into two groups: lexis-based LREs that center around the meaning of a word or choosing among competing words, and form-based LREs that revolved around an issue of spelling, morphology, syntax, or discourse. In their experimental study which quantified the number of LREs that occurred during peer interaction tasks in a language classroom, they found that the number of LREs varied widely among the 12 dyads during a single classroom task, ranging from one LRE up to 26 LREs, with an average of 8.8 LREs per group. There was also a correlation between time-on-task and the number of LREs produced as well as between the number of LREs and performance on post-test learning measures.

One aspect of LREs studied by Zhang (2021) and Philp et al. (2010) is the extent to which they occur during moments of translanguaging or code-switching (switching between languages in the same interaction), when learners resort to using their L1 to

resolve a language challenge with the L2. Garcia and Sylvan (2011) recommend that all language classrooms allow learners the flexibility to translanguage whenever they would like as an essential learning strategy to take greatest advantage of their learning moments. Zhang (2021) found that participants in dyads who shared an L1 and were allowed to use their L1 during peer interaction produced more LREs than dyads in the non-L1 use condition. Zhang hypothesized that for the intermediate proficiency L2 learners in her study, they did not have the language facility in their L2 to discuss their language use as effectively as they could by using their L1. Philp et al. (2010) also found that a third of the LREs that occurred during peer interaction in their study involved translanguaging and use of a shared L1.

Foster and Ohta (2005) argued that clearly identifiable LREs and any related conversational move that involves the negotiation of meaning are just one beneficial aspect of peer interaction for overall language learning and should not be of primary importance in determining the quality of a collaborative dialogue in the classroom. The authors posited that social considerations that arise between peers often inhibit moves to negotiate for meaning, and that the overwhelming majority of LREs during peer interaction involve lexical issues rather than morphosyntactic ones since morphosyntax is less communicatively load-bearing. Foster and Ohta identified relatively few instances of LREs during their study of language learners engaged in one-way discussion and interview tasks, yet they still believed them to be valuable instances of language learning that still encouraged a focus on form on the part of the students. The fact that overt communication breakdowns were rare was noted to be evidence that learners were consciously monitoring and modifying their output to avoid such breakdowns that might

result in an LRE, and therefore the quantifying of LREs during a peer exchange should not be the only or primary way to determine the quality of the interaction.

Grouping Students

Effect of L2 Proficiency Levels

Many researchers have tried to determine the effects of pairing language learners of similar proficiency levels as well as with a higher or lower-proficiency partner (Kim & McDonough, 2008; Shin et al., 2016; Storch & Aldosari, 2013; Watanabe, 2008). No clear trend has emerged to point to one kind of proficiency pairing as superior to others, as the studies revealed relatively higher and lower quality peer interactions among all the types. Shin et al. (2016) focused on task success for learners in a text reconstruction dictogloss task when completed alone or with low-low, low-high, or high-high proficiency pairings. The authors found that all learners completed the task more successfully when in the partner condition than when completing it alone, but that the proficiency-matching of peers did not generally matter for task success. Their only significant finding about proficiency matching was that some low-proficiency learners experienced comparatively greater task success when paired with a high-proficiency peer.

Kim and McDonough (2008) investigated patterns of interaction and LRE occurrence with intermediate learners when first paired with similar proficiency partners and then with a higher-proficiency partner. With regard to LREs, the authors found that a significant amount of LREs occurred in both types of pairings, but there were more LREs produced in the mixed-proficiency dyads with a higher percentage of them resolved correctly. With regard to patterns of interaction, six of the eight core intermediate learners in the study changed their role and pattern of interaction across the two kinds of pairings.

The three learners who were dominant in their pattern of interaction with a fellow intermediate interlocutor became collaborative when paired with a higher-proficiency partner. Conversely, two learners who were initially collaborative with a fellow intermediate interlocutor then became passive with a higher-proficiency peer. Two of the core learners also adhered to the same pattern in both kinds of dyads (collaborative in one case and novice in an expert/novice pattern in the other). The results suggest that the pattern of interaction for any particular learner may be fluid depending on the proficiency level of their partner, and that some learners may engage with peers most effectively when they are either matched in proficiency level or working with a higher-proficiency partner (Kim & McDonough, 2008).

Storch and Aldosari (2013) investigated dyads with similar proficiency (high-high and low-low) as well as mixed-proficiency dyads. The authors found that there was a higher chance of the dyads forming a collaborative pattern of interaction when the peers shared the same proficiency level. For low-proficiency learners in particular, when paired with other low-proficiency partners, they interacted collaboratively and produced significantly longer turns in the L2 than when paired with a high-proficiency partner. The high-low mixed proficiency pairings resulted in a mix of expert/novice, dominant/passive, and collaborative patterns of interaction. In the expert/novice patterns, the authors found that there was a high focus on language use, and while the low-proficiency partner averaged shorter language turns, there was still a beneficial focus on form and meaning for both partners. High-high pairings resulted in collaborative patterns, and the authors concluded that high-proficiency learners could benefit from any

kind of pairing as long as they avoided a dominant/passive pattern when matched with a low-proficiency partner (Storch & Aldosari, 2013).

Watanabe (2008) studied the patterns of interaction and LREs that resulted from first pairing an intermediate proficiency English learner with a low-proficiency learner in a collaborative task and then switching the pairing to a high-proficiency learner. For one core learner in the study, the peer interaction with a higher proficiency student yielded an extremely collaborative pattern of interaction with many LREs, whereas that same learner evinced a dominant role in a heavily dominant/passive pattern with few LREs when paired with a peer of lower proficiency. Another of the core learners took on a novice role in an expert/novice pattern with the higher-proficiency peer and took on the expert role with the lower-proficiency partner. The third core learner engaged in the collaborative pattern with both of her partners, where the expert role was fluid and assistance was offered by both peers in the dialogue. The author concluded that truly collaborative interactions are possible between partners with different proficiency levels, but that there is a clear chance for these dyads to work in a non-collaborative pattern depending on the mindsets and attitudes of the learners and their perceptions of their partners' L2 abilities. To encourage a collaborative mindset, Watanabe suggested that teachers can facilitate explicit reflection on peer interactions, since the stimulated recall interviews the author conducted with the subjects yielded reflections from the learners about the value of peer work and what they could have done differently to make the interactions more effective (2008). Taken together, the studies on peer proficiency levels indicate that learners may benefit from interacting with similar or higher/lower proficiency peers, but that there is a

greater risk of a non-collaborative pattern emerging when dyads are of mixed proficiency.

Effect of Linguistic Background

Some research has been conducted into the effects of collaborative dialogue partners either sharing the same L1 background or having a different L1. Loewen and Isbell (2017) and Pastushenkov et al. (2021) both found no statistically significant difference in the amount of LREs produced by same-L1 dyads or different-L1 dyads. Interestingly, the same-L1 dyads produced more total LREs in Pastushenkov's study and the different-L1 dyads produced more total LREs in Lowen and Isbell's study, but in both cases the authors did not feel the results were clear enough to draw conclusions from.

Bueno-Alastuey (2013), on the other hand, found statistically significant differences in the number of LREs and occurrences of modified output when comparing these two types of dyads. The author found that dyads with a different L1 background produced many more LREs of all kinds (phonetic, lexical, and morpho-syntactic) than dyads with the same L1 background. The different-L1 dyads also produced modified output at a much higher rate than the same-L1 dyads. Bueno-Alastuey hypothesized that learners who share an L1 background experience higher levels of comprehensibility and intelligibility within their dyads and suffer fewer communication breakdowns as a result, leading to fewer LREs and instances of modified output and possibly fewer chances for language learning.

Zhang (2021) found results that add complexity to this discussion, as the dyads in the study all shared the same L1 background but were either allowed to use their L1 during the experimental tasks or were not allowed to do so. Dyads who were allowed to

translanguage were found to discuss task management and language use much more often and more in-depth than dyads who could only use the L2 to communicate. Zhang hypothesized that learners who could use their L1 with each other could elaborate on their ideas much more easily, avoid communication barriers, and clarify the task instructions—all factors that allowed them to focus more on lexical and grammatical issues in the L2. On the other hand, learners in the L2-only condition were more limited in communication due to limited L2 proficiency and resorted to more reading or repetition of each other's utterances (Zhang, 2021). Thus, sharing an L1 and translanguaging during tasks allowed for greater depth of interaction and more analysis of the learners' language use.

Tavakol et al. (2022) investigated the effects of dyads who either shared or did not share the characteristic of learning English as an L3 or as an L2. The authors found that pairs were much more likely to interact collaboratively if they were either both L2 English learners or both L3 English learners rather than in mixed dyads. Tavakol et al. hypothesized that L3 English learners had more linguistic resources to draw on and higher confidence as language learners, which resulted in them taking on a dominant role in interactions when they were paired with an L2 English learner.

Effect of Partner Familiarity

Some studies have been conducted to discover whether peer familiarity within dyads has an effect on patterns of interaction (Chen, 2018; Pastushenkov et al., 2021; Philp et al. 2010; Tajabadi et al., 2020). Pastushenkov et al. found that partners who were previously familiar with each other from before the study achieved greater task success and exhibited more LREs than unfamiliar peer dyads. Chen (2018) sought to analyze

patterns of interaction for initially unfamiliar partners across three separate tasks on different days. Most of the dyads (80%) demonstrated a non-collaborative pattern in their first interaction, taking on either a dominant/dominant or dominant/passive pattern. By the final task, most of those dyads had shifted to a collaborative pattern of interaction. The dyads that had begun by interacting collaboratively also maintained a collaborative style throughout the tasks. Chen hypothesized that when the subjects interacted with completely unfamiliar partners, a fear of unpredictable social dynamics and a need to establish roles obstructed task completion and a focus on language. Chen also believed, particularly in an Asian context, that unfamiliar partners might exhibit shyness to avoid losing face. Conversely, among familiar partners Chen posited there will be reduced anxiety and a freer use of the L2 and giving of feedback due to less fear of being judged (2018).

Tajabadi et al. (2020) found different results after also studying the effect of growing peer familiarity on the dynamics of pair interactions over time. The authors found that pairs who showed a non-collaborative pattern in the first task (either dominant/dominant or dominant/passive) did not shift to a more collaborative pattern in future tasks. Similarly, pairs who were initially collaborative maintained that pattern, though some of the groups who initially showed an expert/novice pattern shifted to a purely collaborative pattern over time. Indeed, the authors found that initially non-collaborative dyads showed less mutuality and equality over time, while the reverse was true for the collaborative dyads; this means that the pattern established early strengthened over time as the pairs spent more time together over more tasks.

Philp et al. (2010) posited a complicated relationship between peer familiarity and mindset toward peer interaction. The authors concluded that students who shared more familiarity and felt more comfortable around each other experienced less anxiety during peer interaction and were more free to experiment with language (a desirable outcome from a sociocultural theory perspective). However, students with less familiarity with their interlocutor and who felt more anxiety about the interaction were found to care more about using correct forms and so were overall more prone to focus on form during their interactions (a desirable outcome from the interactionist perspective). The authors also found that peer familiarity could lessen the amount of LREs exhibited by pairs, due to factors such as peers who felt relaxed with each other and so did not desire to focus on errors or correcting one another or on a related note did not desire to appear arrogant or more knowledgeable than their interlocutors (Philp et al., 2010).

Teacher Effects

Teacher Scaffolding of Peer Interaction

Newman (2017) investigated the classroom dynamics in the class of a teacher the author found to be particularly successful at scaffolding peer collaborative dialogue during her qualitative study of a classroom intervention. The effective teacher discussed expectations for peer interaction explicitly with the students and then went on to model certain discourse forms and structures she desired the students to use themselves. The teacher consciously worked to chain student responses together, to ask for clarifications and expansions, and to encourage peers to engage each other for understanding. Key to the findings, the teacher continually used metatalk to emphasize certain words and

discourse structures to scaffold students' movement from simply knowing expectations for peer interaction to fulfilling them during classroom tasks (Newman, 2017).

Lynch (1997) came to similar conclusions and urged teachers to explicitly help raise learner awareness of their options for overcoming communication problems. Lynch also judged the teacher in his study to be effective at scaffolding students' collaborative dialogues that were already underway when the teacher took a supportive rather than proactive approach in terms of not initiating the negotiation of meaning but legitimizing the negotiation of meaning that students had already begun. In contrast, when the teacher interrupted a collaborative dialogue to tell the students not to worry about a word one of them had identified as being unsure about, an opportunity for negotiation of meaning among peers was lost. Teachers should instead seek to nudge learners to finding solutions during peer interactions instead of introducing the solutions themselves (Lynch, 1997).

Kim and McDonough (2011) studied the effects of a more systematic type of teacher scaffolding of peer interaction across three different tasks. Their experimental group of learners received explicit instructions for engaging with peers including asking questions and giving feedback. The students then watched a brief video of the researcher and teacher modeling the task with clear examples of negotiating for meaning. The control group was given simple task instructions without the scaffolding for collaborative talk or the video model of the task. The learners that received the pre-task modeling engaged in more LREs and resolved a higher proportion of their LREs correctly than the control group. In addition, in all three tasks studied there was a significantly higher percentage of pairs who engaged in a collaborative pattern of interaction than a non-collaborative one (Kim & McDonough, 2011).

Philp et al. (2010) found certain effects for another type of pre-task scaffolding by teachers: pre-emptive focus on form. The authors found that when a teacher explicitly focused the students' attention on specific lexical forms, lexical LREs were less common during peer interaction than when such a pre-emptive focus on form was absent. Conversely, if a teacher focused students' attention on specific grammatical forms before a task, then grammatical LREs were more frequently found during peer interaction (Philp et al., 2010).

Effect of Task Type

Nassaji and Tian (2010) studied instances of negotiation for meaning and focus on language forms during two slightly different tasks for the same learners: a cloze task dialogue reconstruction involving filling in the blanks, and a text editing task where learners had to identify errors present in the fully written-out dialogue. The authors found that learners had significantly more instances of metalinguistic feedback and form-focused discussion during the editing task compared with the cloze task. Kaivanpanah and Miri (2017) also studied a cloze fill-in-the-blank task versus another task, except in their study the alternate task was a more open-ended writing composition where a pair was just tasked with using certain vocabulary words in a context of their making. The authors found that not only did the learners in the writing task condition perform better on post-tests related to the target words, but they exhibited significantly more LREs and negotiation of meaning along with successful resolution of their LREs than the learners completing the cloze task. They hypothesized that the writing task facilitated more negotiation of meaning because of the way the open-ended task required

a co-construction of context rather than just simply determining what item best fit in the blanks in already-constructed sentences (Kaivanpanah & Miri, 2017).

In contrast to the previous findings by Kaivanpanah and Miri, Zabihi (2022) found that learners engaged in more LREs and negotiation of meaning in an input-oriented text editing task (of a prepared text with certain grammatical errors) compared with a more open-ended and output-oriented narrative writing task. Instead of a lexical focus, though, the focus for these learners was on certain target grammatical forms, and the learners in the text editing task also performed better on post-tests for the target forms. Zabihi posited that for targeting of grammatical forms in particular, teachers should provide input that can create cognitive conflict for partners to deliberate over.

Swain and Lapkin (2001) also studied the effects of two different collaborative tasks: a jigsaw and dictogloss. A jigsaw task as used in the study is a two-way information gap task and involves learners holding/seeing only half of the pictures that tell a complete story and needing to reconstruct the whole narrative with their partner. A dictogloss task involves the learners listening to a text being read out loud multiple times before needing to reconstruct the text afterward with a partner. The authors found a similar number of LREs exhibited by the students across the two tasks and an overall similar amount of attention paid to language form. Swain and Lapkin hypothesized that both tasks encouraged a similar amount of focusing on form due to how they both required the students to produce written language in a collaborative fashion. The tasks forced the learners to talk about their language use and confront gaps in their knowledge while working out possible solutions verbally with their partner. One difference found between the two tasks was that the dictogloss constrained the language use and types of

LREs produced compared with the jigsaw task, which the authors hypothesized was due to the more open-ended nature of the jigsaw task. In addition, the learners showed higher accuracy with the target forms on the dictogloss task (Swain & Lapkin, 2001).

An alternative approach to assessing the effectiveness of task type for peer interaction that did not focus on the quantity of LREs produced was proposed by Foster and Ohta (2005). The authors used one-way discussion and interview tasks in their study, which resulted in few LREs overall compared to interactions in other studies; however, the authors maintained that the peer interactions in their study exhibited a high degree of collaboration and peer scaffolding and so were productive regardless of the presence of communication breakdowns that would require an LRE in order to resolve.

Conclusion

Summary

This chapter began with a discussion of the major theories of second-language acquisition that support the notion that peer interaction is a crucial aspect of second-language learning: sociocultural theory and the interactionist approach. Sociocultural theory highlights the way in which other people can scaffold one's learning and grow through the zone of proximal development, while the interactionist approach focuses on how interacting in the L2 leads to a noticing of form and modified output on the part of the learners as they negotiate meaning.

The next section explored how researchers have determined the quality of peer interactions. One of the primary ways has been through the patterns of interaction identified by Storch (2002), with certain patterns being more or less collaborative based on the amount of mutual engagement and equality over the direction of the task. Learners

may take on certain roles or patterns of interaction based on how they view the learning process, their goals for a task, or social considerations. Another primary way researchers have determined interaction quality is through identifying the quantity of language-related episodes (LREs) as defined by Swain and Lapkin (1998). Foster and Ohta (2005) posited that LREs are just one indication of effective collaboration, and that a lack of communication breakdowns and LREs does not equate to a non-collaborative or unproductive peer interaction.

The next section explored the effects of different ways of grouping learners in pairs. With regard to proficiency level, the mix of studies showed that both same-proficiency pairings and mixed-proficiency pairings can result in collaborative or non-collaborative patterns of interaction. However, mixed-proficiency pairings have a greater chance of exhibiting a non-collaborative pattern where one member is dominant and the other passive; they also often result in an expert-novice pattern that can be beneficial for both partners. With regard to linguistic background, the studies offered conflicting results concerning if a shared or different L1 resulted in higher quality peer interactions. However, Zhang (2021) found that in a class where all the students shared an L1, interactions were of higher quality when the students were allowed to use their L1 at their discretion compared to when L1 use was not allowed. With regard to peer familiarity, the research also conflicts and does not offer a clear answer as to whether familiar or unfamiliar peers will have a higher or lower quality interaction. In some cases, familiarity led to more collaborative patterns of interaction, but in other cases, repeated interactions with the same peer simply led to a strengthening of the pattern of interaction established at the beginning.

The final section focused on ways that teachers can impact peer interaction through scaffolding or the choice of task type. The researchers found that teachers could positively affect the quality of peer interaction in real time through how they verbally responded to students or prompted them. Explicitly instructing students on goals for collaborative dialogues and showing pre-task example videos were ways teachers successfully prepared students to engage more collaboratively and to do more negotiation for meaning. With regard to task type, the kind of task that led to the least amount of collaborative peer dialogues was a cloze or fill-in-the-blank task. Other tasks such as jigsaw, dictogloss, editing, and composition tasks led to higher quality peer interactions.

Reflection on Research

For language teachers, the fact that there is widespread agreement that peer interaction has beneficial effects should hopefully lead to teachers ensuring that their students are given opportunities for peer interaction on a regular basis. Learner outcomes and patterns of interaction can vary widely within a classroom depending on certain factors (such as who learners are paired with or individual learner attitudes toward group work), so there should be more intentionality and awareness of group dynamics on the part of teachers. Teachers should also probably engage in explicit teaching and discussion with their students around the benefits and goals of group work. Being aware of patterns of interaction and what leads to a "collaborative" interaction type—high mutuality and equality—should also guide teachers in how to scaffold group work and provide feedback and possibly incentives to encourage this most desired style of interaction. If class grades depend more on factors like engagement with a partner's ideas and avoiding a dominant or passive interaction style rather than on task performance, then learners might be

encouraged to alter their interaction style to a more collaborative one. Relatively simple scaffolds have proven successful and can be widely employed by teachers like spending a bit of time explicitly discussing expectations for peer interaction and showing video examples of tasks (or demonstrating live) where the interlocutors engage collaboratively and display negotiation for meaning.

Providing a variety of tasks as well that encourage negotiation of meaning and language-related episodes is another aspect of peer interaction that is under a teacher's control to maximize the effectiveness of peer interaction in the classroom. The research shows that many factors from the task type to social considerations to linguistic background might affect the amount of language-related episodes exhibited by pairs and the extent to which students feel comfortable speaking with their interlocutors or focusing on form. To maximize both student comfort level during peer interaction but also a focus on form, teachers should try to curate a safe environment for all learners where they can feel free to play with language, make mistakes, politely offer feedback to peers, and use their L1s when they wish to aid in working through any linguistic problems. Language teachers can make these interaction behaviors the primary goals of peer interaction alongside the target forms/content the tasks are designed to practice; in this way, certain social factors may be mitigated that might otherwise limit the amount of negotiation of meaning due to peers feeling either too uncomfortable with their interlocutors to engage in LREs or so comfortable that there is little focus on form. Teachers can also occasionally vary the pairings within a classroom to ensure that students have a mix of interlocutors and do not fall into a negative or unproductive pattern of interaction that gets repeated indefinitely. By rotating partners occasionally, the learners can also profit

from all the varied benefits offered by peers that are more or less familiar to them, similar or different in proficiency level, or similar or different in linguistic background.

While the research points to some of these takeaways for language teachers, there is still a limit on what the research has been able to capture. Individual interaction studies are generally small in scale in terms of how many learners are involved, the variety of tasks used, and the time-frames of the studies. These results might not be able to capture all of the benefits of peer interaction that might not reveal themselves in quantifiable measures of task performance on a specific task or through numbers of language-related episodes, or even through qualitative surveys which hinge on what learners think about on a conscious level. In addition, each study's results are affected by the specific context of the participants, and results may not be generalizable to every language-learning context. The next chapter, Chapter Three, will outline the professional development series capstone project that will aim to help language teachers explore key concepts related to peer interaction that can inform their teaching.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

This chapter will present an overview of my capstone project based on the following research question: *How can teachers maximize the effectiveness of peer-to-peer interactions in an English Language classroom at the secondary or post-secondary level?* Chapter One provided a personal and professional rationale for why this question is important to me as well as to the foreign-language teaching field in general. Chapter Two explored the research and literature surrounding peer interaction in language classrooms to establish what we know about what makes for high or low quality peer interaction. It looked at effects of different methods of grouping students into pairs based on proficiency level, peer familiarity, and linguistic background. It also examined how language teachers can affect the quality of peer interaction through scaffolding and through control of task type. Chapter Three will present an overview of the professional development series that will form my capstone project, the goal of which will be to provide English-language educators with a new way of thinking about and facilitating peer interaction in their classrooms.

Rationale and Design Framework

This project will take the form of a series of three professional development seminars targeted at adult English-language teachers. This format will allow me to present teachers with what the literature has to say about peer interaction in the classroom while also allowing for group discussion, peer interaction among the adult participants, and the chance for teachers to try out some of the tools to experience them firsthand. It is

a common format for group learning among teachers and could hopefully provide useful information and tools for teachers to then use in their classrooms.

The project will not simply take the form of a slide deck or informational packet due to the essential aspect of interactivity that could help make the seminar more engaging and transformative. Knowles et al. (2005) explain in their andragogy approach to working with adult learners that adult learners learn best when it is clear how the learning targets will benefit them or apply to their real-life tasks and when they are not just told what to do but involved in the learning process and still allowed autonomy. Furthermore, the authors explained that teachers should leverage the extensive life experiences of adult learners and place a great emphasis on activities that allow for the learners to share that experience with their peers. They warn that adult learners will react negatively if they perceive that their life experiences are devalued or ignored (Knowles et al., 2005). The design of the professional development seminars will also take into account the core principles of effective professional development as discussed by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) based on their meta-analysis of 35 professional development studies. These principles include professional development that is content focused, incorporates active learning, supports collaboration, makes use of modeling of instruction/materials, provides coaching and support, offers chances for reflection, and is sustained in duration.

To ensure that the topic of the seminar and content is met with open-mindedness and a clear rationale for why it is directly useful and beneficial to the adult participants, the seminar will begin with reflections and discussion surrounding teachers' current experiences with student-student interaction in their classrooms. That way gaps can be

clearly identified between what the teachers currently know/practice and where they would like to be concerning this domain of their teaching. Hearing from the adult participants' voices from the beginning of the seminar will also set a tone for the participants where they can expect their experiences to be valued and not to be ignored in a passive lecturing environment. Engaging the participants in real-life tasks that they could use with their own students will offer chances for collaboration, modeling of classroom tasks, and could also maintain the feeling of relevance of the seminar and keep the participants intrinsically motivated to engage and learn with and from each other.

Setting and Audience

As I am not currently attached to a university or institution engaged in foreign language teaching, this project is for a hypothetical setting and audience I might be a part of in the future. When I was a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant in Vietnam, the cohort of 14 inexperienced English teachers to-be engaged in a pedagogy workshop over two weeks led by a Fulbright specialist, and this seminar series of mine could be part of the agenda for such a workshop for new English language teachers abroad. Whether for Fulbright English teachers or teachers involved in other similar programs, any group setting of new language teachers would be an ideal audience for this project.

Another ideal setting for this seminar series would be a professional development workshop with the English department faculty at any high school or university abroad. When I was teaching at a university in Vietnam, the faculty occasionally all engaged in professional development workshops led by an outside facilitator. I could picture myself teaching once again at a similar institution and being in a position to run these seminars at my school or others for both experienced and new faculty (there are often young and

inexperienced foreigners teaching at schools on a temporary basis alongside long-tenured teachers). English teachers in an Asian context such as Vietnam often adhere to a more traditional teaching approach involving mostly lecturing or having students complete individual work silently at their desks, so a seminar that highlights the value of peer interaction and that offers some tools and best practices could be part of the worldwide sea change toward more communicative language learning.

Positionality

In creating a professional development seminar designed largely for adult teachers in an Asian context, it is important to recognize the influence my own background and assumptions might have on the project's content and design. In thinking about my own personal experiences with peer interaction as a student myself, I recognize that I was born with certain privileges that led to a great comfort with speaking up in the classroom and making my voice heard. I am a cis white male who grew up and went to school in the United States where that identity is privileged, and such an identity no doubt made it easier for me to feel confident in the classroom. If I was ever put in pairs or group work, my social identity and personality made it unlikely that others would dominate the interaction or make it uncomfortable for me. While I can intellectually understand that others may feel much more reserved about collaborating with peers for many reasons, my positive experiences interacting in classrooms and social privilege no doubt affect my outlook on peer interaction in general and contribute to my desire to encourage this kind of teaching in language classrooms everywhere.

Western pedagogical theories and practices nowadays also strongly veer toward communicative language teaching and extensive peer interaction while more traditional

lecture-style pedagogy is the norm in many places such as Vietnam where I am hoping to run the seminar in the future. The content of my seminar may clash with the participants' teaching methods and may threaten their self-identities as competent professionals, so it is incumbent upon me to approach the design of the seminar with great sensitivity and with the understanding that there may be other pedagogical assumptions and methods that are valid that I do not want to trample on as a foreign white "expert" in the developing world (as surely much unintended harm as been done throughout history in just such a way).

Content

The first phase of the opening session of the seminar has an objective of encouraging learner reflection on the nature of peer interaction in their classrooms. This will hopefully lead to participants sharing their personal experiences as well as collaborating to establish their own thoughts on what makes for high or low quality peer interaction. Prompts ask participants to reflect on and share both positive examples of peer interaction from their classroom as well as any challenges they have experienced in this area. Further discussion prompts ask participants to consider in what ways they would like to improve with their facilitation of peer interaction to establish clear motivation and rationale for the usefulness of the seminar. Discussions take a think-pair-share format where participants have a chance to think and write down their thoughts before sharing with a partner, leading to whole-group discussion.

The next phase's objective is to present the four patterns of interaction for student dyads as identified by Storch (2002): collaborative, expert-novice, dominant-dominant, and dominant-passive. The participants are first shown Storch's visual matrix based on

equality and mutuality with the terms being clearly defined, and the essential description of each pattern of interaction is presented. There is then a discussion prompt around the participants' experiences with observing these different styles in their classroom to make the concepts feel relevant to their lives and work. Based on Knowles's recommendation to engage adult learners in more task-based and experiential activities, participants are split up into pairs and assigned a specific kind of role play to create together. There are four role-play prompts for each of the styles of interaction with instructions on how they should act during a text-editing task (a kind of task where the pairs have a paragraph of text with a certain amount of errors contained in it that they need to identify and correct). The participants then have time to practice taking on their pattern of interaction with the task before being given a chance to present their skit to the whole group. After the role-plays are complete, the participants collaborate as a group to establish the positives and negatives of the different patterns of interaction. Finally, the participants are presented with the research consensus that has found that learning outcomes are best for students who take on collaborative or expert-novice patterns and not dominant-passive or dominant-dominant patterns. The findings about the reasons why learners take on certain patterns of interaction are also presented and discussed (including the importance of learner attitudes toward the learning process and how a certain style of interaction will affect their task performance). This section can conclude with group brainstorming about how teachers can encourage collaborative patterns of interaction and discourage non-collaborative ones.

The following session of the seminar explores grouping effects based on factors such as proficiency level of students, peer familiarity level, and linguistic background.

The participants are split up into three groups (ideally through the participants choosing which topic they want to discuss, though the groups should be roughly equal in size) and brainstorm ideas in their small groups about the advantages and disadvantages of different kinds of pairings. The group assigned to discuss proficiency level sees prompts about advantages/disadvantages of pairing students with the exact same proficiency level such as high-high, intermediate-intermediate, and low-low pairings versus mixed proficiency pairings. The peer familiarity group is assigned to discuss the advantages/disadvantages of pairing students who are completely unfamiliar versus somewhat familiar versus very familiar (such as best friends). The linguistic background group is prompted to discuss the advantages/disadvantages of pairing students who either share or do not share the same L1 (first language learned as a native speaker). The groups create a list of their pros and cons that each member later shares with members of the other two groups in a jigsaw-style discussion. This means that the first groups split up to form new groups of three, so each new group has at least one member who has discussed each of the topics. Finally, the class collaborates for a master list of advantages/disadvantages of each kind of pairing, which is concluded by a brief presentation on what the research has shown.

The next phase of the second seminar session focuses on how teachers can affect the quality of peer interaction based on the amount and type of scaffolding that can be provided to students before and during collaborative tasks. Two situations are modeled and experienced by the participants, with the first one being a pair task such as a text editing task where the instructions for the pairs are to complete the task as quickly as possible. In the next situation, new instructions are then provided to encourage

negotiation of meaning and collaboration so that the goal of the task is for the participants to practice using language to communicate back and forth and to ask questions, involve their partner equally, and make decisions together after hearing everyone's opinions. The pairs are given a new version of the task to complete after receiving the instructions concerning how to engage with their partners. Afterward, the whole group discusses the differences they experienced in the two conditions (performance-oriented versus learning-process-oriented) and evaluates the effectiveness of the scaffolding provided in the second condition. The discussion is then extended to allow for brainstorming of other kinds of scaffolding the teachers have used in the past or could imagine being effective.

The last session of the seminar explores how teachers might impact the quality of peer interaction through choice of task type. To experience different kinds of tasks as students would, the participants are put in pairs and asked to complete one task at a time before the group as a whole reflects on the kind of peer interaction that occurred during it. The participants will also rotate partners after every two tasks to get a sense of what partner rotation feels like for students. Tasks include reading a scripted conversation, completing a semi-structured conversation, a dictogloss text reconstruction, a one-way information gap activity, a two-way information-gap activity, and an open-ended discussion prompt. During reflections after each task, everyone can evaluate how each task affected the amount of negotiation of meaning and language-related episodes that occurred. At the end, the whole group discusses the pros and cons of the different types of tasks and the usefulness of task variety.

As a final step, the participants reflect on key takeaways for themselves personally from the seminar series and decide on action steps they wish to take for their own teaching regarding facilitating peer interaction with their own students.

Timeline

The capstone project will be developed over the course of Hamline University's Fall 2022 semester during GED 8490 between late August to early December 2022. I do not have an opportunity to immediately implement it but will seek out chances to do so when I eventually resume teaching English abroad (most likely in Vietnam once again). Whatever school I end up working at, I will propose running my seminar series with the language-teaching faculty and will pursue opportunities to do the same in other schools as well.

Summary

This chapter has presented an overview of my capstone project, which will take the form of a professional development seminar for English language teachers. It has provided a rationale for the format and teaching methods I decided upon based upon the andragogical model of Knowles et al. (2005). It explored my positionality and then outlined the setting and audience the seminar is targeted for and how I could plan to deliver it in the future. Lastly, the chapter detailed the content and activities that will make up the substance of the seminar as well as the timeline for completion of the capstone.

Chapter Four will reflect on the project as a whole and discuss its place within the language-teaching field and possible benefits and limitations. Future related research will

be proposed to expand on previous researchers' work in the area of peer interaction and fill in some of the remaining gaps in our expertise and command of best practices.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Research Question and Purpose

The research question I have explored throughout my capstone project capstone is the following: *How can teachers maximize the effectiveness of peer-to-peer interactions in an English Language classroom at the secondary or post-secondary level?* When I taught English at the university level in Vietnam, I relied primarily on pair activities to encourage every learner to get practice with speaking and listening in conversational formats. However, with no understanding of the research literature, I was left on my own to guess at how best to facilitate this peer interaction. I stuck mostly to the textbook's repetitive scripted or highly structured conversational tasks, and I left students to pair up themselves (always with the same best friend sitting next to them). By intuition and guess work I hope I stumbled my way through with providing some useful opportunities for my learners to grow and practice their English skills, but I know I could have been more effective in how I went about it if I had had more expertise. My goal with this project has been to discover what we know about best practices surrounding facilitating effective peer interaction, so when I return to the English language classroom I am better equipped to serve my learners' language goals as well as prepared to train other teachers through a professional development seminar series. The area of peer interaction in the classroom is an important one for language teachers to have some grasp of, so I hope this project can continue meaningfully to the English-teaching field.

Chapter Overview

The subsequent sections will begin with my major learnings through the project, including the most important takeaways from my literature review. Then I will discuss how I will share the project before exploring the broader implications with policy and curricular recommendations as well as possible benefits of the project to the English teaching profession. Next, I will enumerate some limitations of the project before discussing some future areas for further related research. Lastly, I will finish with a brief conclusion statement.

Major Learnings

My research for the capstone built on some of the ideas I was exposed to already throughout my MATESOL program, particularly in my English Teaching Practices course and my Learner Language and Second Language Acquisition course. In the former course, core pedagogical principles such as encouraging the negotiation of meaning through facilitated interactions among the learners were continually reinforced as key for a communicative language learning approach. In the latter class we explored the most prominent theories of second language acquisition, including the Interactionist and Sociocultural theories which give credence to the notion that interacting with others using the target language can aid learning it and possibly be essential to the L2 learning endeavor. My inspiration to pursue this topic further through this capstone project really stemmed from my introductions to those theories and ideas about peer interaction in these courses.

Now through my capstone process I have come to a greater understanding about what makes for effective peer interactions in the classroom and the variety of factors that

may affect the quality of interaction. Storch's work on patterns of interaction (2002) in particular has utterly reframed the way I will view peer interactions in my classroom. My primary goal going forward in the classroom will be facilitating as many collaborative peer interactions as possible and limiting the occurrence of dominant/dominant or dominant/passive interactions. Knowing what the collaborative patterns look like will hopefully make it so I can recognize when they are or are not happening so I know when to keep things the same or intentionally intervene to change the classroom dynamics. There are also some practices that I want to employ to encourage collaborative interactions, including spending time explicitly discussing with learners about the reasons and benefits for peer interaction and what productive collaborative interactions look and sound like. In this way I would hope to encourage learner attitudes that view quality peer interaction as an end to itself and something that can be extremely valuable in their journeys to learn an L2.

Another major takeaway for me has been discovering that there might not be a single set of best practices around how to pair students up into dyads for group work in the classroom. There are advantages and disadvantages for every kind of pairing, which leads me to believe that facilitating a regular rotation of classroom partners might offer students the chance to reap the benefits of different pairings while avoiding being caught long-term in an unproductive partnership.

Digging into the research literature on peer interaction in the language classroom led to my recognition of the utter importance of certain foundational pieces of research that created frameworks that almost all of the future researchers in this area would continue to use. The touchstone works that continued to get cited by almost every single

subsequent researcher include Storch's 2002 article establishing the four patterns of interaction as well as Swain and Lapkin's 1998 study that established *language-related episodes* as an important observable marker of quality peer interaction and the negotiation of meaning. It is intriguing to think about how this branch of study is so young and still emerging with some of the foundational works being published less than 25 years into the past. I also was able to see how a community of researchers from around the globe has been able to pursue similar studies and relate results that can be understood and compared due to the shared language of the field and through reference to these same touchstone works and studies. I now have ideas for how I could engage in my own action research in my future classrooms and possibly pursue publishing journal articles to continue to expand the number of studies in the area of peer interaction.

At the end of the capstone process now, I am more confident in my ability to engage with the research literature and produce a synthesis of the research previously conducted in a specific area. I had never produced a substantial literature review before longer than a few pages, so successfully completing this much longer one has removed my anxiety around completing such big projects and shown me that they can grow into a complete whole by building them slowly and steadily one brick at a time. It has also been inspiring to be part of a cohort and watch my peers' projects take shape alongside mine and be part of such a mutually supportive community of practitioners.

How I Will Share the Project

My capstone project is a series of three professional development seminars that will be available to access through Hamline University's digital archives. My ultimate goal is to be able to run the seminar series in the future when I am likely going to be in

Vietnam once again working in a university English-teaching context. I envision opportunities to use it especially in university contexts as a professional development offering (maybe as a Fulbright Specialist). Before I return to a foreign teaching context, I can also pursue opportunities to present findings from my project at more local TESOL conferences. In the immediate future, I will be able to present a summary of my project to the other members of my capstone class cohort.

Broader Implications

In terms of what I would recommend for education policy or curriculum adjustments based on my research, I would like to see curriculum standards in place regarding peer interaction for secondary or post-secondary English language courses. Not only could these standards encourage teachers to make peer interaction a necessary part of any English course, but they could also provide guidelines for what these peer interactions should look like based on the literature's definitions of collaborative interactions. Regarding textbook materials, I would wish that authors would include a greater variety of interaction tasks beyond the usual scripted or structured conversational ones that are so common in the various books my classes used in Vietnam. Textbook makers could also include exemplar videos that teachers could show to their classes to provide models for collaborative interactions.

Benefits to the Profession

My research findings and professional development product can hopefully be useful to the English-teaching field and practitioners in most language-teaching contexts. With the rise of the communicative language teaching approach, language teachers everywhere are becoming aware of the importance of peer interaction as an essential

learning tool, so it would behoove teachers to be aware of the theoretical and practical considerations that may affect the quality of peer interactions for all of their learners to make those moments in class as beneficial as possible. In contexts where facilitating conversational interactions in class is still not widely practiced on a regular basis, this project can hopefully be an encouragement for teachers and schools to move toward the direction of more communicative language teaching practices.

Limitations

One of the major limitations of my capstone research is that there were not many studies to draw generalized conclusions from in many of the specific areas I was seeking to learn about (such as the effects of peer familiarity, proficiency level, or linguistic background on peer partnerships, or the effects of different kinds of teacher scaffolding or individual task types). Many of the studies I drew from are quite recent, but this reflects how young this line of inquiry is and that there will hopefully be many more similar studies conducted in the coming years that can shed further light on best practices. I was hoping heading into the project that I might be able to learn about how other factors might affect peer interaction such as gender, cultural norms, or personality characteristics, but I was unable to find studies that analyzed these specific factors. My project has only looked at a few of the possible factors that may affect the quality of peer interaction, and even those factors have not even come close to being exhaustively researched in many varied teaching contexts.

Another limitation I perceive with the research on peer interaction is that the measures that researchers use to determine the quality of peer interactions are likely imperfect, since the true benefits of using language interactively might be difficult to

capture quantitatively or objectively. Instances of language-related episodes for instance show when there is an attempt at repairing some communication breakdown or lack of understanding, but their absence may not mean that the interlocutors are paying no attention to form or benefiting from their interaction in less noticeable ways. Seeing how learners transfer their peer interactions to post-assessment measures or task success might similarly not capture the full spectrum of benefits of peer interaction, which may be more subtle and gradual than can be accurately captured in such measures. Some studies also rely on self-reported survey questions and interview responses, which can only encapsulate learners' conscious attitudes that they wish to share—these seem valuable in their own right but will not be able to uncover the benefits of peer interaction that learners are not aware of that occur underneath the conscious level.

Future Research and Projects

Considering the number of factors that may affect the quality of peer interaction and how each teaching and learning context is unique, I feel that the door is wide open for much more research in this area. Findings from one context may not match findings of similar studies conducted in other contexts or even in the same context with a new group of students or slightly different circumstances. I think more studies that explore the effect on peer interaction of peer familiarity, proficiency level, linguistic background, task type, and different kinds of teacher scaffolding would provide a fuller and more reliable picture than the one we currently have of best practices in this area.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided concluding reflections on my capstone project. It first explored major learnings for me as a researcher, writer, and learner. It then discussed how

I will share the project, broader policy and curricular implications, benefits to the English teaching profession, limitations to the study, and finally areas for future related research. I began this capstone journey with the hopes of learning useful things for my future teaching practice, and indeed I feel much better equipped to once again lead an English language classroom. No longer will I simply rely on the limited textbook activities or my hopes that all the students in the class already know why and how we should engage in classroom interactions. I plan to take a much more active role in preparing my students for peer interaction so less will be left up to chance and more learners will be set up to collaborate fruitfully.

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