LANGUAGE CHOICE AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN LEARNERS’ SOCIAL NETWORKS
A CASE STUDY OF AN AUSTRALIAN LEARNER OF JAPANESE

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This paper examines the patterns of language choice and the construction of L2 learning opportunities in foreign language learners’ social networks by focusing on how these patterns and opportunities are socially structured in a Japanese language learner’s natural interactions. It is based on a range of data, including a script of on-line chat occurring in natural environments as well interview data. Drawing on Cummins’ (1996) concept of interpersonal space, the findings indicate that there were a number of social and contextual factors that seemed to affect the learner’s language choice and L2 learning opportunities in complex ways. Most of these factors appeared to be related to the learner’s and/or his network interactants’ identity as an adequate L2 user and their perception of each other’s L2 proficiency and/or role. This paper provides insights into how to create environments that promote the learners’ opportunities for L2 use and learning.

INTRODUCTION

An increasing number of researchers have argued that an awareness of contextual and social dimensions of language learning should be enhanced in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) (van Lier 1996; Firth and Wagner 1997; Tarone 1997; Norton 2000; Tarone 2000; Yanagimachi 2003). One of the major social dimensions that are related to second language (L2) learning is the relationships between learners and their interactants (Goodnow 1993; van Lier 1998; Storch 2002). As van Lier (1998) asserts, a person’s relations with fellow-persons form the most important part of his/her language awareness, which, in turn, is likely to increase L2 learning opportunities because the person is a social being. Among these relationships, informal social relations contracted by an individual are called social networks (Milroy 1987).
Milroy (1987) maintains that the concept of social networks is a valuable tool for sociolinguistic research. This is because it allows us to analyse the manner in which individuals utilise the resources of linguistic diversity available to them. However, L2 learning in learners’ social network contexts has received little empirical attention to date, compared to network research in other sociolinguistic topics (Preston 1989; de Bot and Stoessel 2002). In particular, very little research has examined learners’ actual interactive discourse in the natural context of their social networks. Tarone (1997) highlights the necessity to study L2 learning processes in natural settings for everyday communication, if generalisations about SLA are to apply to how people learn an L2 in natural settings. This paper takes up Tarone’s suggestion by examining the case of an L2 learner (male) with a focus on his natural interaction with his social network interactants. In exploring the processes of his language choice and the construction of opportunities for L2 learning in his actual interaction, this paper will provide insights into how learners create environments that promote their opportunities for L2 use and learning.

Specifically, this paper addresses two questions:

1. What opportunities for L2 use and L2 learning occur in a Japanese language learner’s social interactions?
2. What are some of the social and contextual factors which affect his language choice and the construction of such learning opportunities?

**REVIEW OF THE RELEVANT LITERATURE**

Most of the studies dealing with L2 learning in learners’ social networks have been carried out in in-country settings, such as in host countries of immigrants or sojourners (e.g., Smith 2002; Wiklund 2002). With respect to Japanese language learning situations, the concept of network was first employed by Haruhara (1992). His study, which investigated ‘networking strategy’, has provoked interest in this concept (Neustupný 1997). In his study, Haruhara stressed the importance for learners to consider their daily life situations as learning. Subsequent to Haruhara’s study, the Network Research Committee of the Japanese Language Education Society carried out research into learners’ Japanese language acquisition from a network perspective (Nihongo Kyooiku Gakkai Nettowaaku Choosa Kenkyuu Iinkai 1997). The committee’s research consisted of several case studies, mainly focusing on the effect of learners’ networks on Japanese language acquisition. The results of this research revealed some important factors that facilitated their informants’ Japanese learning, including these informants’ active participation in networks where they can...
engage in a variety of activities and can develop mutual and close relationships with
native speakers (NSs).

On the other hand, there has been little empirical research conducted in learners’
home-country settings. A significant study related to these settings, but not directly
concerned with the social contexts that affect learners’ L1/L2 use, was carried out by
Ogawa (1998). Ogawa found that through interaction with Japanese NSs in Australia,
the learners in her study seemed to expand their sociocultural knowledge about Japan
as well as their linguistic knowledge. She called for more research into the relation between
interaction with Japanese residents in the learners’ home country, and the development
of learners’ Japanese competence. Her suggestion has been taken up in part by my previous
research (Kurata 2002; Kurata 2004a; Kurata 2004b). In my examination of the social
networks of upper-intermediate level Japanese language learners studying at an Australian
university, I found that close relationships and collaborative interaction between the
learners and their network interactants, together with the mutual motivation for their
relationships, were important factors in facilitating opportunities for L2 learning.

Although the above literature has provided insights into the link between learners’
networks and language learning, it tells us little about the processes of constructing op-
portunities for L2 use and learning in the learners’ natural interaction within their social
networks. Smith (2002) and Wiklund (2002), for instance, investigated this link. However,
the type of data that they relied on, namely elicited written and spoken texts, is arguably
different from their informants’ everyday interaction within their social networks. As
Tarone (1997) suggested, the way NSs and learners behave in a formal, task-oriented
context cannot be assumed to be the way they behave in the real world. Moreover, it
appears that research on language learners’ networks in home-country settings is highly
underdeveloped. The current study, therefore, will examine the social factors that affect
the construction of L2 learning opportunities as well as the language choice in a learner’s
natural interactions with his social network interactants in his home country.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to analyse the factors that influence a learner’s L2 learning opportunities as well
as the learner’s language selection, I utilise the concept of interpersonal space proposed
by Cummins (1996; 2000a; 2000b). Cummins explains that this space is established
between any individuals involved in a communicative relationship and is constantly
shaped by one’s interactions. He suggests that within this space the dual processes of
reciprocal negotiation of identity and collaborative generation of knowledge take place,
and these processes are viewed as being closely related to each other. Cummins (1996) furthermore explains that the concept of interpersonal space overlaps with Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD is defined as the distance between children's developmental level as determined by their own problem solving, and the potential level as determined by their problem solving with the assistance of more capable adults or peers. The concept of interpersonal space, therefore, extends the notion of the ZPD beyond the cognitive sphere into the realms of affective development and power relationships.

With respect to the concept of identities, Cummins pointed out that identities are not static or fixed but are constantly being shaped through experiences and interactions, and that there are multiple facets to identities (Cummins 1996; 2000a; 2000b). He divides identities into two types: one type that is difficult or impossible to change, such as gender and ethnicity, and the other type that may be more malleable or subject to modification as a result of experiences. The latter type includes sense of self-worth in relation to intelligence, academic achievements and talents. By contrasting two sets of school-community interactions, Cummins (1996) maintained that teacher-student collaboration in the construction of knowledge will occur effectively only when students’ identities are affirmed in their interpersonal space, and that this space can also be a 'constriction zone' where students’ identities and learning are constrained rather than developed.

Since the current study is concerned with the factors affecting L2 use and learning in a learner’s social network contexts, the concept of interpersonal space that connects collaborative learning and social relations between learners and their interactants provides a useful framework. As mentioned earlier, the informant in this study is a learner of Japanese as a foreign language in his home country. Moreover, the majority of his network interactants are those in the same or similar social position and age bracket. In this paper, therefore, it seems appropriate to focus on the identities of the informant and his network interactants in relation to their L2 proficiency rather than other types of identities including social identities. In addition, to distinguish different types of interpersonal space, the term ‘positive interpersonal space’ is used to denote space where learners’ identities are affirmed and collaborative generation of knowledge occurs; the term ‘negative interpersonal space’ is used to denote the constriction zone where learners’ identities and learning are constrained rather than developed.
METHODOLOGY

INFORMANT

This study considers the experiences of a first-year undergraduate student, Jim (a pseudonym), who was enrolled in an intermediate course of Japanese, that is, the third-year course, at an Australian university. I selected a first-year student in order to investigate the features of his social network that he established in the first year of his university life as well as those of his L1/L2 use in this network. The intermediate level was chosen because it might be reasonably expected that students at this level, in comparison with less advanced students, would be more likely to pursue informal out-of-class contacts.

Jim is Australian by birth and his home language is English. He was 18 years old at the time of the study. The approximate length of his formal Japanese study was 10 years, including five years at primary and four years at secondary levels. During his secondary schooling, he stayed in Japan for two weeks when he joined a school exchange trip. In addition, his family occasionally hosted Japanese international students who studied at a high school near his home.

PROCEDURE

This study employed an ‘interaction interview’ format as a main method. This format was proposed by Neustupný and it avoids general questions about what informants usually do and concentrates on specific questions to find out what actually happened in a particular situation, usually within a set period of time (Neustupný 1994, 19). Such a style of questioning can reveal actual human behaviour more accurately than general questions. Utilising this format, I conducted one-hour interviews with Jim five times over a period of nine months (two university semesters in 2004) to closely examine in what ways his language use changed as well as what social factors he perceived had affected this language use.

Two samples of Jim’s natural interaction were collected for the micro-analysis of the processes of his language selection as well as those of constructing L2 learning opportunities. These include an on-line chat script. Subsequent to the collection of the samples, further follow-up interviews were conducted to obtain more qualitative data in relation to these processes.
FINDINGS

JIM’S SOCIAL NETWORKS

Jim’s social networks in which he was exposed to Japanese included non-Japanese interactants as well as NSs of Japanese. Employing Nishimura’s (1992) categories of three varieties of bilingual speech, Jim’s language use within these networks was categorised into three types: ‘the basically Japanese variety’, ‘the basically English variety’ and ‘the mixed variety’. The rest of this paper will explore the social and contextual factors which appear to have influenced Jim’s language use patterns and the construction of L2 learning opportunities through close examination of his interactions with two of his social network members, Tom and Aya. These two members were selected because of their relatively high frequency of interactions with Jim.

INTERACTION WITH TOM

Jim became acquainted with Tom in his Japanese class, and they worked together in pair work in the first semester in 2004. Tom had a Chinese background with some knowledge of kanji. He had emigrated from Hong Kong and had studied in Australia since high school, which included formal Japanese study. However, he discontinued studying Japanese in class after the first semester at university, but wished to continue to use Japanese. The interaction between Jim and Tom was mainly through on-line chat. This was because they did not meet in class after May. They had a short chat two or three times a week and a longer chat once every two to three weeks. Their language use patterns were either ‘the basically Japanese variety’ or ‘the basically English variety’. The discussion below is focused on four excerpts (Examples 1, 2, 3 and 4) which are from a single on-line chat session between Jim and Tom.

Example 1 is the beginning part of their on-line chat session. English translations are in double brackets and my explanations are in single brackets. In line 1, Tom started in English but switched to Japanese in the following line. On the other hand, Jim continued to type in English until line 19 but after that point the basically Japanese variety was used by both Jim and Tom until the end of this chat. Based on this script, I conducted a follow-up interview with Jim and asked him to recall what he was thinking and what he noticed in terms of language use when he engaged in this chat. In the interview, Jim claimed that he was not sure whether Tom wished to use Japanese at the beginning. It seems that they negotiated language choice each time they started on-line chats. Jim reported that Tom occasionally had said in previous on-line chats, ‘I can’t be bothered’ to use Japanese. Thus in Example 1 Jim refrained from writing in Japanese until line 19:
EXAMPLE 1
1  Tom  hmm.. how was (a subject name)?
2  Tom  いい？
       ((Good??))
3  Tom  つまらない？
       ((Boring??))
4  Jim  lol, we haven't really done anything yet but it is already a little different
5  Tom  ほんとう？
       ((Really??))

(Omission of lines 6 to 16, including nine English lines written by both speakers and two Japanese lines by Tom)

17  Tom  でも、
     ((But...))
18  Tom  hahaha
19  Jim  まじめに日本語を勉強するのが、難しい
       ((It’s difficult to study Japanese seriously.))
20  Tom  ははあ。そうそう
       ((ha ha. That’s right.))
21  Tom  そして、ぜんぜん勉強しない
       ((And I don’t study it at all.)
22  Tom  ははっはあ
       ((ha ha ha.))
23  Tom  でも、会話したい
       ((But I want to have a conversation in it.))
24  Tom  へへ  (giggle)
25  Jim  lolです
       ((That is lol.))
26  Tom  貴方は僕の会話 BUDDY
       ((You are my conversation buddy.))

It seemed that in this initial part of the chat, negotiation of language choice occurred implicitly. The analysis of Jim’s interview data as well as close examination of their chat script reveals that this negotiation is related to several social and contextual factors. One of the most influential social factors seems to be Jim’s awareness / sensitivity to Tom’s identity in relation to his L2 proficiency. As mentioned earlier, Tom studied Japanese in semester one but decided not to take the Japanese language subject in semester two. Jim
explained that the reason for this decision was that Tom was so used to high marks and that he was dissatisfied with his lower mark in semester one. However, as shown in lines 23 and 26, Tom indicated that he was keen to have a conversation in Japanese and Jim was his ‘会話 ((conversation)) buddy’. This suggests some ambivalence about learning Japanese as well as his precarious identity as an adequate L2 user. As previously stated Cummins (1996) pointed out that identities are not fixed or static but are constantly being shaped through experiences and interactions. The mark Tom received, which was lower than he expected, seemed to devalue his identity as an adequate user of Japanese to some extent. Nevertheless, he was probably attempting to reconstruct this identity by being exposed to Japanese in ways other than through formal Japanese studies.

Jim appeared to be aware of Tom’s ambivalence about using L2 and to be sensitive about whether Tom wished to use Japanese or not when they started the above on-line chat. As shown in Example 2, Jim also seemed to be aware of Tom’s precarious identity as an adequate L2 user:

EXAMPLE 2
1  Tom  そしてから，  U get HD
   ((And then)) U get HD
2  Tom  lol
3  Tom  i get D
4  Tom  hahaha...
5  Jim  それがいいよ
   ((That is good.))
6  Jim  Dがいいんだ
   ((D is good.))
7  Tom  hahaha...
8  Jim  半分の時間がかかる
   ((It took half of the time)) (What Jim meant here was Tom had studied Japanese only half as long as Jim.)

Here, Tom mentioned that Jim received the highest grade (HD) in semester one and Tom received the second highest mark (D). Jim then said that the second highest mark was good and emphasized the fact that Jim had studied Japanese twice as long as Tom. In addition, Jim encouraged Tom with praise of his knowledge of *kanji* in two different parts of this chat script, such as ‘漢字がよく知ってる’ ((You know *kanji* well)). In this way, Jim appeared to understand Tom’s precarious identity as an adequate user of Ja-
panese and to attempt to affirm or strengthen it in this interaction. Therefore, the language choice in their chat was structured by, amongst other things, Jim’s awareness / sensitivity to Tom’s identity in relation to his perceived L2 proficiency.

There appear to be other social and contextual factors that seemed to affect Jim and Jack’s language choice in their chat. They include the history of their linguistic interaction, types of channel / use of new technology, time for other commitments and fatigue. However, due to the limitations of the space in this paper, these factors will be explored elsewhere as part of the larger research project of which this paper is a part.

Two more excerpts below indicate the opportunities for L2 learning for Jim and Tom. In Example 3, they were talking about Tom’s plan for the evening. In line 8, Tom said he was having Chinese food, which was written in kanji. In the follow-up interview, Jim recalled that he did not know what ‘喜’ (gaiety) was in line 8 when he read this line during their chat. (This character is the second character of the compound ‘中華’, which means Chinese.) This caused him to have difficulty understanding the lexical item, ‘中華料理’ (Chinese food). Tom, on the other hand, made this item in line 8 more comprehensible for Jim in line 12, by rephrasing it as ‘中国料理’ (China food):

**EXAMPLE 3**

<p>| | |</p>
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| 1 | Jim 今日の晩に何する予定？  
((What are you going to do this evening?)) |
| 2 | Tom 家族といっしょに晩ご飯食べに行く 
((I’ll go for dinner with my family.)) |
| 3 | Jim 楽しみ？  
((Are you looking forward to it?)) |
| 4 | Tom hehe.. (giggle) |
| 5 | Tom haihai  
((Yes, yes)) |
| 6 | Jim ストランで食べる？  
((Are you eating at a restaurant?)) |
| 7 | Tom はいかい  
((Yes, yes)) |
| 8 | Tom 中華料理  
((Chinese food)) |
| 9 | Jim マックで？  
((At McDonalds?)) |
Jim claimed that he understood the word in line 12 during their chat. He also said that Tom changed from ‘中華料理’ to ‘中国料理’ because Tom knew that Jim would understand the latter. Since they had studied together in the same class for one semester, it is probable that they had paid attention to each other’s L2 proficiency level, and Tom may have noticed that Jim could not recognize ‘華’. Tom then provided Jim with the appropriate assistance, ‘中国料理’ ((China food)), which enabled Jim to comprehend ‘中華料理’ ((Chinese food)). Tom thus helped Jim perform slightly above his current level of L2 vocabulary without switching to English.

Example 4 includes Jim’s corrective feedback. Tom confused the word ‘質問’ ((question)) with ‘問題’ ((problem)) in this excerpt. Jim switched to English in line 4 to clarify Tom’s utterance in line 1. Jim then noticed Tom’s confusion and corrected Tom’s utterance in line 7:

**EXAMPLE 4**

1. Tom 貴方の問題わからない
   (I don’t understand your problem))
2. Jim 僕の問題？
   (My problem?))
3. Tom はい
   (Yes))
4. Jim my prob?
5. Tom NONO
6. Tom question
7. Jim 質問だよ
   (‘You should have said 質問 (question) ’))
8. Tom はは。。。ごめん
   (Ha ha,,, sorry))
9. Tom too used to chinese
Jim’s utterances after his correction can be seen as an attempt to affirm Tom’s identity as an adequate user of Japanese. Jim said, ‘That’s OK’ and ‘Don’t worry about it’ in Japanese in lines 10 and 12 respectively. In addition, he wrote with humour, ‘Nobody is perfect although I am close to it’ in Japanese several lines later. Since giving corrective feedback may become face-threatening behaviour, these utterances of Jim’s can be considered as mitigation of his corrective feedback. It is clear that in the above example Jim’s correction of Tom’s utterances stimulated Tom to notice his lexical error without intimidating him.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF POSITIVE INTERPERSONAL SPACE

As explained above, the ZPD is referred to as the interactional space within which a learner is enabled to perform above his/her own current level of competence with the assistance of another. Drawing upon this concept, Jim and Tom appear to have assisted each other via collaborative interaction, that is, to do what they could not have done without each other’s appropriate help. In other words, they collaboratively constructed opportunities for each other to perform in a way that allows for proximal development. I argue that this type of collaborative interaction may promote L2 learning by allowing them to participate in producing and comprehending utterances that are slightly beyond their current level of L2 proficiency.

As previously stated, the notion of ZPD can be extended beyond the cognitive sphere, as suggested by Cummins (1996; 2000a; 2000b). This idea is related to his concept of the interpersonal space. Within this space, Cummins suggests that the dual processes of reciprocal negotiation of identity and collaborative generation of knowledge take place and these processes are closely related each other. To reiterate, this concept helps me consider what social factors are related to the construction of the opportunities to use and learn L2 that I discussed above. Cummins (1996) asserted that unless students’ sense of self-worth is affirmed or extended in the interpersonal space between them and their educators, collaborative construction of knowledge will not occur effectively. In the online interaction between Jim and Tom, I found several instances in which they appeared...
to affirm each other's identity as an adequate L2 user. As shown in Examples 1, 2 and 4, Jim seemed to understand the vulnerability of Tom's identity as an adequate L2 user and attempted to affirm it by his careful selection of language and mitigation of his corrective feedback. In another section that I did not quote, Tom similarly made a positive comment about Jim's Japanese proficiency after Jim asked the meaning of an unfamiliar kanji that Tom produced. I wish to argue that this mutual affirming of each other's identity as an adequate user of Japanese positively contributes to the construction of opportunities of L2 use and learning, that is, the construction of positive interpersonal space. Without this affirmation, as Cummins (1996) found, learners tend to be convinced that to invest effort and time in learning is futile and they may resist further devaluation of their identities by withdrawing from participation in interactions in learning contexts.

I have also found other factors that seem to have an impact on the construction of positive interpersonal space. As discussed earlier, sensitivity to each other's ambivalence about using L2, that is, being aware of when the interlocutor is comfortable or uncomfortable in using L2 is one of the most likely influential factors. Paying attention to each other's L2 proficiency is also a probable determinant of interactants' performance in the ZPD. In addition, it seems important for the construction of positive interpersonal space that the dyad considers each other as friends who are learning L2 together. All these factors, including affirming each other's identity, seem to interact with each other.

INTERACTION WITH AYA

Another example, Jim's interaction with Aya, will be highlighted next as a contrast to the previous example. Aya was a Japanese undergraduate student who Jim met through his volunteer work at the ‘Manga Library’ where students borrow Japanese comic books at his university. She was intending to become a teacher of Japanese and had been residing in English-speaking countries, such as the USA and Australia, for many years. In his interview, Jim perceived that she was proficient both in English and Japanese. Jim and Aya's language use patterns were 'the basically English variety' and 'the mixed variety'. After a series of interaction interviews with him over nine months, I found that their language use had changed over time. In his interviews in March when he had just met Aya, he claimed to have used 'the mixed variety' when interacting with her. In the following interview in June, however, he described their most recent language use as 'mainly English' and then continued:
When I try to speak Japanese, she always corrects me because she is training to be a Japanese teacher, so it’s a bit annoying.

You mean she corrects your Japanese?

Yeah, in detail, like ‘the intonation is wrong in this part’.

Here, it is clear that Jim was not comfortable speaking Japanese to Aya at the stage of this interview. It can be considered that this is due to his perception of her over-use of correction of Jim’s Japanese and this over-correction appeared to affect Jim’s language selection.

A particular situation in which Jim’s language choice was determined by Aya’s correction of his Japanese production was when he had an interview with Aya in Japanese for his Japanese project. Jim remembered that in this situation before he started asking her the questions that he had written down in advance, she corrected them with her red pen. This correction was her voluntary behaviour because he did not ask her to do so. Her feedback indicated that there were numerous mistakes and the questions mostly lacked naturalness. Jim claimed to have simply read the corrected questions and rarely asked follow-up questions. Jim, in the interview with me, described his feelings in this situation as ‘I couldn’t sit there and look at her’; ‘To be honest, I felt my Japanese should have been better, I was a bit embarrassed that it wasn’t as good’. After this interaction, Jim socialised with Aya on several occasions. However, he reported that he did not try to use Japanese in these occasions and he added, ‘I shouldn’t try to do so’. Moreover, although Aya asked Jim to edit her essays written in English and Jim provided her with language support, Jim never asked her for Japanese language assistance after the interview for his project.

THE FORMATION OF NEGATIVE INTERPERSONAL SPACE

It seemed that the interactions between Jim and Aya that were described above shaped a negative interpersonal space. In this space, their negotiation of identity in relation to L2 proficiency, negotiation of language selection and collaborative learning hardly occurred. With respect to the interview situation between them, Jim appeared to feel that Aya played the role of a language teacher, and, in turn, positioned Jim as an inadequate user of Japanese. He then seemed to resist this position by deciding not to speak Japanese to her any more. It is probable that Aya corrected Jim’s interview questions with good
intentions to help him learn Japanese. However, he became so embarrassed by her corrective behaviour that he simply read the corrected questions. In such an uncomfortable situation, Jim was probably unable to perform in a way that allowed for proximal development. Unlike the previous case of interaction between Jim and Tom, Jim’s identity in relation to his L2 proficiency did not appear to be affirmed or extended, but devalued to some extent. This seemed to lead him to resist further devaluation of his identity by choosing not to use Japanese with Aya.

Aya’s over-correction of Jim’s L2 production was not the only factor that seemed to contribute to the formation of negative interpersonal space between Jim and Aya. It is highly probable that Jim’s perception of the difference in L2 proficiency between his Japanese level and that of Aya’s English also affected it. As mentioned earlier, Jim claimed that Aya was a bilingual, fluent in both English and Japanese. In an interview, Jim compared his language use with Aya to that with Emi, who was an international undergraduate student who had studied in Australia for only a few months. The language use patterns between Jim and Emi were the same as those between Jim and Aya, namely, ‘the mixed variety’ and ‘the basically English variety’. However, Jim reported that unlike Aya, Emi was practising her English as her L2 just as he was practising his Japanese; he, therefore, felt more relaxed and comfortable in using Japanese with Emi than with Aya. To reiterate, Jim’s perception that his Japanese proficiency was considerably lower than Aya’s English proficiency seemed to result in his sense of inferiority, and he thus appeared to become inhibited and disinclined to use Japanese to her.

In addition, unlike the previous example between Jim and Tom, there was little evidence that Aya attempted to mitigate the negative impact of her corrective feedback. This was partly because Aya was probably insensitive to Jim’s ambivalence about using Japanese, that is, unaware of the circumstances in which Jim was comfortable or uncomfortable using Japanese. These factors seemed to inhibit Jim’s opportunities to use the L2 and are thus related to the formation of negative interpersonal space.

**CONCLUDING DISCUSSION**

Close examination of the natural interactions between Jim and two of his network interactants has revealed the complexities involved in the processes of their language choice and the construction of L2 learning opportunities. The findings reported in this paper demonstrate that there were a number of social and contextual factors that seemed to affect these processes in complex ways, and most of these factors were related to Jim’s and/or his network interactants’ identity as an adequate L2 user and their perception of
each other’s L2 proficiency and/or role. Furthermore, the above two contrasting cases suggest that co-construction of L2 use and L2 learning opportunities seemed to occur when Jim and Tom affirmed each other’s identity as an adequate L2 user, and that it did not occur when Jim’s identity was devalued even though Aya is a NS of Japanese who appeared to intend to assist him in his Japanese study.

The concept of interpersonal space, proposed by Cummins (1996), has helped me explore the dual interrelated processes of reciprocal negotiation of identity and collaborative learning that occurred or did not occur in Jim’s positive and negative interpersonal space respectively. Although this concept is based on Cummins’ (1996) examination of the interactions between minority students in subordinated communities and educators in dominant group institutions in North America, the current study indicates that the concept is applicable to foreign language learning settings.

As previously stated, the majority of the studies investigating L2 learning in learners’ social networks have been conducted in in-country settings. An increasing number of these studies have investigated the social factors affecting L2 learning of immigrant adults or students, that is, L2 learners or users in their host countries (Norton Peirce 1995; McKay and Wong 1996; Angelil-Carter 1997; Miller 2000; Norton 2000; Duff 2002a; Duff 2002b; Miller 2004). They have mainly focused on the learners’ identities, such as those based on social, ethnic, cultural, gender and class variables, and suggested that these identities are closely related to the development of the learners’ linguistic competence or ability to claim a voice in an L2. Since the informant in the current study is an Australian learner of Japanese in his home-country, I found that his identity in relation to his L2 proficiency, rather than cultural or social identity, seemed to be one of the most influential factors affecting his language choice and L2 learning opportunities. This identity seemed to be constructed on the basis of the interactions between Jim and his network interactants. It was dynamic in the sense that it varied according to his perception of his interactants’ roles and that of the difference in L2 proficiency between him and his interactants, and sensitivity to each other’s ambivalence about using L2. It may also have changed according to the types of channels, such as face-to-face or electronic interactions (see Freiermuth and Jarrell 2006). However, the construction of positive interpersonal space between Jim and Emi in face-to-face contexts indicates that face-to-face situations do not automatically lead to a negative interpersonal space. Therefore, Jim’s perception of his network interactants’ identity and relative L2 proficiency as well as sensitivity to each other’s ambivalence about using L2 seemed to be the most important factors that affected the creation of positive interpersonal space.
Jim’s case has provided useful insights into the construction of opportunities to use and learn L2 in a learner’s social networks. It highlights the necessity for learners and language teachers to be aware of the complex processes of the construction of these opportunities, and of the social factors that may determine them. In addition, as van Lier (1998, 142) suggested, by considering the element of learners’ self-consciousness, which enables the construction of identity, in their natural interaction, language teachers can learn from the successful pedagogical moments in students’ everyday lives, and possibly create analogous moments in classrooms. The analysis of Jim’s natural interactions, therefore, suggests that it is very important for language teachers to increase their awareness about their students’ identity as an adequate L2 user, an identity that is constantly being structured through interactions, and to affirm their identity when teachers interact with them. Moreover, paying attention to the students’ perceptions of their own L2 proficiency as well as the proficiency of their peer(s) when they work in pairs or groups is likely to be beneficial for the construction of improved L2 learning opportunities.

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