Use(s) of the L1 in L2 German Collaborative Tasks

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The aim of this study was to investigate how 17 L2-German students (CEFR level A1) use their L1 when performing collaborative tasks. The three interconnected tasks consisted of a peer interview (n = 80), a written report on their partner (n = 170), and peer feedback sessions on mistakes in the partners' reports (n = 78). These tasks were carried out on a weekly basis. An analysis of the audio-recorded peer interviews and feedback shows that students resorted to their L1 to talk about grammar and to discuss problems concerning the task's fulfilment, suggesting that the L1 fulfilled important cognitive functions and may have facilitated L2 learning.

本稿の目的は、17名のドイツ語学習者（CEFR　A1相当）が協働課題に取り組む際、どのように母語を用いるか調査することである。パートナーへのインタビュー（n = 80）、パートナーに関する報告書の作成（n = 170）、報告書の間違いに対するパートナーからのフィードバック（n = 78）といった3つの互いに関連し合う課題を週単位で実施した。インタビューとフィードバックを録音し分析した結果、学習者が文法上の問題や課題の（手法的な意味での）解決方法に関する問題について話をするために母語の助けを借りていることが分かった。これは母語が重要な認知機能を果たし、外国語学習を促す可能性があることを示唆している。

It is generally acknowledged that, in order to learn a foreign language, students have to have ample opportunities to use their L2 in the classroom. In particular teachers who are native speakers of their students' target language often favour using only the L2, creating a mock target language environment in their classrooms. Some researchers have argued that the L2-only classroom offers students not only the chance to practice the L2 through communicative exercises, but also allows them to use it as a tool for real communication by providing them with opportunities to negotiate meaning and solve problems in the L2 (see, e.g., Ford, 2009; Leeming, 2011).

However, numerous studies have recently emerged that emphasize the importance of acknowledging the learners' L1 during L2 instruction (Cummins, 2007; Kim & Elder, 2008; Turnbull & Dailey-O'Cain, 2009). Some of these studies shed light on the cognitive and social functions of the students' L1 during task performance, for example, to avoid communication breakdown (Carless, 2008), to define elements of the task, and to establish and keep up intersubjectivity (Alegría de la Colina & García Mayo, 2009) as well as to allow learners to express inner speech (DiCamilla & Antón, 2012). This is particularly true for teaching contexts where students share the same mother tongue, as is the case for Japanese students learning a foreign language in Japan. In these situations, the L1 may be used as a valuable resource to facilitate or enable communication among learners.

In previous research I have examined how language teachers in Japan use their students' L1 (Japanese) and the target language (German) in their classes. The results have indicated that complex teaching content, big class sizes, and low levels of motivation combined with the low L2 skills of the learners are all factors that lead teachers to resort to using the students' L1 in the classroom (Harting, 2012, 2014). Through learner surveys conducted within these studies, I found that students often prefer their teachers use Japanese for such things as explaining, correcting, or giving instructions regarding exercises (Harting, 2013). In this paper, I build upon these previous studies by examining for which particular functions learners resort to their L1 while performing collaborative tasks. The following research questions will be addressed:

RQ1. To what extent do learners resort to their L1 while performing content-focused interview and form-focused feedback tasks?

RQ2. Which purposes do the learners' L1 fulfil within such tasks?

The tasks under investigation in this study consisted of a peer interview, a peer report, and a related feedback activity, all of which were carried out on a weekly basis. These tasks were implemented as a way of initiating meaningful communication from the students by focussing on the learners' interests, experiences, habits, and opinions. The content-focused peer interview required learners to exchange information, allowing for the negotiation of meaning, which is regarded as beneficial for L2 learning (Pica, 1994; Pica, Kang, & Sauro, 2006). The form-focused peer report and feedback, on the other hand, were aimed at raising students' awareness of L2 structures during task activities. Furthermore, the tasks were designed to combine both speaking and writing activities as this has been shown to help facilitate L2 learning (Azkarai & Mayo 2015; Storch, 2007). The tasks were designed in line with recommendations taken from task-based language teaching (TBLT) studies cited throughout this paper.

Participants and Procedures

The tasks under investigation in this study were implemented in the spring semester of 2015 in an elective L2-German course designed at the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) A2 level. The course consisted of three 90-minute teaching units per week. The participants were 17 second-year students with different majors, all with an equivalent CEFR level of A1. The course was aimed at comprehensively improving the learners' L2 knowledge by placing equal emphasis on speaking, listening, reading, and writing activities.

Each of the three weekly teaching units was conducted by a different teacher: one native speaker of German and two native speakers of Japanese. Regardless of the native language of the teachers, both German and Japanese were used for classroom instructions. However, all of the teachers tried to use the target language as much as possible and to resort to the learners' L1 only when it was deemed necessary to ensure comprehension. The learners were allowed to use either German or Japanese for classroom communication except for during speaking activities that were explicitly aimed at practicing L2 structures and expressions.

During the collaborative interview and feedback tasks, the students were asked to use as much German as possible but were allowed to resort to their L1 if it was necessary to ensure fulfilment of the tasks. The tasks were carried out in pairs during the first 20 to 25 minutes of each class and made up a quarter of the total instruction time. The characteristics of each of the interconnected subtasks of (1) peer interview, (2) peer report, and (3) peer feedback are displayed in Table 1, each of which was carried out on a different weekday.

Table 1. Weekly Tasks

1. Peer interview	2. Peer report	3. Peer feedback
• students interview partners with provided questions • students make notes of partners' answers	• students write reports on partners based on notes • teacher highlights mistakes in students' reports	• students identify mistake types in their partners' texts and give suggestions for correction

As can be seen in Table 1, each task started with a peer interview, for which the students received a worksheet containing five questions. In the first class of each week, students interviewed their partners and made notes about their partners' answers. In the second class, the students had to write a report on their partner based on their responses in the interview. This peer report was submitted to the classroom teacher, who then highlighted mistakes in the students' texts. In the third class, these texts were returned to the students, who were then asked to exchange their texts with a new partner and to give them suggestions for correcting the mistakes highlighted by the teacher. In order to allow students to use the target language as much as possible during the peer interview and feedback, they received expressions in German to ask for help or clarification, to refer to grammatical categories and mistake types, and to provide feedback for correction.

The tasks were introduced carefully in the students' L1 and conducted exactly the same way every week. The topics chosen for the tasks followed the content of the class' textbook *Schritte International 3* (Hilpert et al., 2006). This was done to ensure that the students were able to see the tasks as a logical component of their lessons. In total, 10 different topics were covered in the course: self-introductions, family, my home, private invitations, meals, health, work, learning, hygiene, and sports.

Task performance data was collected for the 10 weeks in which these topics were being covered. The number and types of data used for each subtask as well as characteristics of the analysis are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Data Analysis

Task	*n*	Data type	Data analysis
Interview	80	transcriptions of recordings	Frequency of L1 use in on task and pro task utterances by means of a word count
Feedback	78	transcriptions of recordings	Pro task functions: (1) corrections, (2) comments, (3) 3 Cs, (4) LREs, (5) task talk
Report	170	learner texts	Calculation of mistake types according to 10 predefined categories

As can be seen in Table 2, the peer interview and the peer feedback were recorded and transcribed. Japanese utterances were transcribed in the Roman script (*romaji)* in order to compare their length more easily to German utterances. After transcribing the audio data, utterances were assigned to the predefined categories of *on task* or *pro task*. *On task* refers to utterances that are required to fulfil the task. In the peer interview, these were the questions provided for each task and the answers formulated by the students. As an example, in topic 2 *family* (see Table 4), on task utterances were exchanges like "Do you have any brothers or sisters?," "Yes, I have one brother and two sisters." In the peer feedback, the on task utterances consisted of the students' suggestions for correction, for example "I think this is a tense mistake. It should be 'he read' instead of 'he readed'" as well as their partners' acknowledgements such as "Oh, I see!" The category of *pro task,* on the other hand, which was divided into five subcategories, refers to spontaneous digressions from the task, which have the function of supporting task fulfilment, for example, when learners make interactional adjustments by repeating or modifying utterances to make comprehensible to others (Foster & Ohta, 2005; Jacobs & Kimura, 2013). In this study, pro task utterances were divided into five different functions:

1. corrections, in which students correct their own or their partner's inaccurate utterances as in "Once a week I cook *home, no not home,* at my house";
2. comments to express surprise ("Oh, really?"), doubt ("I'm not sure!"), agreement ("You're right!"), or disagreement ("I don't think so"), and so on;
3. the *3 Cs* identified by Long (1980), in which learners seek to ensure their comprehension through *comprehension* checks like "Do you understand X?," *confirmation* checks as in "Did you say X?," or *clarification* requests such as "What does X mean?";
4. so-called *language related episodes* (LREs; Swain & Lapkin, 1998), which are metalinguistic utterances in which students reflect on lexis ("How do you say X in German?"), grammar ("What's the past tense of X?"), or pronunciation of the L2 ("How do you pronounce X?"); and
5. task talk, which are utterances regarding the fulfilment of the task itself as, for example, "Whose turn is it?" or "Do we have to read this aloud?" (Leeming, 2011).

In order to investigate students' opinions on the appropriateness and effectiveness of the tasks developed, a postcourse survey was carried out with participants, the results of which are outside the scope of this paper and can be found in Harting (2016).

Results

A word count was used to determine the proportion of on task and pro task utterances within the weekly interview and feedback sessions. With an average of 175 words, the interview sessions were considerably longer than the feedback sessions that had an average length of 116 words. However, the feedback sessions had larger standard deviations (*SD* = 38 words) than the interviews (*SD* = 32 words), which can be attributed to the variance in the number of mistakes that needed to be corrected during the feedback sessions. In order to determine the degree to which students resorted to their L1 during task performance, the proportion of Japanese utterances was also calculated for the individual interview and feedback sessions. The calculated proportions of on task and pro task utterances (on task + pro task = 100%) per topic for the interview and feedback tasks respectively are listed in Table 3, as well as the proportions of L1 use within them.

Table 3. Use of L1 in Peer Interview and Peer Feedback

Weekly topics	Interview				Feedback			
	on task		pro task		on task		pro task	
	Total	L1	Total	L1	Total	L1	Total	L1
1. Self-introductions	67%	0%	33%	13%	91%	0%	9%	7%
2. Family	68%	2%	32%	28%	82%	6%	18%	24%
3. My home	80%	4%	20%	58%	70%	5%	30%	33%
4. Private invitations	68%	2%	32%	54%	66%	8%	34%	20%
5. Meals	83%	1%	17%	81%	66%	5%	34%	9%
6. Health	77%	2%	23%	19%	73%	10%	27%	44%
7. Work	66%	4%	34%	31%	81%	8%	19%	49%
8. Learning	74%	3%	26%	54%	79%	9%	21%	56%
9. Hygiene	83%	3%	17%	49%	78%	7%	22%	59%
10. Sports	85%	3%	15%	49%	88%	3%	12%	67%
Averages	75%	2%	25%	43%	77%	6%	23%	37%

As can be seen in Table 3, about three quarters of students' utterances in both the peer interviews as well as the peer feedback related to the fulfilment of the task itself (on task). In the content-focused peer interviews, these utterances consisted of the interview questions provided and the students' answers. In total, the on task utterances only contained an average of 2% of Japanese and did not exceed an average of 4% Japanese for any of the individual topics. The average length of the whole interview was 175 words, and the Japanese utterances usually constituted only a few words of the total. Likewise, the on task utterances in the form-focused peer feedback, for which L2 expressions were also provided, were almost exclusively carried out in the target language with a total L1 average of only 6%, ranging between 0 and 10% for each of the individual topics. Qualitative analysis showed that the Japanese used in on task utterances mostly consisted of single lexical items or expressions for which the students did not have an L2 equivalent on hand.

For pro task utterances, on the other hand, which appeared in about a quarter of the peer interviews and feedback sessions, students resorted to their L1 quite extensively. In the peer interviews, the percentage of L1 use amounted to 44%, and in the peer feedback it was also more than a third. For some topics, more than half of the pro task utterances were in Japanese; in the peer interviews those topics were *meals, my home, private invitations,* and *learning*, and in the peer feedback they were *learning, hygiene,* and *sports.* As was found through the qualitative analysis of students' Japanese utterances, it was not the difficulty of the individual topics that prompted them to resort to their L1, but rather the fact that they encountered lexical or grammatical gaps when formulating their ideas.

As far as the use of the L1 is concerned, the pro task utterances are of particular interest, because they provide insight into the difficulties students' can have with task performance. For that purpose, a qualitative analysis of the 80 interviews and 78 feedback sessions was carried out to determine to what degree the five pro task functions investigated in this analysis appeared in these tasks. The percentages of the appearance of the individual subcategories in the interview and feedback sessions are listed in Table 4. In the following discussion of the findings, quotations from the peer interviews and feedback sessions will be presented to illustrate how the L1 is used within these functions. Each quotation is followed by a code, which refers to the topic (1-10) and the task (I = interview; F = feedback) the utterance was taken from.

Table 4. Pro Task Utterances in Interview & Feedback Tasks

Function	Subtype	Interview	Feedback
Correction	Self correction	41%	40%
	Partner correction	14%	9%
Comments	Acknowledgement, surprise	66%	12%
	Other comments	14%	19%
Understanding (3 Cs)	Comprehension checks	4%	1%
	Confirmation checks	8%	6%
	Clarification requests	23%	10%
Language related episodes (LREs)	Lexis	49%	28%
	Grammar	6%	18%
	Pronunciation	5%	6%
Task talk		24%	51%

As can be seen in Table 4, self-corrections were quite common in both the peer interviews and feedback sessions. Most of these contained an L1 expression, such as *chigau* [that's wrong] or *ja nakute* [not that, but] to indicate the correction, as in "*Wir treffen bei meine Hause, chigau, mir zu Hause* [We meet at mine house, no, my house]" (I.4) or "*Punkt ja nakute, Komma* [not a period, but a comma]" (F.10). In some cases such self-corrections were triggered by partners' questions, as in: "*Wo ist deine Mutter von Beruf? – Wo? – Was ist deine Mutter von Beruf?* [Where is your mother's job? – Where? – What is your mother's job?]" (I.2). Similarly, corrections of partners' utterances were mostly instigated by the partners themselves: "*Für welche Fäck- , nante yomun da? – Fächer! – Fächer must du am meisten lernen?* [For which sub-, how do you read that? – Subjects! – subjects do you have to study most?]" (I. 8), or by leaving an utterance unfinished as in: "*Ich glaube, das hier ist ein Zeichense- – Zeichensetzungsfehler? – Ja, Zeichensetzungsfehler* [I think, this is a punc- – Punctuation mistake? – Yes, a punctuation mistake!]" (F.3).

Comments, which in most cases were expressions of surprise or acknowledgment, appeared quite frequently in the peer interviews. They were mostly realised by L2 expressions, such as *echt* or *wirklich*, both meaning *really*, as in "*Ich spiele gern Schlaginstrument! – Ah, wirklich?* [I like to play drums – Oh, really?]" (I.1). Other comments were rather rare. In the peer feedback, they mostly served to verbalize thoughts, as in *"Kore nan dakke?* [What was that again?]" (F.4), or to request some time to formulate thoughts, as in "*Und, matte!, und ich glaube, das hier ist ein, matte ne!, Satzstellungsfehler* [And . . ., wait!, I think this is a . . ., wait please!, word order mistake]" (F.8). As these examples show, unlike in the peer interviews, in the peer feedback sessions such comments were mostly carried out in the students' L1.

Among the *3 Cs* identified by Long (1980), clarification requests were by far the most common. These were either realised by L2 expressions, as in "*Was heißt 'ungefähr'?* [What does *approximately* mean?]" (I.7), or by resorting to the L1, as in "*Ich glaube, das hier ist ein Tempusfehler! – Dore?* [I think this is a tense mistake. – Which one?]" (F.4). Rather rare were confirmation checks, which were mostly realised by repeating the requested item with rising intonation, as in "*Du könntest vielleicht 'Packung' schreiben. – Packung? – 'Packung' schreiben* [You might write 'package' – Package? – Write Package" (F.8) or by an L2 expression such as "*Wie bitte?* [Come again!]" (I.4), or the sound "*Nn?*" (I.2), which is typically used in Japanese to ensure understanding. Equally rare were comprehension checks, for which, in most cases, L2 expressions were used, as in "*Hast du verstanden?* [Did you understand?]" (F.2) or "*Alles klar?* [Alright?]" (I.3). However, some students also resorted to their L1, as in "*Ich jobbe bei einer Kneipe, wakaru?, auf Japanisch izakaya* [I have a part time job in a bar, do you understand? – in Japanese bar]" (I.7).

In some cases, communication difficulties led students to longer digressions from the task and reflections on their language use. Most of the so-called LREs found in the data addressed lexical rather than grammatical or pronunciation problems. In almost half of the peer interviews and in more than a quarter of the peer feedback sessions, lexical problems were tackled. In most cases, the students resorted to their L1 in search of L2 lexical items, as can be seen in the following example:

A: "*Nante iuka wakaranai . . . Tsunageru te nante iuno?* [I don't know how to say, how do you say *to combine*?]"
B: "*Tsunageru? Doko?* [*to combine*, where?]"
A: "*Musubitsukeru, dakara, richtig müsste, chigau, hier japanische Lehrerin. Du musst 'japanische' und 'Lehrerin' binden* [to combine, it must be . . ., no, you must put Japanese and teacher together]" (F.7.)

In this example, it can also be understood that, although students resort to their L1 to define the problem, they also draw on their L2 repertoire for finding the solution. Compared to discussions on lexical gaps, LREs on grammatical problems were comparatively rare. However, they appeared three times as often in the peer feedback sessions as in the peer interviews. The following example is an LRE on the use of the correct article:

A: "*Was hast du in deinem Zimmer?* [What do you have in your room?]"
B: "*Ich habe ein – kanshi iru? ein?* [I have a . . ., do you need an article? a?]"
A: "*Ah, iru kamo* [I think so]."
B: "*Kanshi ga wakaranain dakeredomo,* ein *dotchi dakke beddo te dotchi da,* eine, *mou* ein *de ii ya.* [I don't know the article for bed, *ein* or *eine* maybe *ein* is ok]."
A: "*Un un un!* [Yes, yes!]"
B: "*Ein Bett, ein Kühlschrank, ein Regal.* [A bed, a shelf, and a refrigerator]" (I.3)

Pronunciation difficulties were brought up even less frequently. Even though the actual pronunciation problem is not solved in the following example, it demonstrates how such LREs may provide opportunities for authentic L2 use.

A: "*Und das . . ., nante yomu no?* [And this, how do you pronounce that?]"
B: "*wakarimasen* [I don't know!]"
A: "*Tut mir leid, ich weiß nicht* [I don't know, I'm sorry.]"
B: "*Kein Problem!* [That's OK]" (F.6)

As can be seen in the examples above, such LREs may have the potential to enhance L2 acquisition even if learners draw on their L1, because reflection on L2 vocabulary and structures allows learners to shift their attention to the properties of the target language that they have not yet mastered (Foster & Ohta, 2005; Jacobs & Kimura, 2013; Storch, 2007).

The final function among the pro task utterances is task talk, which was twice as frequent in the peer feedback sessions as in the peer interviews, suggesting that the former posed more strategic problems to students. In comparison to the interview task, which was rather straightforward inasmuch as students were provided with a fixed set of questions that simply had to be answered, the fulfilment of the feedback task required more negotiation as to how the feedback was given.

In order to tackle such problems students relied heavily upon their L1, as in: "*Kore wo kurikaeseba ii no?* [Do we have to repeat that?]" (I.3) or "*Zenbu tobashite ii kana? – Un!* [Can we skip all of that? – Yes!]" (F.9). Most of these metatask utterances referred to the way in which the two partners structured their discourse, as in the following example: "*Boku wa kikareru mae ni kotaechatta – Un, gomen, kikitorenakatta!* [I answered before I was asked – Ah, sorry I didn't hear that]" (I.8).

Summary and Discussion

The results of this study show some valuable insights into how German L2 learners at level CEFR A1 resort to using their L1 within collaborative interviews and feedback tasks aimed at improving their fluency and their knowledge about L2 structures. As far as the frequency and functions of L1 use in the peer interviews and the peer feedback sessions were concerned, the quantitative findings indicate that learners almost exclusively used their L2 for utterances aimed at fulfilling the actual tasks (on task). This may be due to the fact that for both the content-focused peer interviews and the form-focused peer feedback, L2 expressions for task performance were provided. For pro task utterances, on the other hand, students resorted to their L1 quite extensively. About a quarter of the peer interviews and the peer feedback sessions were dedicated to such pro task utterances (see Table 3), which fulfilled functions such as solving communication problems, reflecting on L2 vocabulary and structures, and tackling difficulties with task fulfilment.

In the peer feedback sessions, the average L1 percentage within such pro task utterances was more than a third, and in the peer interviews it was as high as 44%. In particular, for functions that might require longer exchanges, such as LREs or task talk, learners relied quite extensively on their L1. However, task talk does not contribute to L2 learning, unless it is actually performed *in* the L2, which was rarely the case in this study. The need for exchanges on task fulfilment could have been avoided by creating a simple task design and by giving clear instructions of how to perform the task. As for LREs, however, there is no need for teachers to limit this type of L1 use, because this allows learners to become aware of their L2 weaknesses.

The fact that L2 German learners at the A1 level resort to their L1 while performing collaborative tasks seems to be inevitable. This is because their L2 repertoire is too limited to solve problems that naturally occur in such exchanges. However, this should not be a cause of concern. The use of the learners' L1 in the classroom fulfills important cognitive and social functions. Also, instances in which learners draw on their L1 to tackle problems or to facilitate communication can provide teachers with valuable insights into learners' weaknesses and may help them to improve or alter their instruction.

Throughout this paper, I have only looked at students' L1 and L2 usage during their performance of collaborative interview and feedback tasks. Whether or not the students' reliance on their L1 when completing such tasks was beneficial for their L2 learning cannot be determined based on this data alone. Furthermore, because of the limited scope of this study, I can only make claims about a particular learner group in a particular teaching context based on the descriptive results presented here. Further research is needed in order to arrive at a deeper understanding about what types of L1 usage can be considered a barrier to language acquisition and which can be seen as benefitting L2 learning. In particular, there is a need for both comparative as well as longitudinal studies on this topic.

Bio Data

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