

Dynamics of Pair-work in a JFL classroom: Benefits of Collaborative Linguaging

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Abstract

A growing number of studies of pair-work in foreign or second language classroom have appeared (cf., Adams, 2007; Colina & Mayo, 2007; Kowal & Swain, 1994; Kim & McDonough 2011; Philp *et al.*, 2010; McDonough, 2004; Storch, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2008; Swain & Lapkin, 1998, 2002; Watanabe & Swain, 2007, 2008). These studies indicate that there are many factors that influence the interaction of pair-work and learning outcomes, including collaborative orientation, differences in proficiency levels within pairs, student affect, degrees of active participation, perception of the use of pair-work, task types used in pair-work, etc. Although multiple dimensions regarding pair-work have been uncovered, instructors may often wonder: how instructors should guide the students to carry out pair-work effectively for both members of the pair. Within the framework of Sociocultural Theory –SCT- (Lantolf 2007; Lantolf & Thorne 2006) where language is one of the most important mediating tools of the mind, the present qualitative study aims to answer these questions by observing interactions in pair-work in the Japanese-as-a- foreign-language (JFL) classroom.

This study investigates how JFL learners' 'linguaging' (Swain et al. 2009) of their attempts to understand locative particles *ni* and *de* during focus-on-forms pair-work can help them learn the particles. Thirty-seven learners of third-semester Japanese in a US university participated in two pair-work activities: Pair-work 1, where students identified meanings of particles; Pair-work 2, where students reviewed each others' translation. A fill-in-the-blank test and a translation task were employed at three points (pre-test, post-test, 4-week-delayed post-test). In order to examine dynamics of pair-work in a JFL classroom, two pairs whose performance on the scores of fill-in-the-blank test at the pre-stage was the middle range (65-85%) were selected. One pair, a 'gaining pair' improved in the post-test and maintained his gains in the 4-week-delayed post-test. The other, a 'non-gaining pair' improved in the post-test; however, they lost their gains the most (22-18%) in the delayed-post-test.

The gaining pair shows collaborative dialogue in which both peers engaged in joint search for meanings in Pair-work 1. In Pair-work 2, they not only corrected errors in translation but also used linguaging by talking about *the reasons for making errors*, *seeking confirmation* of own reasoning, and *exhibiting meta-comments*. On the contrary, the non-gaining pair failed to identify the meaning correctly and did not discuss the reason in Pair-work 1. In Pair-work 2, although they identified the function, the peer immediately gave his partner the correction without much linguaging. Based upon the analysis of use of metalinguistic language, this case study illustrates the dynamics of linguaging and the learners' gains in learning particles.

By demonstrating the way we examine pair-work activity, the presentation will conclude by answering the research question addressed as well as emphasizing the value of Vygotsky-inspired SCT-based research for improving L2 education as discussed in Lantolf and Poehner (2014) and Masuda et al (forthcoming).