Learning to participate through interaction

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This paper will present a sociocultural view of classroom EFL learning at the primary level, suggesting that language learning is the process of becoming a participant in the community of the language-learning classroom. Discourse data reveals patterns in which rich affordance is provided and through which pupils are invited to participate in language learning activity. The study concludes by linking Rogoff's participation metaphor to the EFL classroom-learning context.

本論文は、社会文化論的な立場から小学校での教室でのEFL学習の理解に取り組み、言語学習は教室というコミュニティーの参加者になる過程であるという見解を提案する。談話データから、児童が言語学習活動の参加に誘われる豊かなアフォーダンスが現れる過程が明らかになる。Rogoffのparticipation　metaphorが EFL学習においても適応できることが結論づけられる。

This paper presents a sociocultural view of classroom language learning and teaching which recognizes the importance of community activity and language use. The paper explores the possibility of illuminating the teaching and learning process from a participation perspective (Rogoff, 1990; Sfard, 1998). In doing so, an ecological perspective is adopted to analyze the complexity of interaction in the classroom, interaction that creates learning opportunities for learners to become participants of the classroom community. Analysis of a storytelling activity in a Japanese primary EFL classroom is conducted, revealing the process of developing language use and participation through affordances (Gibson, 1979).

Theoretical framework

Participation metaphor and acquisition metaphor: Ontological differences

Sociocultural theory has brought a new perspective to English language teaching, shedding light on social and contextual influences on language learning (cf. Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Appel, 1994). Owing

to ontological differences, two conflicting views have developed regarding the nature of learning (Larsen-Freeman, 2002). While a mainstream individual and cognitive perspective was previously dominant, an alternative situated view of language learning has been increasingly evident. The mainstream perspective views learning as an accumulation of entities by individuals, namely grammatical rules and structures in language learning. Once knowledge is acquired, it is transferred to a different context. On the other hand, the alternative perspective shifts the focus to activity and language use within activity. The alternative perspective regards learning as the development of individuals as socially constituted members of a community, with "the ability to communicate in the language of the community and act according to the norms and values of the community the learner belongs to" (Sfard, 1998, p. 6). This suggests that there is no fixed end point and learning is relational, defined as "taking part and becoming part of a greater whole" (Larsen-Freeman, 2002, p. 37). It also suggests that in order to illuminate the process of language learning, there is need for a research focus on activity and language use. Sfard (1998) describes the above two perspectives as two different metaphors; the mainstream view, the *acquisition metaphor*, and the alternative view, the *participation metaphor*. It is the latter view, a participation metaphor, that this paper adopts in an attempt to illuminate the complex practice of classroom EFL teaching and learning.

"Guided participation"

Making use of a participation perspective, Rogoff (1990) observed informal everyday social situations in which a toddler develops an understanding of and skills in cultural practices with the assistance of a caregiver. According to Rogoff, child development occurs through active participation in culturally structured activities in which the child learns and extends the skills, values, and knowledge of the community, helped by companion adults. Child development is realized by the parent or a caregiver structuring activities. Rogoff refers to this process as one of "guided participation". Additionally, fine-tuned interpersonal communication assists the child's learning. It is a process of communication in which people come to share the common values and practices of the community (Rogoff, Mistry, Goncu, & Mosier, 1993).

Transformation of participation

Rogoff's (1990) study is significant as it demonstrates how learning can be understood as participation. From a participation perspective (Rogoff, 1990; Sfard, 1998), development is seen not only as cognitive but also as taking an increasingly independent and responsible role in an activity of a community. Examining various sociocultural activities including basket weaving in a Mayan family, Rogoff revealed how children eventually managed to do things independently. From the study it is evident that learning took place as participation and involved a gradual shift away from reliance on adults to a learner's independent actions and thinking.

Rogoff's study also reveals what makes guided participation an efficient means for the child to learn the skills and understanding of the community. This, she argues, is a result of authenticity and pragmatic engagement created

by sociocultural activities in which the child participates. The activities are real and authentic to the child so the learner can see herself participating and see the value in doing so in the everyday activity of the community. As a result the child is more motivated and participation becomes engaged, bringing about successful and efficient learning. Children come to share societal values, intellectual tools, and cultural institutions through interaction while engaged in the activity of the community.

Ecological perspective

An ecological perspective of learning (e.g., van Lier, 2000, 2002, 2004) also recognizes the importance of interaction and context, in line with the participation perspective. It is concerned with complex relationships between properties of the environment as they come into contact and interact with each other (Gibson, 1979). An ecological perspective in language learning regards learning as relational and involves making effective use of the environment (van Lier, 2000). It is a perspective in which the learner is immersed in an environment full of potential learning opportunities and learning emerges from interaction of properties in the environment, making use of *affordance* (Gibson, 1979). Affordance here is used to mean a particular property of an environment that is relevant to the learner for taking further action. Gibson (1979) gives an example of how a chair may provide an affordance. If the surface of a chair has the physical properties of being horizontal, flat, rigid and knee-high relative to a person in need of sitting and who perceives its suitability for the purpose, the complementary relationship creates an affordance. The implications for the EFL classroom are that four distinctive elements of affordance can be identified. These are: a) properties of the learning environment such as tasks, activities, teacher's assistance, and peer assistance; b) the learner's goal; c) the learner's perception; and d) the learner's readiness. For an affordance to emerge in the classroom, these must complement one another so that the learner is able to take action to participate in an activity. Thus an ecological perspective is concerned with clarifying the totality of relationships within an environment and the emergence of learning. The implication is that for the researcher an examination of the process of the learner making use of affordances would contribute to understanding the process of learning through interaction and learner participation.

Research implication

The theory of guided participation implies that an examination of classroom interaction and affordances would be an effective way to illuminate the process of classroom EFL learning and teaching. That is, it can be assumed that activities real and meaningful to children in the classroom with appropriate mediation may promote efficient learning and active participation. In addition, the analysis of participation forms would reveal the identities of the community including the expectations, values, and norms of the community. Thus it is the aim of this paper to examine the applicability of guided participation to classroom EFL learning through analysis of affordances.

Research design

In order to examine how guided participation can be used to understand practice in a primary EFL classroom, a close analysis was carried out on classroom discourse. Data was taken from a Year 3 Japanese primary EFL class. Storytelling making use of a story called *Enormous turnip* was chosen, as the story appears to be enjoyable for children and the activity framework encourages active pupil participation. How the learner develops language use and participation is revealed by identifying affordance emerging through complex interaction.

Transcribed classroom interaction was first assigned with categories of educational functions (cf. Cameron, 2002; Ohashi, 2005). Three properties of the classroom environment that lead to the emergence of affordances were identified by examining these educational functions. The three properties consist of (1) intended learning, (2) pre-planned activity structuring by the teachers, and (3) contingent interpersonal communication between the teachers and pupils, and between pupils. Finally, the process of interaction of the properties was analyzed to identify emergence of language use and participation.

Identifying guided participation

Analysis of guided participation is attempted using two excerpts from storytelling. Storytelling is a regular activity in the class. A native speaker teacher and a Japanese teacher team-teach. They adopt a procedure of *joint* storytelling requiring a high degree of active pupil participation due to the activity framework. As the native speaker teacher reads the story to the class, he tells the class that he has forgotten words and asks the class to help him by providing words and phrases. Both teachers assist the class to understand the story and to promote transformation of participation in the activity by providing help.

Excerpt 1

After introducing the story, the native speaker teacher (TS) starts to read the story and then stops to elicit the new word *turnip* by pretending he has forgotten the word. (See Appendix for transcript conventions)

Excerpt 1. Storytelling—*The Enormous Turnip*

	Utterances	Educational functions
1	TS: **the man is hungry. he wants to eat the**	T3.2 Elicit specific info.
2	((points at the turnip))	T6 Clue
3	P?: ((unint.))	P?
4	TS: forgot ((uses a gesture for forgetting))	T3.2 Elicit info. T6 Clue
5	P?: ((laugh))	P2.2 Provide info: feeling
6	TS: what is it	T3.2 Elicit specific info.
7	TT: turnip turnip ((whisper with singing tone))	T5.2 Model: complete
8	Sachiko: [turnip]	P1.1 Provide info.
9	TS: oh. thank you. turnip	T11.1 Feedback
10	P?: *what is* turnip	P8.2 Elicit unknown info.
11	Tomoya: *it's turnip*	P1.1 Provide info.
12	TS: **the man holds the**... ((uses a gesture for	T3.2 Elicit info.
13	pulling out the turnip))	T6 Clue
14	Sachiko: turnip	P1.1 Provide info.

15	TS: very good.	T11.1 Feedback
16	Daisuke: Cabrella ((a name of an American	P2.4 Provide info
17	baseball player. Cabu is a Japanese word for	
18	turnip))	

This is the first time the pupils have encountered the word *turnip*. The native speaker teacher provides careful support to prompt pupil participation. He first elicits with a rising intonation, pointing at the picture of a turnip (L.1-2). Then he elicits indirectly by saying he has forgotten the word (L.4). Still the pupils cannot provide the word. Finally, the Japanese teacher (TT) models an answer by whispering (L.7). Immediately Sachiko provides the answer (L.8). The affordances created in this excerpt are analyzed as follows, identifying the three properties of the environment.

Intended learning

The intended learning in this excerpt is learning the new word, "turnip" by noticing the sound and the meaning of the new word and using it in context. The teachers set a clear goal as intended learning and this will be achieved by appropriate support provided by the teachers as (2) activity structuring and (3) contingent communication.

Pre-planned activity structuring

The teacher's assistance appears first as structuring of the activity, joint story telling by asking for help to complete the activity (L.1-6). To achieve this, the pupils provide the missing words. This way of teacher elicitation creates pupil need for meaningful and active engagement. It is also a non-threatening way of elicitation and inviting active participation compared with direct questions.

Contingent interpersonal communication

The teachers' assistance appears as interpersonal communication as required. This is teacher support resulting from responsiveness to pupil need, for example, through the use of a picture (L.2), gesture (L.4), and modeling of the correct word (L.7). The data shows that Sachiko makes use of the assistance to successfully provide the missing word, although her performance is heavily assisted. The pupils appear to benefit from peer interaction as they help each other voluntarily (L.10-11).

Emergence of language use and participation

No pupils have immediate success in this extract. Although Sachiko successfully makes use of the opportunities and provides the missing word (L.8), a majority of the pupils are unable to do so. This means the pupils at this stage require heavy assistance and their participation is still dependent on the teachers. However, this is not to deny that learning is not taking place. As the activity develops, the pupils succeed in providing the required information, the word "turnip" and the characters who pulled the turnip. This suggests that the affordance in this excerpt creates a delayed effect and in fact learning may be happening internally, which enabled the pupils' later success.

Excerpt 2

After Extract 1, the teachers elicited more difficult language use. As well as "turnip" and names of the characters who pulled the turnip, the teachers elicited the phrase "come and help", which frequently appeared in the story and the pupils successfully provided the phrase. In the following excerpt another pupil also succeeded in providing the phrase, "hurry up", which are her own words and do not occur in the story.

Excerpt 2. Storytelling—*The Enormous Turnip*

	Utterances	Educational Functions
1	TS: the girl says to the cat,	T3.1 Elicitation
2	P?: hurry up	P2.3 Providing information
3	P?: come and help	P1.1 Providing information
4	TS: ((laugh))	T11.1.1 Feedback?
5	TT: ((laugh))	T11.1.1 Feedback?
6	TS: hurry up. good.	T11.1.3 Feedback
7	TT: good	T11.1.1 Feedback
8	TS: come and help good	T11.1.3 Feedback
9	P?: come and help	P3.1 Repeat
10	P?: come and help	P3.1 Repeat

Intended learning

This excerpt also shows that the teachers have a clear focus on the intended outcome. The teachers try to elicit the phrase "come and help", which appears frequently in the book. This framework is meant for the pupils (1) to understand the story and predict the storyline and (2) to learn the phrase "come and help" by noticing the meaning and using it in context.

Pre-planned activity structuring

The same activity framework used in Excerpt 1 is used here as well. The teachers ask for pupil assistance to provide the missing information to complete the story as joint storytelling. This again creates pragmatic engagement and assists pupils to take part in the activity. It is noticeable here that the teacher's choice of the book is observed to contribute to creation of learning opportunities. As the following analysis reveals, the discourse of the storybook is assisting pupil learning. The repetitive use of language (e.g., "come and help") is effective, as it provides plenty of opportunities to hear language use. The story also contains a predictable repetition of events with a little surprise at the end. It is a discourse with which the pupils feel secure and find fun (Cameron, 2001). This absorbs the pupils and engages them in the story, creating an opportunity for initiating creative language use ("hurry up" in L2).

Contingent interpersonal communication

Excerpt 2 does not contain contingent interpersonal assistance from the teachers. However, it can be argued that such assistance may also come from peer pupils. The language use of peers can also be considered as contingent interpersonal communication. As they listen to their peers' language use as a model, pupils may benefit and this therefore contributes to their learning.

Emergence of language use and participation

Excerpt two reveals that the pupils assumed a more independent role in their participation than Excerpt 1. Pupils

are using the required new phrase, "come and help" (L.3, 8, 9, 10). Additionally, a pupil provides her own phrase "hurry up", which is pragmatically correct, before the desired phrase is given. This is an example of contingently appearing opportunities. This is something the teacher did not plan and is an example of the pupil's own voice emerging from her own active agency. The whole context has contributed to this happening. The activity framework creates real pragmatic engagement, the assistance is effective and usable, the discourse of the story meaningful and interesting. All help the pupil to produce the phrase "hurry up". This successful production of creative language use by the child appears to be a very active form of participation.

Excerpt 3

At the end of the joint storytelling activity, all the characters pulling the turnip are elicited. The pupils jointly tell the story in chorus, managing to provide all the names of the characters that pull the turnip. One pupil, Tomoya, even starts to say not only the names of the characters but also whole sentences together with the teacher. He appears to be taking over the teacher's role. As the same type of *Intended learning*, *Pre-planned activity structuring* and *Contingent interpersonal communications* as in the previous excerpts are observed in Excerpt 3, only the dimension of *Emergence of language use and participation* is described in the following.

Excerpt 3. Storytelling—*The Enormous Turnip*

	Utterances	Educational functions
1	TS: **the mouse, pulls the**, ((points at the picture))	T3.2 Reading/Eliciting info.
2	Pp: cat	P1.2 Providing information
3	TS: **the cat pulls the**, ((points at the picture))	T3.2 Reading/Eliciting info.
4	Tomoya: [the cat holds the]	P1.2 Providing information
5	Pp: dog	P1.2 Providing information
6	TS: **the dog pulls the**, ((points at the picture))	T3.2 Reading/Eliciting info.
7	Tomoya: [the dog holds the]	P1.2 Providing information
8	Pp: girl	P1.2 Providing information
9	TS: **the girl pulls the**, ((points at the picture))	T3.2 Reading/Eliciting info.
10	Tomoya: [the girl pulls the]	P1.2 Providing information
11	TTPp: boy	P1.2 Providing information
12	TS: **the boy pulls the,** ((points at the picture))	T3.2 Reading/Eliciting info.
13	Tomoya :[the boy pulls the]	P1.2 Providing information
14	TTPp: woman	P1.2 Providing information
15	TS: **the woman pulls the**, ((points at the picture))	T3.2 Reading/Eliciting info.
16	TTPp: man	P1.2 Providing information
17	Daisuke : [*old man*]	P1.2 Providing information
18	TS: **the man pulls the,** ((points at the picture))	T3.2 Reading/Eliciting info.
19	Tomoya: [the man pulls the]	P1.2 Providing information
20	TTPp: turnip	P1.2 Providing information

Emergence of language use and participation

Of particular note is Tomoya's performance. For Tomoya, the activity provides an opportunity to be a more responsible

and autonomous participant. In the learning environment created by the teachers, he finds a different aim to subvert the teacher's intended goal and initiate his own goal of providing whole sentences rather than simply the words required. Tomoya successfully manages to carry out his own intended actions.

Discussion and implications

The analysis above reveals a change in pupil participation. The pupils learned to use the intended language to take part in the activity of the classroom. Making use of the language, the pupils were able to take more responsible roles. This transformation of participation was achieved as pupils made use of the assistance teachers provided as structuring as needed while the pupils were engaged in the activity. Therefore observed transformation appears to support the participation perspective in which learning is perceived as guided participation.

If learning is seen as participation, then it might be thought correct to view guided participation in the EFL classroom as similar in type to the guided participation encountered by Rogoff in daily sociocultural activities. However, such an application is not straightforward. The nature of guided participation as found in the EFL classroom is different from that of Rogoff's guided participation. First, the participants are different. In Rogoff's informal daily activities the participants are parents and children. However, in EFL classroom activities, the participants are teachers and pupils. Secondly, while the activities and the communities in Rogoff's study are real and pre-existing, the activities and the communities of the formal EFL setting are created by the teachers, are classroom specific, and do not exist outside school. Finally the purpose of the activities in Rogoff's study is full participation in the real existing community, but the purpose of the EFL classroom is to become participants of the classroom with a language learning focus. Thus, the adoption of authentic activities from real English speaking communities may not create learner interests and engagement, as the pupils in the EFL context usually do not have opportunities to participate in activities in English speaking communities and may not know what real authentic activities are like. These differences mean that the EFL classroom, due to its context, does not and cannot produce authenticity in activities of real English speaking communities and pupils who are expert users in *that* context. A gap inevitably exists between the sociocultural world outside the classroom and the EFL learning context of the classroom. A comparison of the two differing contexts is provided in Table 1 as follows:

Table 1. A comparison of contexts in the sociocultural world and the EFL classroom

	Rogoff's sociocultural community	EFL Classroom community
Participants	• Parents, caregivers (Expert) • Young children (Novice)	• Teacher (Expert) • Pupils (Novice)
Community	Real life communities	Does not exist outside school.
Activities	Real, pre-existing activities	Created by the teacher, classroom specific
Purposes	Full participation in the community	Language learning in focus

However, authenticity is not just about using activities in English speaking communities. What makes an activity authentic is the sense of relevance and meaningfulness for the participants (Widdowson, 1998). Thus the EFL classroom could create a different type of authenticity in activities, one that differs from authenticity in real English speaking communities.

The EFL classroom is capable of creating authenticity and pragmatic engagement in activities by paying attention to imagined communities (Kanno & Norton, 2003). As is seen in the analysis of the storytelling activities, the pupils in this study were observed to be actively engaged, suggesting that the activities were real and meaningful to them. According to Kanno and Norton, direct engagement in communities in tangible and accessible relationships is not the only way for an individual to belong to a community. Imagination is an additional way by which an individual is able to affiliate with communities transcending time and space. In particular, children love fantasies and live in imagination. Thus the world of a fairly-tale like story (*Enormous Turnip*) used in the classroom may be real in the pupils' imagined world and result in pupils' active participation.

The implication of the above is that selection of activities and tasks can play a significant role in fostering pupil engagement. If an imagined community associated with fun and engagement is as real to a young learner as a real life community, the teachers need to take greater notice of how this can be called upon to benefit the learning experience. It is the task of the teacher to judge how best to stimulate pupil interest by introducing aspects of English and English speaking culture likely to appeal to pupil interests and motivations by appealing to their interests and building motivation to access the real community. What "guided participation" does in the EFL classroom is perhaps inevitably to guide the pupils towards becoming an expert user in the classroom community. The challenge for teachers is to help them cope with the real English using world by finding ways to bridge the gap between the EFL classroom and authentic communities.

The participatory storytelling technique adopted in the data appears to be an approach suitable for English language teaching within the "Integrated Study" period recently mandated by *Mombukagakusho* (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) in Japan. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2001), the purpose of English activities within an "International Understanding" segment of "Integrated Study" is to foster interests and a desire to use English with the goals of "International Understanding" to "develop the qualities and abilities essential for leading responsible, proactive lives, while having an awareness of themselves in a wider international society" (p. 121). An instructional technique based on participation theory aims at transformation of participation in which children are motivated to learn to take responsibility for their contribution to their own learning and the classroom community. The children learn the knowledge and skills of the community as they collaborate with each other and adults in carrying out activities in the community. If the teacher can successfully create a community of classroom learning bridging the wider world, the participatory instructional model appears to be one that meets the expectations currently held for EFL teaching in Japan.

Conclusion

There remains a challenge for teachers to understand the nature of the formal classroom community and to investigate ways to create an effective learning environment. However, by adopting a participation perspective, this study demonstrates an alternative way to illuminate EFL classroom practice. The participation perspective is beneficial as it reveals how effective teaching and learning can emerge as the result of active learner engagement and teacher assistance. Analysis from a participation perspective is also valuable owing to its holistic focus, paying attention to the wider contextual factors including imagined communities beyond the individual cognitive factors in learning.

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Appendix 1. Transcript conventions

The transcription made use of the following conventions.

. .. …	A pause of roughly one second; different numbers of dots indicate shorter or longer pauses.
: :: :::	Prolonged sound
,	Slight rising tone
?	Rising tone
italics	Utterances in L1
bold typeface	Reading text
[	Overlapping speech
((unint)) ((laughter))	Unintelligible utterances, or comments about the transcript, including non-verbal actions
T	Teacher
TT	Mrs T (teacher)
TS	Mr S (teacher)
Pp	several pupils

The turns are numbered in the left hand side column of the transcript. The utterances are shown with the pupils names and the teacher's initials.