Learning Opportunities Among Expert–Novice Pairs in the L2 Classroom

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This paper is a discussion of the role of language interactions among L2 learners with differing proficiency levels in a university classroom. Previous research has shown that L2 interactions between expert and novice learners can stimulate positive language learning (Storch, 2002). Using conversation analysis, we argue that pairings that provide disparity in L2 proficiency provide rich opportunities for learning to occur. We show that mixing students with differing L2 proficiency levels can enable classroom interactions that benefit both the novice and the expert and also facilitate better language task management. With the assistance of an expert learner, novice learners are able to provide extended responses and are continually challenged to provide adequate information in discussions. The experts also benefit from these pairings as they are required to take leadership roles and frame their ideas in such a way as to ensure that the novices understand.

本研究は、大学の教室内における多様な第二言語学習者の言語インタラクションの役割について考察する。先行研究では、熟達者（以下 expert）と未熟者（以下 novice）による第二言語インタラクションが、より積極的な言語学習を促すことが示された（Storch, 2002）。Storchのexpert–noviceインタラクションパターンでは、学習者は言語的及び文化的知識を交換する機会をより多く得ることで学習を最大化することができるとされている。本研究では、流暢さを重視した言語タスクを分析するために会話分析を使用し、第二言語能力の不均衡がもたらす学習効果の向上について論じる。調査結果からは、異なったレベルの学習者をペアにすることで、双方にとって有益な教室内インタラクションが起こり、より良い言語タスク管理にもつながると推察される。調査結果については、学習の社会文化理論と学習者発達理論の研究を基に説明を行う。

Mixing proficiency levels for speaking tasks in the language classroom has been shown to create collaborative interactions that allow for high uptake of knowledge transfer between students (Storch, 2002). In the classroom, student pairings can be formed to allow students to scaffold each other's language in a way that allows students to learn in a collaborative, dynamic, and social way. Although core EFL courses may require a stratification of proficiency levels, there are still many classes where streaming is either impossible or impractical. In these types of classes students can collaborate across a range of proficiency levels in a classroom environment where less proficient students are able to interact with more advanced students in ways that allow them to extend their spoken output. More proficient students will also benefit from these pairings as they will be provided with the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and assume facilitation roles. Teaching or explaining to other peers has been shown to help students clarify their own L2 knowledge and produce more coherent speech (Allwright, 1984).

Research on L2 student groupings has shown that different types of groups can have different learning outcomes (see e.g., Donato, 1988; Lockhart & Ng, 1995; Nelson & Murphy, 1993). Storch (2002) identified four main types of pair interactions: dominant–dominant, dominant–passive, collaborative, and expert–novice. Expert–novice pairings are pairs in which the expert, the student with greater linguistic and communicative competency, scaffolds the novice, thus demonstrating and engendering more advanced language for the novice. Despite there being a high disparity in proficiency, the expert encourages the novice to participate and to complete the task collaboratively. According to Storch, the two most beneficial student pairings are the collaborative and expert–novice pairs due to the high level of knowledge transfer shown by these pairings. This study focused on expert–novice pairs. For the purposes of this paper, *expert* is defined as someone who has greater linguistic and communicative competence in English than their[1] partner.

Learning as Social: Sociocultural Theory

Talk in interaction is a dynamic social phenomenon, and language learners produce naturally occurring talk in paired language fluency-based tasks. In the analysis of talk, the essential questions to ask are why utterances occur, what linguistic forms are used, and why they occur at that moment in an ongoing sequence (Seedhouse, 2004).

Sociocultural theory, which grew from the work of psychologist Vygotsky, views learning as a social process in which a learner's cognitive development is facilitated by interaction with others who have more knowledge and experience. Through the use of culturally constructed forms of interaction with more knowledgeable counterparts, or experts, a learner's own knowledge is expanded. Vygotsky placed particular importance on the role of language as a semiotic tool to engender this kind of interactional learning (Parker, 1979). Students can learn new concepts through social speech with experts, which is then internalized and consolidated as their own knowledge through private speech.

In this study, we sought to understand how students mediate L2 learning together through social and, in particular, conversational interaction. With the objective of discovering how expert and novice student pairings interact in the L2 classroom, the following research questions were asked:

RQ1: What evidence is there to support Storch's (2002) claims that expert–novice interactions are highly conducive to learning?

RQ2: What, if anything, do experts gain out of interactions with novice learners?

Participants and Methods

The conversation analyzed in this paper was selected from video recordings taken of classroom interactions at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University in the spring semester of 2017. The video recordings were of five student pairings undertaking different conversational tasks. Students were purposefully paired according to different levels of linguistic and communicative competence. Students were selected as experts or novices based on the teachers' classroom observations of their spoken proficiency and their vocabulary range. The expert–novice concept was not explicitly explained to the participants as we sought to keep the interactions as natural as possible. The conversation analyzed in this paper was based on an academic conversation task done in an Advanced English course in which two English students, Yuki and Alex (pseudonyms), had a free-form conversation based on questions from the course textbook about Vincent van Gogh's art and life. For both students English was their second language

and both were enrolled as students in the same Advanced English language class. Due to Alex's higher degree of spoken fluency and vocabulary knowledge in this pairing, Alex was identified as the expert and Yuki the novice. This conversation was chosen for analysis because it produced more communicative interaction than the other recorded conversations and the expert–novice delineation was clear.

In order to analyze the interactions of an expert–novice pair, in this study we adopted conversation analysis (CA). Originally stemming from ethnomethodology, CA is a tool that can be used to measure spoken interaction "rigorously, empirically, and formally" (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, pp. 289-290). Because of this, it has gained significant ground in the field of applied linguistics, and there are numerous studies that have used CA in language learning contexts, including tasks in the classroom (Markee, 2000), in the Japanese as a foreign language context (Carroll, 2004; Mori, 2003, 2004; Mori & Hasegawa, 2009; Stilp, 2014), and on NS and NNS talk (Hosoda, 2006). By adopting a CA methodology, we sought to discover how expert–novice student pairings are interacting with each other to improve peer-to-peer L2 learning when working with mixed proficiency classes.

For the purpose of this study a basic transcription of the entire conversation was undertaken and then instances identified as worthy of further analysis were transcribed using Jefferson's CA transcription conventions (see Appendix).

Transcripts and Analysis

In the first excerpt, Alex (A), and Yuki (Y) are discussing the first set of open discussion questions from the textbook. Excerpt 1 shows instances where the expert scaffolds and extends the novice's utterances.

Excerpt 1 (0.00-)

```
01 A: Okay. so:: how would you describe Van Gogh's painting like
02 Y: hhh ugh ((looks away))
03 A: As you, like, as you have seen it in the class?
04 Y: .hh Ah, eh (0.5)
05 A: You have any [opinions towards it?
06 Y:              [Eh.. well (1.0) Um::: (1.5) just beautiful? beautiful, ah
      (1.0)  impressing
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```
07 A: Uhm, impressing, [impressive]

08 Y:                  [kinda impressing] Because there, the touches are=

09 A: =>What do you mean?<  ((finger raised))

10 Y: are just different from Ah:=

11 A: =ahh, the touches? ((nodding))

12 Y: The touches are different from other people's pa[intings yeah. As you
      know=

13 A:                                              [Such as?

14 Y: Su such- such as (1.0) such as s- such as (1.5) .hh

15 A: Other paintings such as? ((head turn))

16 Y: Other paintings, ah sorry, these day.           ,

17 A: ah the modern. [ok ok

18 Y:                [The these days the modern the modern paintings like[we=

19 A:                                                                    [so::

20 Y: =just draw the lines, but they::: (1.5) ((hand gestures))

21 A: Okay.

22 Y: Yeah (0.5) that's it.

23 A: Yeah, an: I agree with you, it's kind of, um (.) aesthetic in a way. Um
      (0.5) but I think that's not my cup of tea so.

24 Y: ((nodding only))
```

Rather than seeking to dominate the conversation, Alex helps Yuki to extend his speech by allocating the next turn to Yuki. With follow-up questions such as *you have any opinion towards it?* in line 05 (Excerpt 1), Alex selects Yuki to take his turn and express his opinion. Alex then requests clarification from Yuki with another prompt *such as?* to seek a further elaboration in line 13 when discussing how Van Gogh's paintings are unique. Here, Alex is acting as the expert and facilitating the task by selecting his partner to take his turn. This allows for the novice to have a balanced sequence of turns rather than taking a passive role in the conversation. Alex's means of other selection ensures Yuki's turns are extended and justified.

In addition to guiding the turn sequence, Alex also scaffolds Yuki's utterances with more appropriate phrases. In line 7, Alex corrects *impressing* to *impressive*; although

Yuki does not repeat the corrected version, this use of recasts can help to scaffold the novice's linguistic progress, allowing them to notice and correct gaps in their linguistic knowledge. In line 16, Yuki's statement, *other paintings, ah sorry, these day*, is rephrased by Alex to *the modern* which Yuki takes up in line 18 with the more appropriate phrase, *the modern paintings.* Yuki seeks to elaborate further about modern paintings but struggles to explain himself; this struggle is exhibited by the elongated speech, long pause, and use of hand gestures in line 20. Alex uses this as an opportunity to offer his own opinion with more complex language such as *aesthetic* in line 23. The novice's inability to fully explain his opinion allows space for the expert to vocalize and give an opinion, which in turn gives new information and vocabulary to the novice.

Alex also exhibits dispreference, a conversational phenomenon in which an interlocutor indicates the response is unexpected or unsatisfactory. In line 09, Alex forces Yuki to explain his term *touches* by asking *what do you mean?* This request makes Yuki extend himself to give a fuller response *the touches are different from other people's paintings* in line 12. By seeking clarification of the novice's utterance, the expert is helping the novice produce clearer speech. As the expert, Alex takes an active role in turn-taking selection, scaffolding responses, and requesting clarification of terms, and noticeably prompts Yuki, the novice, to produce more appropriate language.

A few minutes later, in Excerpt 2, we can see more instances of Alex guiding Yuki through the discussion.

Excerpt 2 3:31~

```
01 A: Cool. Okay so next question, what was the painter's ((unintelligible))
      would like? Uhm I think it's really sad though.  >what do you think?<

02 Y: Just strange maybe.

03 A: Strange?

04 Y: Strange.

05 A: >In what way?<

06 Y: Uh, different from other people. like the: way of thinking and the:
      (0.5) way they feel .hh on something with colors (0.5) or (0.5) shapes
      can be different from other people.

07 A: I see

08 Y: Uhm
```

```
09 A: And how did it influence his art? I think the paint he took during his
      childhood really influence his art (.) in his art because of his way of
      thinking and his madness. but what do you think?

10 Y: Uhm… shadow?

11 A: No.  Like the: pain that he had to endure (0.5) in his childhood
      really affects how he thinks and therefore affects his painting in a
      way

12 Y: Ah… naruhodo. ((Japanese)) Ah.  Yes hhh .hh yes:: ((both laughing))

13 A: You agree?

14 Y: Yes, [w-]

15 A:      [Ok] So do you think that our childhood determines what happen to
      us later in life? [Like] what happen in your childhood, [does it have
      a...

16 Y:          [Exactly]                               [Yeah
      Well it's [influenced by our childhood, even now

17 A:           [Does it influence
      But does it determine, like what happen to us, like ((hand gesture
      seeking answer))

18 Y: Determine (0.5) determine (2.0) ((looks at textbook closely))

19 A: Hmmm ((head nods))

20 Y: Determine

21 A: uhm

22 Y: it decides=

23 A:        =Uhm, Not actually

24 Y: It decides mitai na ((sideways head turn showing confusion))

25 A: Like to what extent, that's it. What do you think?

26 Y: .hh Extent ((bangs head on table in confusion))

27 A: Does it does it affects too much or:

28 Y: (0.5) Yeah, affect too much ((head raises confirming understanding))

29 A: Why?

30 Y: 100 percent

31 A: 100 PERCENT?
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32 Y: Yea, 100 percent affected by the childhood and even now, like 20 years
      old or 21 years old

33 A: 20.

34 A: Yeah I agree with that because just like during our childhood are like,
      norms and values will being internalized.

35 Y: Uhm

36 A: During the childhood process, and it still stays with us until we are
      adult so yeah I agree with you.
```

In Excerpt 2, the expert Alex guides Yuki, the novice, in three ways: request of additional information, clarification, and lexical search. First, in line 1, Alex begins with his opinion and then allows for Yuki to take a turn to express his own opinion. In line 9 as well, after initially asking the question and responding to the answer, Alex offers up a chance for Yuki to express his ideas. Alex is unsatisfied with Yuki's short responses and asks both follow-up questions and clarifications several times throughout the exchange. Alex gives Yuki time to elaborate on his response, as indicated by the multiple pauses in line 6, places where Alex could have taken his own turn but did not. In addition, Alex asks *what do you think* three times in this exchange (lines 1, 9, and 25). This further shows how the expert is being collaborative without dominating the talk. Second, Alex's requests for clarification of Yuki's responses, such as in line 3 or line 11, serve to make Yuki extend his response when it is clear that Yuki has misunderstood the question. In line 12 it would seem that Yuki does reach an understanding by responding with the Japanese L1 *naruhodo* [I see], and his continuation in line 14 shows strong evidence that the original question in line 9 was in fact understood. Finally, in line 17, Yuki encounters an unfamiliar word, *determine*, as indicated by his repetition and the long pauses that occur in his turn in line 18. The subsequent lines divert from the original task as Alex provides several definitions of the unknown word for Yuki, until the two eventually reach an understanding in line 28, which is shown by the multimodal response and head nod confirmation.

Although expert–novice pairings are criticized for benefiting only the novice, we can observe how the expert rephrases responses and explains concepts (lines 5 and 11, and the lexical exchange from lines 17-28). Alex also extends his own response and provides a detailed opinion (lines 34 and 36), as was also shown in Excerpt 1.

In Excerpt 3, we can see another example of a lexical term search by Yuki through the negotiation of the word *clergy* (line 2).

Excerpt 3 (6:13~)

```
01 A: What jobs did Van Gogh have before he became a painter. (1.0) Like I
      think he also a clergy, do you know what clergy is like
02 Y: (E)cology?
03 A: Clergy.
04 Y: Clearly?
05 A: Like some, some guys in the [religious place
06 Y:                             [in the (1.0) religious
07 A: like (1.0) like [clergy clergy yeah.
08 Y:                 [Ah ah ok ok ok ok.
```

In Excerpt 3, Alex preempts the potential difficult term by asking *do you know what clergy is like*. Yuki admits the term is unfamiliar, through repetition and emphasis in lines 2 and 4 and a brief 1.0 second pause in line 6. The overlap talk in lines 6 and 8 indicates an understanding of the definition *some guys in the religious place,* as Yuki tries to understand the new vocabulary term. This excerpt is an example of how the novice goes through the process of identifying a new word until an agreement of understanding is reached. It is unclear whether or not Yuki has internalized the term, as he does not actually produce the word in any discernible form.

Finally, in Excerpt 4, we can see the challenges of the ability for the novice to maintain longer, deeply engaged conversations with experts.

Excerpt 4 (9:19~)

```
01 A: Usually? Uhm Ok. Is it necessary to suffer in order to create? (0.5) I
      think it's necessary=
02 Y: =Why?
03 A: Because like if you look at the world successful people. Most of
      them through, get get through a phase or they suffer a lot (0.5) and
      through those suffering they want to change their life and hence it's a
      motivation for them to strive their life °and be successful°
04 Y: hh But in case he suffering too much to create, they cannot create=
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```
05 A: =Yeah but maybe it's necessary for them to suffer to go [through] phase
      and then make that, turn that into motivation to change their life
      right?
06 Y:                                                         [hmmmm] hh
              ((head nodding in agreement, painful expression))
07 A: It's ok, you can have your opinion ((hand gesture towards Yuji)
08 Y: .hh Yes, no, ah, hibiku (1.0)   nan to iu no (4.0) ((stabbing gesture
      in heart)) sasaru.
09 A: What do you mean? It hurts?
10 Y: No, well, ah, to say (3.0) hibiku sasaru.
11 A: Like stab?
12 Y: Stab?
13 A: Like a sword or=
14 Y: =Uhh uhnnn ((heading nodding in agreement))
15 A: Stab yeah ((head nodding))
16 Y: stab stab yeah maybe I can I can see .hh hh I wanna dictionary later.
17 A: OK yeah
18 Y: hhh hee hah
19 A: Ok yeah
```

In lines 2 and 4, the novice provides two opportunities for the expert to elaborate and extend his own response. The latching, when talk is followed immediately by a second person without pause, between Alex and Yuki also shows a meaningful exchange of different opinions. This exchange of opinions can also be seen by the breath intake (*hh*) and outright disagreement in line 4. In line 6, Yuki's final understanding is indicated by his use of multimodal expressions and gestures. However, Yuki is unable to continue the fast-paced opinionated exchange for very long and reverts to his L1 (Japanese) in line 8. When prompted by Alex to explain the Japanese *hibiku* [it resonates with me] and *sasaru* [it really strikes me], the task abruptly stops. Although Yuki tries to explain the meaning in his L2, without the expert's direct input, the conversation is limited, which leads to a resolution in which both participants move on from the discussion. In previous excerpts, Alex provided important feedback for Yuki, allowing him to elaborate on his response. However, in this excerpt, despite the support from Alex (as seen by his use of clarification

questions in lines 9, 11, and 13), Yuki is unable to answer the question. In line 16, Yuki finally suggests that the point he was trying to make is too difficult to explain.

Discussion

Our findings support Storch's (2002) original claim that expert–novice pairings are highly conducive for language fluency tasks. As can be seen see from our analysis of the excerpts, in this type of pairing novices are able to expand their knowledge and provide extended responses with the assistance of an expert learner. First, as indicated in Excerpt 1, the expert often makes use of specific other-selected questions or comments (*such as, what do you think*) that prompt the novice to provide additional information. Second, novices are continually challenged to provide adequate information to experts when there is a misunderstanding or they encounter some type of linguistic or semantic issue in the talk. This can be seen in Excerpts 3 and 4, in which the novice encounters an unfamiliar term or phrase that needs renegotiation. With help of the expert, this can sometimes be resolved through lexical searches or elaborations of concepts. When the conversational task becomes problematic, the importance of having an expert to initiate a response or give feedback is crucial, especially when the talk diverges from the teacher's designed task.

Finally, we can also see examples of how the expert benefits from this type of pairing. One of the main benefits is that by taking a leading role in organizing the task, the expert may contribute meaningful responses and rephrase challenging or new information in such a way that the novice may understand them. In one sense, due to the proficiency gap, the expert often must work harder to make themself understood by novices. In particular, experts must be able to manage the task itself, as they try to extend responses from novices (as seen in Excerpt 2) or introduce and explain lexical items in simpler language (as seen in Excerpt 3).

Conclusion

In conclusion, using CA's participant-focused methodology, we have shown that the use of expert–novice pairs has the potential to provide a great deal of pedagogical benefits in the classroom. We argue that the expert–novice relationship is one in which social interaction and language practice is naturally occurring, and therefore, is a context that is highly conducive to learning, particularly for the novice learner.

Although in the classroom the teacher typically takes on the expert role, students can also take on the expert role and learn collectively when working together on interactional tasks. One criticism of using CA in SLA studies is that CA's methodology only measures language use and not learning. However, learning is a social construct and talk in interaction is more than only a place where input occurs. In other words, social interaction between expert and novice may be necessary for mediated social learning to occur but is not the only factor that contributes to overall language acquisition.

Continued close examination of expert–novice pairs may reveal valuable future research in terms of teaching pedagogy and task design. For example, language teachers could benefit from having classrooms with some degree of varied language proficiency levels. The expert–novice model also supports peer-to-peer learning, which could provide teachers with a valuable classroom resource, namely expert teaching assistants who can be used to help monitor and scaffold classroom tasks. These expert assistants could be trained to provide novice learners with guidance in tasks, allowing teachers more time to focus on individual students while giving novice students more opportunities to engage in real communicative experiences in the classroom. The future of L2 classroom research would benefit from continued work on further understanding this relationship as it would allow teachers to design tasks that specifically give membership roles to learners, making it possible for novice learners to receive the scaffolding that they need from their peers. Further research would simultaneously provide a greater understanding of how to train experts to adopt teacher-type leadership roles, thus also allowing these students to benefit from the expert–novice pairing.

Note

1. In this paper, we have chosen to use the pronouns them, their, and themself as singular pronouns of indeterminate gender.

Bio Data

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Appendix
Transcript Conventions

Jeffersonian Transcription Notation as described in Atkinson (1984).

SIMULTANEOUS UTTERANCES

huh [oh] no	Left square brackets mark the start of overlapping talk.
[what]	Right square brackets mark the end of an overlap.

CONTIGUOUS UTTERANCES

=	Equal signs indicate that
	Turn continues at the next identical symbol on the next line, or
	Talk is latched; that is, there is no interval between the end of prior turn and the start of next turn.

INTERVALS WITHIN AND BETWEEN UTTERANCES

(0.4)	Numerals in parentheses mark silence, in tenths of a second.
(.)	A period in parentheses indicates a micropause (less than 0.1 sec).

CHARACTERISTICS OF SPEECH DELIVERY

hhh hee hah	Indicate laughter or breathiness.
.hh	Indicates audible inhalation.
hh	Indicates audible exhalation.
<u>dog</u>	Underlining indicates marked stress.
yes?	A question mark indicates rising intonation.
yes.	A period indicates falling intonation.
so,	A comma indicates low-rising intonation, suggesting continuation.
HUH	Capitals indicate increased loudness.
°thanks°	Degree signs indicate decreased volume.

$No way$	Dollar signs indicate utterance is delivered in a "laughing voice."
><	Inward-facing indents embed talk which is faster than the surrounding speech.
<>	Outward-facing indents embed talk that is slower than the surrounding speech.
go:::d	One or more colons indicate lengthening of the preceding sound. Each additional colon represents a lengthening of one beat.
no bu-	A single hyphen indicates an abrupt cut-off, with level pitch.

COMMENTARY IN THE TRANSCRIPT

((hand clap))	Double parentheses indicate transcriber's comments, including description of nonverbal behavior.
the (park)	Single parentheses indicate an uncertain transcription.