

○ REHEARSING, CONVERSING, WORKING IT OUT

SECOND LANGUAGE USE IN PEER INTERACTION

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This paper reports on a study of peer interaction in ten foreign language (FL) classes, six secondary and four primary, over a period of four months. The focus of this paper is the nature of peer interaction, including the purposes of second language use, and language choice. The data, comprising observation, audio and video recordings of five lessons from each of the classes, and interviews with learners, indicates multiple uses peers make of their time together, and different potential outcomes for learning. The findings suggest second language use varies in purpose and includes both formulaic pattern practice and communication of new information or ideas, and at the same time creates a context for the co-construction of language and a grappling with form-meaning connections in the target language. By exploring peer interaction as a context for second language use and development, this research brings together different perspectives on interaction and second language acquisition and builds on recent calls for a greater awareness of the interdependence of social and cognitive factors in the process of language learning.

INTRODUCTION

The nature and outcomes of peer interaction have received increasing attention in second language learning research in recent years. This body of research draws on both cognitive and sociocultural theoretical orientations, employs a wide range of methodologies, reflects a number of quite different learning contexts and involves child, adolescent and adult learners. However, despite this broad scope, knowledge and understanding of this area remain limited, and some groups of learners and contexts are not well represented in the research to date. Learners in ‘conventional’¹ school LOTE (Languages Other Than English) classes, indeed, FL learners in school contexts in general, are cases in point.

In this paper we seek to address this gap by drawing on data from a descriptive, longitudinal study that investigated the nature and pattern of interaction in ten LOTE classes in Western Australia (Tognini, 2008). We employ perspectives from both cognitive and sociocultural orientations in order to explore peer interaction – its purposes, features and contexts of use, and learners’ perceptions about interacting with one another, and their choices in using English or the target language (French or Italian). In doing so we seek to provide a picture of the nature of peer interaction in LOTE school classrooms, and the benefits and limitations inherent in first language (L1) and additional language (L2) use in this context. We then discuss the study’s implications for pedagogy and future research. The theoretical eclecticism of the research enables us to demonstrate how the use of both social and cognitive perspectives on research can provide complementary pictures of the benefits and limitations of peer interaction. As Batstone (2010, p. 5) notes, ‘neither language use nor language learning can be adequately defined or understood without recognising that they have both a social and a cognitive dimension, because both dimensions are an intrinsic part both of language use, and of the processes of language learning’.

OVERVIEW OF PEER INTERACTION RESEARCH

In a review of research on interaction in foreign language instructional contexts, Philp and Tognini (2009) suggest that peer interaction differs in purposes and outcomes to teacher-led interaction, recognising that L2 use may differ for each. They identify three distinct purposes of peer interaction: ‘(1) interaction as practice, including the use of formulaic language; (2) interaction that concentrates on the exchange of information; and (3) collaborative dialogue including attention to form’ (p. 254). We briefly review the literature on these three areas, but limit our focus to research on peer interaction,

rather than adult-child interaction, and specifically, among primary and high school learners, that is 10–12 year olds and 14–15 year olds, in foreign language contexts where students typically share a common L1 and have limited exposure to and use of the target language.

INTERACTION AS PRACTICE

Research on interaction as practice tends to focus on the use of formulaic and scripted language among beginner learners. A number of studies of secondary classes report learners' use of memorised chunks for talking about topics such as 'family', 'hobbies' and 'likes and dislikes' (e.g. Mitchell and Martin, 1997). Such formulaic use may contribute to learning in a number of ways. Firstly, researchers argue that formulaic language provides learners with a database of examples, which may be internalised, broken down and eventually used creatively (N. Ellis, 2007; Myles, Hooper and Mitchell, 1998; Myles, Mitchell and Hooper, 1999; Wray, 2002). Secondly, repeated language use provides contextualised practice of language forms. DeKeyser (1998) emphasises the importance of such contextualised language practice, chiefly as a means of proceduralising knowledge; fluency develops as language knowledge becomes more automatised, that is, as speed and accuracy increases and use of language knowledge becomes spontaneous and effortless. Thirdly, use of the L2 can serve important social functions in some contexts, as seen in research among peers in mainstream classrooms. Research on formulaic use by L2 learners in mainstream kindergarten and primary schools suggests that the appropriation of the language of peers plays important social functions, including social acceptance (Cekaite, 2008; Day, 2002; Perera, 2001; Philp and Duchesne, 2008; Willett, 1995; Wong-Fillmore, 1976) and as such reflects the power of language. That is, by using expressions that their peers use, albeit as formulaic chunks, children can be 'not only linguistically but also socially, connected to the community in which the language is used' (Perera, 2001, p. 11). In LOTE classrooms where the L1 is the dominant language, the social value of L2 use to students may operate quite differently (whether positive or negative). While important, this aspect of L2 use is beyond the scope of this paper.

INTERACTION AS EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION AND IDEAS

Research on interaction involving the exchange of information and ideas suggests benefits relating to other aspects of the language learning process: Specifically, using the L2 to converse may force the participants to engage with both form and meaning. As Gass (2003) notes, communicative pressure is an important catalyst for second language development. The pressure to understand one another may lead to linguistic and interac-

tional modifications, this in turn provides opportunities to notice problems and attend to the features of the target language; lexical, phonological, morphosyntactic and/or pragmatic. In addition to work among adult learners (see Mackey and Goo, 2007), experimental research among primary school children learning English as their second language, suggests such interaction contributes to L2 learning because of these opportunities for the learners to make sense of novel input and receive feedback on their production, for example through clarification requests and recasts (Oliver, 1998, 2000, 2002; Oliver, Philp, and Mackey, 2008; Silver, 2000). This research places an emphasis on the contribution of specific interactional moves, such as recasts and clarification requests, to attention to form, and the individual's interlanguage production and subsequent development. Firth and Wagner (1997), characterise this approach as being problem oriented (see introduction to this issue), however it is akin to work on child cognition (for a review, see Chapman and McBride, 1992), who recognise cognitive conflict between peers, or the challenge to children's existing understanding or representations, as the catalyst for development. In the following example, two young children discuss the characteristics of snakes. Through their discussion they pool knowledge and clarify their ideas, and their initial disagreement leads to greater clarity in their ideas.

M: Does the snake have ear?

C: No

M: Yeah they are little... I think no be... I think I think I thinks they
no they smell something ok let=

C: =Yeah them smell with them tongue

(Data from Oliver, Philp and Duchesne, 2009)

With respect to second language acquisition by young adolescents this is relevant both for cognitivist and sociocultural understandings of the benefits of interaction. In this case, conflict can occur through misunderstandings or problems in accuracy, and the challenge may be to existing interlanguage representations, rather than conceptual understandings.

INTERACTION AS COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

The collaborative nature of interaction is perhaps best recognised through a sociocultural framework. Research into this aspect of interaction focuses on the inherently social or co-created nature of interaction, and what learners can achieve in collaboration with the

interlocutor. Here, referring to Vygotsky's (1978) work, the discourse represents the learners' proximal development; it reflects what they may one day accomplish without the assistance of an interlocutor. In this sense, it is an exploration of language *use* as learning. The purpose is joint construction of a common meaning, where language use mediates language learning (Swain, 2000). In a conversation, learners may scaffold one another to enable communication: this is not one learner filling in for another, but rather the enabling of an idea between speakers. Similarly, a shared text co-written by a pair of learners reflects a collaborative dialogue, as learners reformulate, extend, or reduce one another's attempts at expressing a shared meaning. Studies of pairs of secondary foreign language learners suggest that this may encourage learners to formulate and test hypotheses about linguistic form. As learners pool their knowledge to jointly construct ideas in the L2, their hesitant, trial and error attempts are first steps in noticing and emergent use of a form, whether lexical or grammatical (Kowal and Swain, 1994; Kuiken and Vedder, 2002; Swain and Lapkin, 1998, 2002). Thus peer interaction can provide different types of learning opportunities in the way the L2 is used, and, potentially, complementary benefits for language learning. These benefits can only be understood when both social and cognitive aspects of interaction are taken into account (see Batstone, 2010, for further discussion).

USE OF L1 AND L2 IN THE CLASSROOM

Another feature of peer interaction in the LOTE classroom is language choice, the benefits and limitations of L1 use in the classroom being one dimension. L1 use has been viewed in different ways, based largely on the theoretical perspective of the research: on the one hand, dominant use of the L1 in class restricts critical exposure to L2 input (Tognini, 2008); on the other hand, L1 use can be a beneficial resource to learners for task management and as an aid to making sense of L2 grammar (Antón and DiCamilla, 1998; Platt and Brooks, 1994; Brooks, Donato and McGlone, 1997). It can scaffold L2 use where L2 proficiency is very low (Alegria and García Mayo, 2009; Liesbscher and Daily-O'Cain, 2005; Mori, 2004). Studies of immersion classes, (Blanco-Iglesias, Broner and Tarone, 1995; Swain and Lapkin, 2000; Tarone and Swain, 1995) have found that use of L1 remains a feature of peer interaction even after a number of years of study. For instance, Swain and Lapkin (2000) found that about 25% of turns between learners undertaking dictogloss and jigsaw tasks were in L1, this included task management and interpersonal purposes. Despite reservations, they concluded that L1 use appeared to have important cognitive and social functions that contributed to learning. The use of L1 helped learners to solve linguistic problems, mostly related to vocabulary, but also

to grammar. Research in other contexts needs to further investigate the use and role of L1.

The nature of L2 use between learners also has implications for learning. If L2 use during interaction with peers tends to be predominantly scripted and formulaic in nature, peer interaction is more likely to contribute to learning through proceduralising knowledge (e.g. DeKeyser, 2007). Meaningful L2 use may serve another kind of function: communication puts pressure on a learner to be more target-like in production. This can facilitate learning through highlighting problems, and drawing the learners' attention to form (e.g. Mackey, 2006). Additionally, L2 use during collaborative interaction, when meaning is jointly constructed among peers, may contribute to learning through challenging inter-language representations. Such joint construction by peers can extend learner production beyond what each might achieve individually (e.g. Swain and Lapkin, 2002). The potential benefits of L2 use among peers is not something determined solely by the learner, by the task, or by the relationship between those engaged in the interaction – these and other factors interdependently contribute to the effectiveness of peer interaction for learning.

In their review of research on peer interaction in foreign language contexts, Philp and Tognini (2009) suggest 'there is a need for a principled and balanced use of the two codes to ensure maximum benefit for learners (Cook, 2001; Macaro, 2001; Wells, 1999)' (p. 259) and call for further studies in this area. This is the focus of this study: it investigates the nature of L2 use in peer interaction in 10 secondary and primary LOTE classes in Western Australia. Interaction in the context of practice activities, communicative tasks and collaborative tasks is seen to have three overall purposes: practicing the production of L2 forms accurately; exchanging information and ideas; and co-constructing meaning in the L2. Of interest here is the nature of L2 use in the LOTE classroom – whether primarily formulaic, semi-scripted or learner-generated. Secondly, it concerns the extent to which learners choose to use the target language or their first language. Finally, the study investigates learners' perceptions of the purpose and usefulness of peer interaction.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A. FEATURES AND PURPOSES OF PEER INTERACTION

1. What are the main contexts of L1 and L2 use in peer interaction?
2. What is the nature and purpose of L1 and L2 use within these contexts?

B. LEARNER PERCEPTIONS OF PEER INTERACTION

1. What are learners' perceptions of peer interaction and of L2 use?

METHODOLOGY

Data for the study were collected from six secondary (Year 10) and four primary (Years 6 and 7) school LOTE classes in Western Australia over a period of four months. All 50 lessons were those normally prepared by the teacher for the unit of work being covered. Of these, approximately half were analysed for the purposes of this paper; some lessons were all teacher fronted, in other lessons poor recording quality precluded reliable transcription.

The data comprised non-participant observation and field notes by the first author of five complete lessons in each class, together with audio and video recordings of each lesson, which were transcribed by the first author.

Learner perceptions were obtained after the third and fifth lessons through two interviews conducted with groups of students (N= 120) from eight of the ten schools. Thirty primary and 41 secondary students participated in the first interview and 19 primary and 30 secondary students in the second interview. Most of the students who participated in the first interview were also involved in the second. Group size varied between 5 and 11 in the first interview and 2 and 10 in the second interview. The interview groups were predominantly female, with only 27 males among the 120 students interviewed.

PARTICIPANTS

The six secondary school classes contained between 17 and 24 students in their fifteenth year (Year 10). The students in these classes averaged between 3.2 – 6 years of language study, as some had commenced study of their language at primary school. The four primary school classes contained between 22 and 30 students, about two thirds of whom were in their eleventh year (Year 6) and the other third in their twelfth year (Year 7). One primary and one secondary class was single sex (female), two other classes had an almost equal number of males and females and the remaining six were predominantly female. The students in the primary school classes averaged between 3.8 and 4.7 years of language study. No formal measure of proficiency was taken. However, state-wide testing using the Western Australian *Student Outcome Statements* (Department of Education and Training, 2003) indicated that Year 6 students would have typically achieved Level 1 (i.e. *Listens to the target language, demonstrating understanding through non-verbal response, repetition, action and response in English*) of the Listening and Respond-

ing and Speaking Strand and that Year 10 students would have typically achieved Level 3 (*i.e. Listens to longer spoken texts in the target language and responds using predominantly well-rehearsed language*). Information on the proficiency levels of individual participants was not collected.

All ten teachers involved in the study were female. Their language teaching experience ranged from 7 to 34 years overall. Three primary and three secondary teachers had twelve or less years of language teaching experience. However, the primary teachers had between 21 and 35 years of experience as generalist (*i.e. classroom/ non-language specialists*) teachers. Two teachers of Italian (one primary and one secondary) and a secondary teacher of French were native or near native speakers. The other three teachers of Italian were of Italian background.

CODING

To answer the research questions, analysis of the data addressed the three main areas of investigation: 1) contexts and purposes of peer interaction; 2) L1/L2 use; and 3) learner perceptions of peer interaction. Transcripts were coded accordingly.

1. Contexts of peer interaction were identified as one of two types, based on Ellis (2001): Functional language practice activities (FLP), that is ‘instructional materials that provide learners with the opportunity to practice producing the target structure in some kind of situational context’ (p. 20) and; focused communicative tasks (CT), ‘designed to elicit production of a specific target feature in the context of performing a communicative task’ (p. 21). While both functional language practice and focused communicative tasks require the learner to use a specific target form, they differ in that focused communicative tasks (CT) involve a primary focus on meaning rather than on form.

The perceived purpose of the interaction was evaluated with reference to patterns within the interaction: *i.e.* Practice; Information exchange, and; Co-construction of meaning. These different patterns were each coded using different systems of categorisation, reflecting both social and cognitive perspectives on interaction. They are represented in Figure 28.1.

Restricted language practice was identified through formulaic language in the context of routinised or memorised language use, and interactional routines – elicitation of the completion of an utterance by pausing, and the use of praise, encouragement and affirmation. Conversation and communication of information was identified through interactional moves such as recasts, negotiation and explicit correction. Co-construction of meaning identified through language-related episodes (LREs)², related to lexis, form and

discourse of the target L2. This included coding of requests about language, metatalk, other correction and learner initiated requests to the teacher about language.

2. Use of L1 and L2 during peer interaction was counted by turns in the discourse. Turns where students switched codes were not counted.

3. Sixteen learner perception interviews involving 120 students were transcribed and analysed heuristically by the first author who identified any comments which related to language choice, or which expressed feelings, opinions or beliefs about peer interaction. Group size varied between 5–11 in the first interview and 2–10 in the second interview. The interview groups were predominantly female, with only 27 males among the 120 students interviewed.

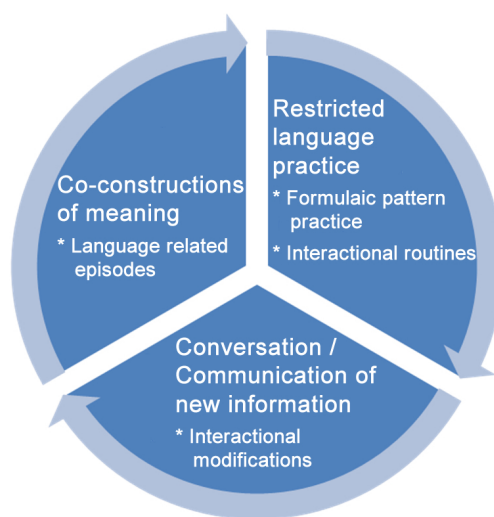


Figure 28.1 Categories of interactional patterns (adapted from Tognini, 2008)

INTER-RATER RELIABILITY

Approximately 50% of the data of peer interaction were coded by the first author and a second trained rater for each language (French and Italian near native speakers were used). The reliability of the coding for the language related episodes (LREs) was calculated using simple percentage agreement (i.e. the coding of the two raters was compared) for each of the categories. The results for the French data were 100% agreement for the

types of interaction and 89% agreement for the LREs. For the Italian data, the results were 92% agreement for the types of interaction and 97% agreement for the LREs.

RESULTS

CONTEXTS OF PEER INTERACTION

WHAT WERE THE MAIN CONTEXTS OF L1 AND L2 USE IN PEER INTERACTION?

As noted earlier, this question was addressed by identifying the types of activities or tasks (Ellis, 2001) learners were engaged in.

The interaction in the ten classrooms occurred as part of learner participation in functional language practice (FLP) activities and focused communicative tasks (CT). Three types of FLP and two types of CT were identified, as described in Table 28.1:

FLP1.	Pair work where students ask each other questions on a predetermined topic such as daily routines – in other words, question and answer practice using targeted vocabulary and structures, including survey type activities.
FLP2.	Pair or group work where students describe an item, person or a picture to each other using targeted vocabulary and/or structures.
FLP3.	Pair or group work where students engage in role play either based on a model dialogue or involving a situation which requires them to use familiar and well-rehearsed language.
CT1.	Pair work where students engage in one or two-way information gap tasks.
CT2.	Pair or group work where students work collaboratively to construct text e.g., list questions to ask exchange students who will visit the class in the future; develop an argument for their side for a debate; create a role play; prepare part of a procedural text such as a recipe; list the ingredients of an imaginary dish.

Table 28.1 Types of activities involving peer interaction

An analysis of the data showed that FLP 1-3 and CT1 were carried out entirely or predominantly in L2. CT2, on the other hand occurred mainly in L1.

To explore this further, the use of L1 and L2 in the 10 classes across a range of tasks was undertaken. Table 28.2 illustrates the variation that occurs across the classes. It also shows the notable increase in the proportion of L1 turns for the focused communicative tasks, which make greater communicative demands on learners than functional language practice activities. It is highest during collaborative text reconstruction. Such variation

also reflects learners’ proficiency as well as other factors such a task familiarity. L1 and L2 use is commented on in greater detail in the following section as we address the second research question.

Class	Activity/Task	No. of L1 turns	% of L1 turns	No. of L2 turns	% of L2 turns	Total no. of turns
Secondary French Class C	FLP1: Q/A activity using reflexive verbs (2 pairs)	8	12%	60	88%	68
Primary Italian Class D	FLP 3: Role play of meal where participants ask each other to pass food items (4 pairs)	13	32%	27	68%	40
Secondary French Class B	CT1: Two-way information gap task (4 pairs)	24	52%	22	48%	46
Primary French Class D	CT1: One-way information gap task (1 pair)	6	15%	33	85%	39
Secondary French Class B	CT2: Preparing for city v. country debate (1 pair)	78	74%	27	26%	105
Secondary Italian Class B	CT2: Brainstorming ingredients and predicting method for a recipe for jigsaw activity (3 groups)	92	75%	30	25%	122

Table 28.2 Proportional use of L1 and L2 in a selection of functional language practice (FLP) activities and focused communicative tasks (CT)

WHAT IS THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF L1 AND L2 USE WITHIN THESE CONTEXTS?

The second research question investigated L1 and L2 use when learners carried out particular tasks or activities: that is, whether to practice language forms, to exchange information, or to co-construct meaning together. As the data was gathered in LOTE classes,

the initial focus was on L2 use, but in doing so, an examination of L1 use was also carried out. Together, these were evaluated qualitatively.

Although there was variation across classes in the proportional use of the target language (in the results relating to Question 1), in general the characteristics of learners' L2 use did not vary greatly according to activity and task. However, it did differ according to purpose. The limited proficiency of the students involved in the study and their reliance on written models to complete oral tasks meant that much of the interaction consisted of students reproducing and/or manipulating targeted structures and vocabulary provided in model sentence/questions or dialogues. A great deal of peer interaction tended to involve 'interaction as practice' and included the use of a considerable amount of formulaic language; this was true both for functional language practice activities and focused communicative tasks. Thus interaction in a Q/A activity, such as practising reflexive verbs with the infinitive form of the verb given as a prompt for each question (Excerpt 28.1), and a one-way information gap task (Excerpt 28.2) where interlocutors were trying to discover similarities and differences between two pictures could look very similar:

1. Std D: Tu te réveilles à quelle heure?
At what time do you wake up?
2. Std C: Je me reveille à sept heures.
I wake up at seven o'clock.
3. Std D: A quelle heure tu te lèves?
At what time do you get up?
4. Std C: Je me lève à sept heures.
I get up at seven o'clock.

Excerpt 28.1 Functional Language Practice 1*

(Data from a secondary class)

* Learner errors in audio recordings are reproduced in the excerpts from the lesson transcriptions included in this paper.

1. Std A: La Frigidaire – est - jaune? *(laughter)*
The fridge – is - yellow?
2. Std M: Non. la – commode - est - mauve?
No. The chest – is - purple?
3. Std A: Errm - la commode – jaune?
Errm - the chest – yellow?
4. Std M: No. – Le divan *(mispronounced divin)* –
No. - the lounge –

Excerpt 28.2 Focused Communicative Task 1

(Data from a primary class)

There was, however, also evidence of learners using language to communicate and exchange information with one another in semi-structured and unstructured interaction. This occurred both in functional language practice activities, particularly role plays (FLP3), and in focused communicative tasks, particularly information gap tasks (CT1). In these contexts learners provided one another with feedback on their production and target like input. These types of interaction are illustrated in Excerpts 28.3, 28.4 and 28.5. Excerpt 28.3 is taken from an activity where students surveyed five class members about what they liked to do during the holidays. It illustrates the use of interactional moves such as elicitation (line 3) and clarification requests (line 5). Each potentially could prompt the interlocutor to pay attention to language form. In this case, the request was ignored; Student P appears intent on completing the task.

1. Std M: Que'est-ce que (*laughter*) tu aimes faire pendant les vacances?
What do you like to do during the holidays?
2. Std P: Pendant les vacances .. um ... j'aime faire du sport.
During the holidays... I like to play sport.
3. Std M: Mais -
But...
4. Std P: Mais je préfère du batik
I prefer batik.
5. Std M: Batik?
Batik?
6. Std P: J'aime aussi rendre visite à mes grands-parents (English pronunciation)
I also like to go and see my grandparents.

Excerpt 28.3 Functional Language Practice 3
(Data from a secondary class)

Excerpt 28.4 is taken from a two-way information gap task where the tourist and waiter in a French restaurant have different information on their respective menus. The preparation for the two-way task was the reading and discussion of a model dialogue by the whole class. The excerpt features a recast (turn 3) to provide the correct pronunciations for *vin*, which is taken up by Student S in turn 4.

Excerpt 28.5 comes from a two-way information gap activity set in a youth hostel in France, where a young tourist tries to find out about the hostel's facilities from an employee. Excerpt 28.5 contains a clarification request (turn 2) which is resolved by a translation (turn 3).

1. *Std S:* um Bon, alors, les escargots à l'aïl, une omelette au fromage - au tarte aux fraises. C'est bien ça?
Good, then, garlic snails, a cheese omelette, strawberry tart. Is that all?
2. *Std C:* Ça...et je peux voir la carte des vins. (*mispronounced*)
This...and I'd like the wine list.
3. *Std S:* Vin (*repeats the word, using the correct pronunciation*).
Wine.
4. *Std C:* Vin – des vins
Wine – wines
5. *Std S:* Bien sûr, là voilà.
Certainly, here it is.

Excerpt 28.4 Focused Communicative Task 1
(Data from a secondary class)

1. *Std R:* Um, I'll ask you another one anyway. Um, on peut - on peut acheter des provisions ici?
Um, can one – can one shop here?
2. *Std Q:* Provisions?
3. *Std R:* *That's shopping. –*
4. *Std Q:* Les provisions est rez de saussée - rez de chaussée
Shopping is the ground floor – ground floor

Excerpt 28.5 Focused Communicative Task 1
(Data from a secondary class)

These examples illustrate that learners engaged in a variety of interactional moves to negotiate both form and meaning. Not all are resolved, and few are resolved in the L2. Interestingly, the occurrence of moves involving some form of negotiated interaction seemed to be influenced by the dynamic between pairs or groups of learners as well as the nature of the task. Thus, some learners engaged in negotiated interaction and some did not, regardless of the type of task they were completing. This is illustrated in Excerpt 28.6, taken from a primary school class activity that put little communicative pressure on learners. Each learner described to a partner the clothes worn by people in a picture, thus practising clothing vocabulary, colour adjectives and noun – adjective agreements. Here Student A assumes the 'expert' or teacher role and facilitates interaction by initiating responses for Student B.

1. Std A: Ready. La gonna - la gonna - è nera e bianca. La maglietta - la maglietta rossa - è bianca e nera.
The dress - the dress - is red and white. The jumper - the jumper red - and white and black.
2. Std B:-
3. Std A: La maglietta -
The jumper -
4. Std B: - La maglietta è nera. Umm
The jumper is black.
5. Std A: I pantaloni -
The trousers -
6. Std B: I pantaloni - [rossa]. - Le scarpe - rossa - nere. La maglietta blu.
The red- trousers - The - red - black shoes. The blue jumper.

Excerpt 28.6 Functional Language Practice 2
(Data from a primary class)

While L2 use for the purpose of practice and for exchanging information was found in both FLP and CT contexts, interaction for the purpose of co-construction of meaning appeared to be particular to certain focused communication tasks (CT), and provided evidence of learners attending to form. Pair or group work where students collaborated to construct an L2 text (CT2) was characterised by interaction in which learners: made requests to each other about the L2 they wanted to use, including both lexis and grammar; engaged in metatalk; initiated requests to the teacher about L2; and corrected each other. The discourse was often extended (five minutes or more in duration) and sometimes resulted in a succession of LREs (particularly those linked to lexis, form and discourse of the target L2) that were part of the same interaction. This is illustrated in Excerpt 28.7, from a Jigsaw activity where students were attempting to predict the ‘method’ section of the recipe mentioned above.

What is evident in Excerpt 28.7 is the use of L1 to help solve problems with L2 form. The first (turns 1–3), fourth (turns 11–14) and fifth (turns 15–16) LREs all illustrate Student I’s attempts to understand when to use the masculine or feminine article with a noun, through dialogue with Student K. Of note here is the expert role taken by Student K. He provides both explicit and implicit negative feedback throughout the exchange, from which Student I seems to benefit. This kind of collaborative work provides students with the opportunity to engage with language form as they work out how to communicate

in the L2. However, much of this collaborative interaction was usually in L1. This is the issue we turn to next.

1. *Std I:* Why is it, why is it 'il or la'? I don't understand it.
2. *Std K:* Because if it ends in 'a' it's 'la' and 'o' its 'il'.
3. *Std I:* Oh, I get it. - Grattugiano – grattugiano il cioccolato. (*gets the stress right the second time*) – No, how do you say 'smash' le uove?
4. *Std K:* Break
5. *Std I:* Break, break - (*trying to find the word in dictionary.*)
6. *Std K:* We'll have no break. Mix the cream and eggs.
7. *Std I:* Mescoli
You mix
8. *Std K:* No
9. *Std I:* Mescolano. (*stress in wrong place*)
They mix.
10. *Std K:* Mescolano.
11. *Std I:* Mescolano - il crema -
They mix the cream.
12. *Std K:* La -
13. *Std I:* Crema is – o - if I have 'o' it's il crema –
14. *Std K:* No
15. *Std I:* e le uova - e la – uova -
16. *Std K:* It's le. Ask her.

Excerpt 28.7 Focused Communicative Task 2
(Data from a secondary class)

L1 use occurred more frequently in certain types of activities, as seen in Figure 28.3. As illustrated in Excerpt 28.7, it was most prevalent in CT2; it was also more prevalent in two way information gap tasks (CT1) and role plays (FLP3), than in surveys (FLP1) and picture description tasks (FLP2).

Students tended to use L1 when they engaged in negotiation moves (as in turn 3 in Excerpt 28.7) but also for task management and interpersonal exchanges. A characteristic example is provided in Excerpt 28.8, from an information gap activity, where the students encounter difficulties and try to negotiate, but in doing so revert to L1 to keep the exchange going.

1. *Std A:* - (Possibly reading from worksheet.) Est-ce que il y a une - cuisine?
Is there a kitchen?
2. *Std B:* Umm - la cuisine - est –chez le - premier étage.
Umm – the kitchen – is – at the first floor.
3. *Std A:* Umm, umm - une peut – on peut -?
Umm, umm – can one -?
4. *Std B:* What did you say?
5. *Std A:* on peut?
can one?
6. *Std B:* I don't know what you're actually doing.
7. *Std A:* I don't know. Umm (Laughs) - Is this all right?
8. *Std B:* You have to say, what time is it open till.
9. *Std A:* Yeh, I say, au premier étage.
...on the first floor

Excerpt 28.8 Focused Communicative Task 1
(Data from a secondary class)

In this data, L1 plays cognitive and social roles that contribute to learning. Students use the L1 to solve linguistic problems, to manage tasks and for interpersonal purposes.

It must be noted here that an aspect of interaction that was not common in this data is the use of affiliative talk. When it did appear it tended to be carried out in the L1, demonstrating the rather artificial position of the L2 for these learners. In Excerpt 28.9, while conducting a survey of holiday activities, learners share 'real life' examples and use L2 for these more personal purposes. Both the structure and possible responses had been practised in the L2 beforehand and support was available to them on a worksheet. Interestingly, they switch to L1 when 'off-script', as Student B teases A about her 'friend':

1. *Std B:* Qu'est-ce que tu aimes faire pendant les vacances?
What do you like to do during the holidays?
2. *Std A:* Pendant les vacances j'aime faire des promenades à vélo avec mon ami – (snigger from questioner) mon ami.
During the holidays I like to go bike riding with my friend – my friend.
3. *Std B:* Your friend!
4. *Std A:* Why do you say that! (Laughter and protestations) Shut up.

Excerpt 28.9
(Data from a secondary class)

In summarising the features and purposes of peer interaction identified in these lessons from 10 schools, a major finding is the restricted nature of L2 use by these secondary and primary children. Although engaged in both functional practice activities and more communicative tasks, L2 use was generally made up of pre-formulated language, and usually followed a script. While there were opportunities for spontaneous production and for negotiation of meaning, L1 use was the more prevalent choice, likely due to the learners' low proficiency and limited exposure to the target language.

What does this suggest for the language learning opportunities in these classes? The emphasis on practice activities and the reliance on pre-scripted or pre-formulated language suggests an emphasis on proceduralising knowledge and use of particular forms (DeKeyser, 1998, 2007). Similarly, in a case study of four French and Japanese classes in New Zealand High schools, Erlam, Sakui and Ellis (2006) found high use of formulaic sequences, together with a lack of communicative tasks, which teachers attributed to low proficiency levels. L2 use in our data appears restricted at early stages of learning to particular domains, for example, describing clothing, talking about hobbies. However there is little need for the learners to rely on the L2 for real communicative purposes and opportunities that might arise in a class of mixed L1 learners, such as negotiation of form and meaning, and inter-personal banter, in this context was more often carried out in L1. The limited proficiency of the learners, and the lack of pressure to resolve difficulty in the L2, meant that this was more likely to take place during teacher-learner interaction. While use of the L1 may have impeded some learning opportunities, it provided others. As seen in other studies (Antón and DiCamilla, 1998; Brooks, Donato and McGlone, 1997; Platt and Brooks, 1994; Swain and Lapkin, 2000), students in this study were often able to use L1 effectively: as a scaffold to production; as a tool for reflecting on and resolving language difficulties (Excerpt 28.7); and as a means of rendering a task feasible (Excerpt 28.8).

WHAT WERE LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PEER INTERACTION AND OF L2 USE?

Supplementing the data from the interactions, two interviews were conducted with 120 students about their perceptions of classroom interaction. Forty nine were from primary and 71 from secondary school classes. Forty four of the primary and 49 of the secondary students were female. Their insights assist understanding of the purpose and nature of language use in peer interaction. Firstly, the majority of learners viewed peer interaction very positively and older learners reported a preference for peer interaction over teacher-learner interaction, with some declaring it less 'scary' and less stressful than interacting with the teacher: 'You're a lot more confident [assent from others]. Like, if you make a

mistake...you help each other out' (Secondary student). Similarly to the ESL learners in Garrett and Shortall's (2002) study, both primary and secondary learners in this study thought interaction with their peers helped their learning. Secondary students mentioned the benefits of working with someone else, in particular the opportunities to pool knowledge and help each other out, especially with new or unfamiliar work. They also felt that peer interaction contributed to their learning by providing opportunities for practice. This assisted their memorisation of new language items and enabled them to use known language to say something new. The facilitative role of practice, especially in being able to remember relevant language was highlighted by a primary student who commented, 'When you've already done the word so many times you can remember it and do something with it.'

Other comments by students on L2 use run counter to the mainly positive perception of peer interaction. Most found difficulty in having to use L2 in peer interaction and felt constrained by a lack of knowledge and lack of appropriate language to express their ideas. 'It's hard to speak French 'cos it's confining sometimes', was an observation made by a secondary student. Another commented on inadequate ability to converse; 'We can't speak French. You're not good enough to actually have conversations in French...We know what that means and what that means, but we can't connect it to actually say something'. Students also cited lack of L2 knowledge as the main reason for reverting to L1 when a communication breakdown occurred. Individual secondary learners felt interaction with peers did not extend them linguistically and more capable learners felt they were just going over familiar material. Several primary learners included as negative aspects of peer interaction partners who misbehaved, laughed and made fun of others' efforts and did not stay on task. Most students considered having the right partner was considered an important element for the success of peer interaction by most students.

Despite these perceived shortcomings, students had mostly positive perceptions of interaction with their peers confirming its importance as a site for learning. Learners' emphasis on the value of peer interaction as a vehicle for practice was consistent with the purposes of interaction identified in the data: Peer interaction is seen as a site for practicing and rehearsing new language forms, and for trying out formulaic and semi-structured expressions in different contexts. At the same time, however, this restricted view of peer interaction as a site for practice possibly reflects teachers' reliance on practice activities and pre-scripted or pre-formulated language because of the real and perceived constraints imposed on communication in L2 by learners' limited proficiency.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Interestingly, the peer interaction that emerged from this study reflected all three aspects identified by Philp and Tognini (2009, p. 254). Interaction as practice, with its use of formulaic language, featured strongly. However, the conversational moves characteristic of interaction that concentrates on the exchange of information, were also present in exchanges, as seen for example in the provision of recasts and clarification requests. Co-construction of meaning through collaborative dialogues, including attention to form (as shown in the analysis of LREs) also featured, but generated higher L1 use. This is perhaps a common feature of classes with a shared L1 (see Swain and Lapkin, 2000), but not those in L2 contexts where L1 is not an option (e.g. Williams, 1999).

While certain types of tasks were associated with higher L2 use, learner proficiency also played a role in this. Earlier research (e.g. Pica, Kanagy and Falodun, 1993; see Ellis, 2003 for review) identifies certain design features, such as two-way information gap tasks, as promoting negotiated interaction to a greater extent than other features. This was also found to be true of classes in this study: interaction during such tasks was more conversational in nature than practice activities, and included more feedback. However, in this FL context, where L1 is shared, the tendency of learners to have recourse to L1, sometimes for negotiation moves (such as clarification requests and confirmation checks), and more extensively in collaborative dialogue, highlights proficiency and shared L1 as factors alongside task features.

Focused communicative tasks involving joint construction of texts did not appear to promote L2 production in any obvious way, perhaps due to a reliance on L1. However, it would seem that the LREs in L1 had the potential to contribute to the development of the learners' language by facilitating awareness of the particular linguistic features concerned. Learners' use of L1 in these tasks reflected peer support through scaffolding. This scaffolding was also apparent when learners' operated predominantly in L2, often through one of the partners taking on the expert role. The data on learner perceptions indicated that learners highly valued the support provided by their peers and considered that it assisted their learning. On the other hand, mismatched partners were reported to hinder positive outcomes through ineffective support or misbehaviour.

The role and use of the L1 in foreign language classroom learning remains a topic of debate for researchers and teachers. Recently, Carr (2005), writing about the potential of task-based learning to meet the diverse needs of learners in today's LOTE classes, observed that 'A surprising amount of classroom interaction continues to happen in English...' (p. 34). Carr suggested a task-based approach as a way of addressing this issue.

However, the dependence on L1 by students undertaking communicative tasks points to other factors at play, including proficiency and students' awareness of the limitations of their language skills. Ohta (2001) argued that task type might not be the crucial factor in determining the quality of peer interaction, but rather the relevance of a particular activity or task to the learner's particular linguistic needs at the point of performing the task.

This study, like that of Antón and DiCamilla (1998), suggests that L1 has a role to play in the second language learning process by helping learners scaffold and support each others' language use and as a tool for thinking about their language learning. Conversely, L1 use limits L2 use. Therefore the real challenge may be for research to discover more precisely how L1 contributes to L2 learning in the longer term in LOTE classroom learning and how to facilitate the transition from L1 to L2 in classroom interaction as part of developing proficiency. Once these issues are better understood, the implications for classroom pedagogy can be more realistically determined.

What are the implications of this study for teachers in LOTE classrooms? The three different aspects of interaction identified by this study and by Philp and Tognini (2009) draw attention to the complex nature of interaction in LOTE classes and the potential contribution of each aspect to learning. The restricted nature of L2 use in peer interaction highlights the role of teacher-learner interaction in providing opportunities for learners to use L2 for real communicative purposes such as negotiation of form and meaning and interpersonal chat. At the same time, the mostly positive perception of interaction with peers supports its important role in classroom learning as a site for practice and experimentation with the L2. The opportunities for learning provided by L1 use needs to be acknowledged and utilised by both teachers and learners. However, it is also necessary for teachers to understand and respond to the factors that appear to contribute to learners' dependence on L1 such as proficiency and learners' awareness of the limitations of their language skills. Finally, teacher and learner enthusiasm and motivation can mitigate the limitations of activities and tasks.

By exploring classroom interaction through a variety of perspectives, this study points to different ways in which peer interaction may contribute to language learning. Although the breadth of this study, involving a relatively large data set, precluded detailed and intricate socio-cultural analysis of the interaction, it nevertheless provides a broad portrait of these LOTE classrooms. It suggests that learners were engaged in interaction for different purposes, and depended on the L2 to varying degrees. Firstly, contextualised practice and the use of formulaic chunks may have enabled learners to proceduralise explicit knowledge and develop fluency. This type of interaction was characterised by

greater L2 use, albeit more restricted and predictable in nature. Secondly, learners carried out activities that required exchange of information. This communicative pressure may have encouraged greater attention to form, and potentially led to developing understanding of how to use their interlanguage grammar to express particular meanings. Finally, peer interaction was also found to encourage the kind of collaborative discourse that facilitates the co-construction of language and learning. This involves processes of using the L2 to express particular shared meanings, and to resolve difficulties of expression together. It is only through looking at the data from more than one perspective that we are able to recognise different potential benefits of the three different purposes of interaction examined in this study, and the complementary roles that L1 and L2 use may play in developing second language proficiency in the LOTE classroom.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ In 'conventional' LOTE classes, the language itself is the focus of instruction rather than being the vehicle for teaching particular content, as in immersion programs. The weekly time allocation for 'conventional' LOTE classes in Western Australia is an average of 30-60 minutes per week in primary school, 120 minutes in the three years of lower secondary and 240 minutes in the two years of senior secondary.
- ² Swain and Lapkin (2000) define LREs as any part of a dialogue where the learners talk about the language they are producing, question their language use or correct themselves and others.

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