Cooperative and Collaborative Learning in the Language Classroom

Yoshitaka Kato
Kyoto University
Francesco Bolstad
Kyoto University
Hironori Watari
Waseda University

Cooperative learning and *collaborative learning* are two of the central approaches that utilize pair or group activities in the language learning classroom. However, despite the fact that these approaches have been developed under different historical backgrounds and thus have different pedagogical aims to be pursued, a tendency to use the two terms interchangeably has obscured their respective merits in foreign language education. This paper therefore attempts to differentiate them through an extensive review of the relevant literature. It reveals that *cooperative learning*, which emphasizes the necessity of developing learners' social skills, tends to be described as a more structured and teacher-centered approach than *collaborative learning*, which presupposes the learners' autonomy to a greater extent. This paper, rather than arguing any primacy of one of the two approaches, introduces some issues to assist practitioners and researchers to identify which approach would be most beneficial for their individual teaching and research goals.

「協同学習」と「協調学習」は、言語学習におけるペア・グループ学習を有効活用するための2つの中心的なアプローチである。しかし、両者が異なる歴史的背景、教育目的のもとで発展したにもかかわらず、これら2つの用語は外国語教育において混同されて用いられる傾向があり、互いの利点が十分に活かされてはこなかった。そこで本論は、従来の先行研究を幅広く概観することで、両者の相違点の明確化を試みた。その結果、学習者の社会スキルの向上を重視する「協同学習」は、学習者の自律性を前提とする「協調学習」に比べ、より構造的で、教師中心のアプローチとして記述される傾向があることがわかった。本論は、これらのアプローチいずれかの優位性を示すものではない。言語教育の実践家や研究者が、各々の教育や研究の目的にとってより有益なアプローチを見出すための指針を提供するものである。

Since the 1980s, the emergence of constructivism has shifted much of the discussion on effective language teaching, from a focus on *knowledge-transmission* to *knowledge-building* frameworks of learning (Brown, 2000; Crandall, 1999). This paradigm shift has coincided with the prevalence of a wide variety of small group activities in the language-learning classroom. Two well-known approaches within the new paradigm of knowledge building are *cooperative learning* and *collaborative learning*. In recent years, these approaches have enjoyed increased attention among researchers and practitioners in foreign language education both within Japan and abroad (e.g., Erikawa, 2012; Kamimura, 2006; McCafferty, Jacobs, & DaSilva Iddings, 2006; Storch, 2013).

While both of these approaches show potential in improving language education, a growing concern is that many practitioners tend to use these two terms (i.e., cooperative learning and collaborative learning) interchangeably.[1] The ambiguity needs to be clarified because these two approaches have been developed under different historical backgrounds and thus pursue different pedagogical aims. Bruffee (1995) states:

> ...describing cooperative and collaborative learning as complementary understates some important differences between the two. Some of what collaborative-learning pedagogy recommends that teachers do tends in fact to undercut some of what cooperative learning might hope to accomplish, and vice versa. (p. 16)

Unless language teachers understand the roots and aims behind the two, it is unlikely that they can fully utilize peer activities in their classroom. This paper therefore attempts to clarify the differences through an extensive review of the relevant literature. After describing cooperative learning and collaborative learning respectively, it will summarize the distinctions between the two approaches. Rather than insisting on any primacy of one of the two approaches, this paper introduces some issues to assist practitioners and researchers to identify which approach would be most beneficial.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning was originally developed in the field of general pedagogy, and it is often contrasted with *competitive* or *individualistic* learning. Its roots are said to lie in the democratic view of

education advocated by John Dewey (see Sugie, 2011, p. 17). Although the term itself connotes various teaching techniques, such as Learning Together (Johnson & Johnson, 1999), Student Teams Achievement Divisions (Slavin, 1978), Jigsaw (Aronson, Blaney, Stephan, Sikes, & Snapp, 1978) (see Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 2000 for a summary of techniques), a frequently cited definition in the field of foreign language education would be that of Johnson and Johnson (1999). They define it as "the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning" (p. 5).

Cooperative learning is often characterized by its well-defined structure of activities, aiming at fostering social skills as well as maximizing learning outcomes. It designs activities where learners need some interaction with each other to achieve a shared goal. In an actual classroom, it is often the case that some learners, called "free riders," do not actively get involved in a group activity, which makes group interaction less efficient. To prevent this, cooperative learning sets out several basic principles. The principles vary widely among researchers, but the two generally accepted principles are *positive interdependence* and *individual accountability* (Jacobs & Ball, 1996; McCafferty et al., 2006; Millis & Cottell, 1998).

The first principle, *positive interdependence*, falls into one of three types of social interdependence (positive, negative, and none), which can be expressed as "a *sink or swim together* feeling among group mates" (Kimura, 2009, p. 13). Positive interdependence exists "when the actions of individuals promote the achievement of joint goals" (Johnson & Johnson, 2009, p. 366). Though positive interdependence alone does not lead to higher achievements in student collaboration, it is necessary to provide the foundation on which cooperative learning is built. Another principle, *individual accountability*, "exists when the performance of each individual member is assessed and the results are given back to the individual and the group to compare against a standard of performance" (Johnson & Johnson, 2009, p. 368). Meeting this principle leads to the feelings of personal responsibility in task completion, which makes cooperative learning more likely to succeed.

Thus, cooperative learning is different from typical pair or group activities in its well-structured task design, in which group members are required to work together to achieve a shared goal. This situation can be created in classrooms by meeting the two basic principles of *positive interdependence* and *individual accountability*. What should be noted here is that cooperative learning presupposes to some extent the relative dominance of a teacher in learner cooperation. Although cooperative learning expects the learners to actively join in an activity, it is their teacher who preliminarily determines most of what they are going to learn in the classroom. In this sense, cooperative learning can be described as a form of teacher-centered approach (Panitz, 1999). This so-called "covert teacher-centeredness" is an essential feature of cooperative learning, which will be further discussed later.

Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning has been developed mainly within a social constructivists' school of thought. One of the featured concepts underlying collaborative learning is Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). It facilitates learners' engagement "with more capable others (teachers, advanced peers, etc.), who provide assistance and guidance" (Oxford, 1997, p. 444). The broadest definition of collaborative learning would be "a situation in which two or more people learn or attempt to learn something together" (Dillenbourg, 1999, p. 1), but this definition is unsatisfactory and needs to be more sophisticated as Dillenbourg himself discusses in his article. Here, to achieve the purpose of this paper, we compare it with cooperative learning.

As mentioned before, while the primary interests of cooperative learning lie in its elaborate process of small group learning so that students can maximize their learning, students in collaborative learning are assumed to be "responsible participants" who have already acquired, to some extent, the social skills required to undertake and complete a task (Matthews, Cooper, Davidson, & Hawkes, 1995). Rather than prescribing the collaboration process among learners, it puts an emphasis on any learning outcomes gained through collaboration. This is likely to be why the degree of structure and prescriptiveness is lower in collaborative learning (Oxford, 1997), and it is why the collaborative learning approach does not recommend teachers intervene in working groups (Bruffee, 1995). In this sense, collaborative learning can be described as a more student-centered approach than cooperative learning (Panitz, 1999).

Although we cannot say this conclusively, collaborative learning in foreign language education seems to most often take the form of collaborative writing (Storch, 2013), dictogloss (Wajnryb, 1990), learning grammar in collaboration with peers (Storch, 1999), peer feedback or interaction on writing (e.g., Kamimura, 2006), and on speaking (e.g., Sato & Lyster, 2012), and other small group activities. In these ac-

tivities, though there are some exceptions, teachers do not specify the structure of collaboration by, for example, the division of labor among participants. The ways and means of interaction are usually negotiated by the learners themselves. In addition, in contrast to covert teacher-centered cooperative learning, the authority of learning in collaborative learning lies with the learners themselves, which is to say that they are expected to negotiate with others to achieve more than they would alone. Thus, these small group activities (e.g., peer feedback) can be categorized as collaborative learning rather than cooperative learning.

How Different Are They?

As discussed so far, there seems to be at least two features that distinguish cooperative learning from collaborative learning: the degree of structure and learner-centeredness (see Figure 1). Regarding the first feature, Oxford (1997) states that cooperative learning "is considered more structured, more prescriptive to teachers about classroom techniques, more directive to students about how to work together in groups" (p. 443), than collaborative learning. This highly structured approach is one of the reasons why cooperative learning has developed so far a lot of teaching techniques (e.g., jigsaw) to make small group activities successful. Conversely, collaborative learning generally allows learners to be more flexible in the working process with their peers.

The second feature that differentiates the two is the degree of learner-centeredness. Cooperative learning can be considered to be a more teacher-centered form of instruction because the teacher decides beforehand most of the learners' roles during a small group activity and she or he "controls most of what is going on in the class" (Dooly, 2008, p. 21). On the other hand, collaborative learning allows learners more freedom to negotiate their ways and means of interaction among peers because it assumes they are already "responsible participants" (Matthews et al., 1995), who can learn autonomously through collaboration with others.

Figure 1 describes the relationship between the two approaches. This model views cooperative learning and collaborative learning as a continuum rather than a clear-cut dichotomy. Please note that "less" in this figure does not mean "no": "Less structured" does not mean that collaborative learning has no structure, where learners interact with others in a completely free way. Likewise, "More teacher-centered" does not mean that learners have no determination over the path the class takes.

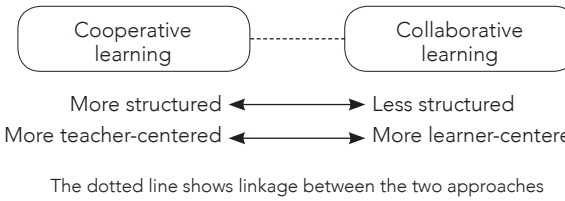

Figure 1. **A Relationship Between Cooperative Learning and Collaborative Learning**

How can we utilize both approaches?

The differences highlighted between cooperative and collaborative learning imply that language teachers have to determine which approach to take depending on their teaching goals. If a teacher aims at fostering social skills or motivating students with a highly structured task, it would be better to utilize a cooperative learning approach. Conversely, if the primary focus of the teaching is on learning outcomes and if students are autonomous enough to have responsibility in their own learning, a collaborative learning approach would be a better choice to achieve the purposes.

Because both approaches have their own respective advantages, it is ultimately the teaching goals that should determine which approach would best serve in any individual situation. Any priority of the two cannot be stated without taking into account educational factors such as the purpose of the class, learners' motivation, proficiency, and degree of autonomy. With a good understanding of the different backgrounds of cooperative and collaborative learning, language teachers and researchers are expected to apply both approaches appropriately for their teaching and research goals.

Note

1. In Japan, this confusion partially comes from translation issues. Cooperative learning and collaborative learning are translated inconsistently into Japanese as *kyodo-gakushu* or *kyocho-gakushu*, which can be written with a variety of characters, each with different nuances. The lack of uniformity may well induce misunderstanding among researchers as well as practitioners in foreign language education. Solutions proposed by Sekita and Yasunaga (2005), for example, may help to alleviate such issues of uniformity.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions to improve the quality of the paper. They are also grateful to Professor Akira Tajino at Kyoto University for his insightful comments and warm encouragement throughout the study.

References

Aronson, E., Blaney, N., Stephan, C., Sikes, J., & Snapp, M. (1978). *The jigsaw classroom.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Brown, D. H. (2000). *Principles* of language learning and teaching (4th ed.). New York: Longman.

Bruffee, K. A. (1995). Sharing our toys: Cooperative learning versus collaborative learning. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 27*(1), 12–18.

Crandall, J. J. (1999). Cooperative language learning and affective factors. In J. Arnold (Ed.), *Affect in language learning* (pp. 226–245). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dillenbourg P. (1999).What do you mean by collaborative learning? In P. Dillenbourg (Ed.), *Collaborative-learning: Cognitive and computational approaches* (pp. 1–19). Oxford: Elsevier.

Dooly, M. (2008). Constructing knowledge together. In M. Dooly (Ed.). *Telecollaborative language learning: A guidebook to moderating intercultural collaboration online* (pp. 21–44). Bern, Australia: Peter Lang.

Erikawa, H. (2012). *Kyodo gakushu wo toriireta eigo jugyo no susume: Eigo kyoiku niju isseiki sosho* [Promoting cooperative learning in English learning classes: The 21st century English education series]. Tokyo: Taishukan.

Jacobs, G. M., & Ball, J. (1996). An investigation of the structure of group activities in ELT coursebooks. *ELT Journal, 50*(2), 99–107.

Johnson, D.W., & Johnson, R.T. (1999). Learning together and alone: Cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning (5th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2009). An educational psychology success story: Social interdependence theory and cooperative learning. *Educational Researcher, 38*(5), 365–379.

Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Stanne, M. B. (2000). Cooperative learning methods: A meta-analysis. The Cooperative Learning Center, The University of Minnesota. Retrieved from <http://www.tablelearning.com/uploads/File/EXHIBIT-B.pdf>

Kamimura, T. (2006). Effects of peer feedback on EFL student writers at different levels of English proficiency: A Japanese context. *TESL Canada Journal, 23*(2), 12–39.

Kimura, H. (2009). Controversy over cooperative learning: An interview with Dr. George M. Jacobs. *The Language Teacher, 33*(8), 13–16.

Matthews, R. S., Cooper, J. L., Davidson, N., & Hawkes, P. (1995). Building bridges between cooperative and collaborative learning. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 27*(4), 35–40.

McCafferty, S. G., Jacobs, G. M., & DaSilva Iddings, A. C. (2006). *Cooperative learning and second language reaching.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Millis, B. J., & Cottell, Jr., P. G. (1998). *Cooperative learning for higher education faculty.* Phoenix, Arizona: American Council on Education and The Oryx Press.

Oxford, R. L. (1997). Cooperative learning, collaborative learning, and interaction: Three communicative strands in the language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal, 81*(4), 443–456.

Panitz, T. (1999). Collaborative versus cooperative learning: A comparison of the two concepts which will help us understand the underlying nature of interactive learning. Cape Cod Community College, MA. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED448443.pdf>

Sato, M., & Lyster, R. (2012). Peer interaction and corrective feedback for accuracy and fluency development: Monitoring, Ppractice, and proceduralization. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 34*(4), 591–626.

Sekita, K., & Yasunaga. S. (2005). Kyodo gakushu no teigi to kanren yogo no seiri [A proposal for proper use of "cooperative learning" and "collaborative learning" in Japanese]. *Kyodo to Kyoiku* [Cooperation and Education]*, 1*, 10–17.

Slavin, R. E. (1978). Student teams and achievement divisions. *Journal of Research and Development in Education, 12*, 39–49.

Storch, N. (1999). Are two heads better than one? Pair work and grammatical accuracy. *System, 27*(3), 363–374.

Storch, N. (2013). *Collaborative writing in L2 classrooms.* Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Sugie, S. (2011). *Kyodo gakushu nyumon* [An invitation to cooperative learning]. Kyoto: Nakanishiya.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wajnryb, R. (1990). *Grammar dictation.* Oxford: Oxford. University Press.

Yoshitaka Kato is currently a doctoral student in the Department of Foreign Language Acquisition and Education at Kyoto University. His research interests include cooperative/collaborative language learning and task-supported language teaching. He can be contacted at <kato.yoshitaka.36u@st.kyoto-u.ac.jp>.

Francesco Bolstad is currently a lecturer at Kyoto University where he teaches academic writing and ESP biology and chemistry courses. His research interests include childhood language acquisition, team-teaching and academic writing. He can be contacted at <fbolstad@me.com>.

Hironori Watari is currently a research associate in the Global Education Center at Waseda University. His current research interests include pedagogical grammar and second language writing education. He can be contacted at <watari.hironori@aoni.waseda.jp>.

[RESOURCES] MY SHARE SPECIAL

Jonathan Reingold

We welcome submissions for the My Share column. Submissions should be up to 700 words describing a successful technique or lesson plan you have used that can be replicated by readers, and should conform to the My Share format (see the guidelines on our website below).

Email: <my-share@jalt-publications.org> Web: <http://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/myshare>

Before and After a Study Abroad Programme: Prompt Cards to Facilitate Discussion

Brett Davies
Showa Women's University, Tokyo
<davies@swu.ac.jp>

Quick Guide

- Key words: *Study abroad, peer learning, authentic interaction*
- Learner English level: *Intermediate and above*
- Learner maturity: *High school to university*
- Preparation time: *10 minutes*
- Activity time: *60 – 90 minutes*
- Materials: *Prompt cards (one set of six per pair of students), blank cards (three per student)*

As MEXT aims to make Japanese students more internationalized, Study Abroad Programmes (SAP) are becoming increasingly common in universities and high schools. While the benefits of such programmes are clear, students often display high levels of anxiety before going abroad, most notably regarding their perceived lack of English ability. In contrast, after returning to Japan, almost all students express satisfaction with the experience and show a marked increase in English fluency and confidence. Unfortunately, in many settings there is little opportunity for pre-SAP students to interact with post-SAP students in order to benefit from their advice.

This activity encourages meaningful English communication between these two groups. It aims to ease pre-SAP student concerns, allow them to practice authentic English and simultaneously giving post-SAP students the opportunity to reflect on their experiences more deeply.

Preparation

Step 1: Arrange a time and place for students to meet a week or two before pre-SAP students depart. Ideally there will be equal numbers of pre-SAP and post-SAP students, though the activity is adaptable for uneven numbers.

Step 2: Make and copy a set of six prompt cards (one set per pair of students; see appendix). These can be simple (*Food*; *Weather*) or more complex (*The most surprising thing I saw*; *My biggest regret*). If the destination is the same for all students, the cards can be tailored accordingly; for example, *Clam chowder* (for Boston).

Procedure

Step 1: Give three blank cards to each student and ask them to write their own topic ideas – one per card. Post-SAP students can choose something they particularly liked or disliked during their stay, or something they believe the pre-SAP students ought to know. Some recent examples: *Best ice cream; Slang; I wish I took...* Meanwhile, Pre-SAP students