

EXPLORING AND EXPOSING A GAP IN L2 RESEARCH: HOW
SOCIO-LINGUISTIC ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS FACILITATE
OR FRUSTRATE SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Colby Toussaint Clark
Portland State University
colby@pdx.edu

Ian Clark
Mukogawa Women's University
ianclark01@gmail.com

This article has two central aims. Firstly, to discuss how a sociolinguistic approach to language learning creates measurable increases in performance and secondly to highlight the need for a greater quantity and quality of research in this area. The article begins with a discussion on the discontent that exists regarding studies which investigate how sociolinguistic variables influence the quality of classroom learning. This will be followed by a brief discussion on the now mature field of classroom interaction, which will reaffirm the potential of this approach to deliver measurable increases in performance across the curriculum before moving on to briefly discuss how these general understandings are relevant to the discipline of second language acquisition. The remaining content of the article will be confined to a discussion concerning the sociolinguistic roles 'acted-out' by learners in pairs and small groups. The work of Neomy Storch has been selected as a research feature because it presents a particularly clear argument for the potential of the sociolinguistic perspective.

Key words: socio-cultural, sociolinguistics, interaction, classroom, dyads, collaborative, SLA, L2, English, language

The Slow Growth of a Sociocultural Focus in SLA Research

There is a preponderance of anecdotal evidence that strongly suggests second language acquisition (SLA) is best supported by the use of clearly structured pair-work or small group activities. The key to understanding the difference between this constructionist view and more traditional views is that for constructionists, knowledge is not what individuals believe but rather what social groups or knowledge communities believe.

This widely accepted Vygotskian approach has in recent years begun to gradually move toward a wider acceptance of sociocultural perspectives in the field of second language acquisition.

This article will feature a 2002 study by Neomy Storch who argues that randomly assigning students to groups or pairs does not necessarily facilitate learning or language acquisition. Storch is one of a growing number of researchers that recognize the importance of student socio-linguistic roles and relationships in classroom interaction and how the various kinds of roles affect language learning. Storch points out that *collaborative relationship* means much more than two or more learners working together. From a sociolinguistic perspective when students take on collaborative roles in an interaction, they are assisting each other equally while attempting to solve a particular linguistic challenge or problem. For this reason the word *collaborative* in all its forms will be avoided unless it meets Storch's definition of *collaborative relationship*. It is this type of collaboration that many studies highlight as essential, and that without the opportunity to practice language and negotiate meaning in pairs or small groups, students' language learning may be hindered. However, the field of sociolinguistic interactions in the classroom remains a much understudied realm of pedagogical research. One explanation for this dearth of sociolinguistic research is the manner in which studies have been constricted by a narrow traditionalist purview of mainstream SLA work. Pennycook remarks, "...the learner has been cast as a one-dimensional acquisition device...as a sort of language learning machine" (2001: 143). Lantolf suggests that SLA "presents a lopsided and uncritical view of both itself and the scientific tradition from which it arises, and it precipitously dismisses those who would challenge it" (1996: 716). Rampton points out that SLA studies "could probably benefit from an enhanced sense of the empirical world's complex socio-cultural diversity" (1995b: 294). Similarly Gebhard argues for a "sociocultural perspective" that takes as a starting point "an understanding that the origin and structure of cognition are rooted in the daily social and cultural practices in which an individual participates" (1999: 544). Although the respected mainstream journals *TESOL Quarterly* and *Language Learning* are publishing articles that adopt a sociolinguistic approach and recent works by dedicated authors to the perspective are in evidence (Lantolf and Thorne 2006); studies which robustly investigate social context, power and identity remain relatively difficult to locate.

The Case for Peer Interaction

Classroom practice has evolved at a rapid rate since the importance of peer interaction was widely acknowledged at the 1972 International Communication Association (ICA) convention which focused on interaction and learning. While such a notable evolution in classroom practice is of course not wholly attributable to a single event, the accumulated research since the early 1970s has caused the widespread use of social interaction in classrooms today. The benefits of peer interaction across the entire curriculum have been compellingly expressed (Johnson and Johnson 1990, 1996; Fuchs *et al* 1994; Slavin 1990). Consequently, an increasing number of teachers in every discipline are structuring their teaching methods to engage their students in

communicative tasks, often through grouping them in small groups or pairs. According to Bruffee (1993), research indicates that five or six is the optimal number for a group primarily dedicated to discussion, while task groups assigned to produce a tangible group project or product should have no more than three members. Johnson and Johnson (1996) using the term *co-operative learning groups* began to characterise the benefits of peer learning interactions as: a) positive independence, b) individual accountability, c) face-to-face promotive interactions and d) the appropriate use of interpersonal and small-group skills and group processing. In summary, such learning arrangements act as powerful catalysts for higher achievement, more positive relationships among students and greater psychological health. These significant realisations have contributed to the demise of the teacher-fronted methodology as the predominant method of classroom instruction across the entire curriculum. However, before one becomes complacent about the ubiquitous nature of classroom interaction across the curriculum, one should note the following remark by Askew: “the characteristics of dialogue are equality, sharing, spontaneity, collaboration and reciprocity. What I found interesting is that young people do not think such experiences are appropriate for the classroom where a particular view of behaviour is perceived” (2000: 47). This perception is perpetuated in the minds of students and practitioners alike by the prevailing policy of high stakes testing in schools. A phenomenon noted by Wiliam *et al* when they observe that classroom interaction is severely limited because “the introduction of high-stakes state-mandated testing, such as now exists in England and most states in the U.S.A, makes the effective implementation of formative assessment even more difficult. This is because...attempts to maximise student and school scores appear to result in a lack of attention to the kinds of higher-order thinking involved in formative assessment” (2004: 49).

The Practice and Theory of Interaction in the L2 Classroom

The crucial question is: do practitioners really understand why peer-peer interaction facilitates (or frustrates) language acquisition from a *sociocultural* perspective? When focusing on L2 classrooms it is to be expected that social interaction is a very popular method of instruction. As Kumaravadivelu says, “...theorists and practitioners alike almost unanimously emphasise communication of one kind or another” (1993: 12). Thinking comes along as a necessary element of the communication process. It is for this reason that “human thought is consummately social: social in its origins, social in its functions, social in its form, social in its applications” (Geertz cited in Bruffee 1993: 114). The internalisation of experience arising from social interaction is crucial to a person’s understanding of his or her role as a participant in a post-modern society typified by states of flux, dynamic change and complex uncertainties. As Eisner and Peshkin observe, “Whether we are talking about unicorns, quarks, infinity, or apples our cognitive life depends on experience” (1990: 31). In the microcosm of the classroom and then in the yet smaller collective of the group or dyad this observation is also true. Many foundation studies have demonstrated that communicative interaction is necessary (Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982; Long and Porter 1985; Long 1983a, 1983b; Krashen 1982). It is therefore inevitable that even a cursory library search on second

language acquisition and interaction reveals a proliferation of research which seeks to aver that second language acquisition is facilitated by interaction between the learner and a more proficient English speaker. Through interaction with more able English speakers, language learners have access to models of language structure and are given a chance to practice what they are learning, therefore moving forward in their second language acquisition. As early as 1975 Wagner-Gough and Hatch claimed that second language acquisition is a process based on conversational interactions, and that limiting research to a syntactic process internal to the learner is not adequate. Interaction is seen as a means of providing comprehensible input to the learner and also as fundamental to an individual's cognitive and affective growth. The main pedagogical arguments in favour of collaborative learning in the SLA context have been summarised by Long and Porter (1985) as: a) increasing opportunities of language practice, b) assisting in the individualisation of instruction, c) advancing the quality and quantity of student talk, d) encouraging a positive affective environment, and e) increasing the students' motivation to learn. Ellis remarked, "group work provides the kind of input and opportunities for output that promote rapid L2 acquisition" (1994: 598). The fundamental point made by many researching on classroom interaction is that collaborative learning reduces communicative stress and creates a more natural environment in which to practice communicative skills. Mainstream SLA research examines a number of crucial variables which facilitate a comprehensive investigation into language learning. Of primary importance is a) the cultural background of the students, b) the classroom environment and c) the learning styles of the students. It is with the already cited concerns of Pennycook (2001), Lantolf (1996), Rampton (1995) and Gebhard (1999) in mind that this article seeks to explore a fourth and largely neglected variable: d) the sociolinguistic roles and relationships that exist in the classroom and the extent to which they facilitate or frustrate language acquisition.

The Sociocultural Approach and Language Acquisition

The study of socio-linguistic roles between peers is a relatively new concept in SLA research and is notably understudied. Building on the early work of L.S Vygotsky, specifically his theory of the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD), L2 researchers have developed a body of very compelling evidence that became so persuasive that the Vygotskian (or *social constructivist*) approach is now conventional pedagogical wisdom. It is worth remembering that although Vygotsky's most productive years at Moscow's Institute of Psychology were between 1924-1935 the most often cited text on his theories, *Mind in Society* became accessible to the mass international readership in 1978. Furthermore, Vygotsky's work, while enormously influential, is limited by a focus on learner-teacher/expert interactions. Consequently, it has only been in relatively recent years that the potential benefits of peer-peer interactions have become widely acknowledged. Contemporary researchers such as Donato (1988, 1994), Ohta (1995) and Storch (2002) have advanced Vygotskian theory by arguing that for SLA to occur *in a manner that will promote language learning* learners need to interact with their peers in small groups or pairs. Accordingly, Swain, Brooks and Tocalli-Beller (2002) also argue that input from a teacher/expert is not the only factor that creates the

opportunity for second language acquisition; peer-peer interaction can also facilitate effective learning. Peer-peer interaction is not only crucial to effective learning, it also has important psychological ramifications. Classroom discourse has been recognized as a complex sociocultural activity in which meaning-making is an integral process in the creation of the social identity of learners, (Pennycook 2004; Norton 2004; Kubota 2004). Of particular interest among the foundation studies that look at peer-peer sociolinguistic interaction is a 1986 study by Porter. This study contrasted native speaker/native speaker (NS/NS), native speaker/non-native speaker (NS/NNS) and non-native speaker/non-native speaker (NNS/NNS) interactions based on grammatical accuracy, interactional features, and sociolinguistic appropriateness of the input between a variety of such dyads. Porter's findings most relevant to the stated enquiry of this article are two-fold. Firstly, there was no clear advantage having a NS as an input provider because input from a NNS was just as comprehensible as input from a NS. Secondly, there were few indications that NNS frustrate SLA by giving each other miscorrections and error incorporations. The roles that learners take on in this type of interaction are often described as expert and novice. A study conducted by Storch (2002) expanded the existing taxonomy of sociolinguistic descriptors by adding *collaborative*, *passive* and *dominant* as role-categories to the list. More will be said about Storch's research in a later section of this article.

Up to this point the focus of this article has been dedicated to the discussion of the positive aspects of peer-peer interaction. Indeed, the results of both the foundation studies and more recent research consistently support the hypothesis that peer-peer interaction is of at least parallel importance to learner-teacher/expert input in pedagogical terms and goes far beyond it in terms of psychological and social value (Long and Porter 1985; Johnson and Johnson 1996; Pennycook 2004; Kubota 2004). However, a growing body of complementary research reveals that the sociolinguistic roles that students assume while interacting may not assist the process of language acquisition. Undesirable and counter-productive interactions occur in any social setting as they must do in a classroom that exhibits the Vygotskian concept of the social construction of knowledge as a central design feature. For example, DiNitto (2000) compared two small groups of language learners in order to ascertain why one group was achieving at a considerably lower level than the other. She observed that one student in particular seemed to dominate and control the flow of communication. This type of peer-peer interaction, which engendered asymmetrical (i.e. non-collaborative) social roles, did not allow for the hypothesis testing and group interaction that is characteristic of collaborative group work. DiNitto explained this phenomenon by pointing to the teacher-fronted method deployed by the instructor. Both DiNitto (2000) and Bruffee (1993) note that the instructor's role includes the function of group facilitator and role-model as well as serving as a source for information and insight. Consequently, the type of teaching technique may create the social circumstances which bring into existence types of peer dynamics which frustrate effective learning. Teaching is often described as a social accomplishment and student perceptions of the teacher are important in deciding the kind of society the students find in a classroom. Cited in Harrison *et al*, one student responds positively to the social role modelled by the teacher: "It wasn't as if there was a teacher in the class, but rather someone whom we could trust and identify as a 'sharer'. You were...sensitive to our thoughts and that

made it all the more 'authentic' for me. It was an authentic experience, not just a class" (2002: 29). Foster (1998) also found that students working in groups or pairs did not always work collaboratively or show any notable L2 acquisition. In her study, she compared the language produced by intermediate EFL students between small groups and dyads based on tasks that required the negotiation of meaning. The process of negotiating meaning takes place when a speaker requests clarification (asking for repeating or rephrasing), confirmation (e.g. tag questions) and makes self and other repetitions (Ellis 1994: 260). Foster found that this process was frustrated by the personalities of the learners and the roles that they 'acted-out' during the task. Foster also found that the type of task had a significant effect on the social interaction. The next section explores how and why tasks are of fundamental importance to sociocultural researchers.

The Relevance of Task Type in Sociocultural Research

While the type of interaction (e.g. collaborative) is in itself of key importance to a sociolinguistic approach to language learning, it is also of crucial importance to pay close attention to the context in which the interaction takes place. Coughlan and Duff point out that a task is only "a kind of behavioural blueprint" (1994: 175) given to students, setting out the expectations of the teacher. In their study, although the pairs were given the same task, with the same instructions, and produced texts which on the surface looked similar, the pairs experienced a range of very different activities. Therefore, sociocultural researchers claim that it is not only the personality and ability of the teacher or the type of task which affects learning outcomes. They emphasize that it is the kind of *behaviours* and *relationships* exhibited by the participants when working together to complete the task that determines the quality of the learning process. Following the works of Pennycook (2004), Toohey (2003) and Kubota (2004), two core principles are developed to inform our understandings of the task blueprint and the activities which arise from the task blueprint during the learning interactions. Firstly, language learning tasks provide participants with opportunities to assess and negotiate knowledge, concepts and ideas in the light of their own sociocultural backgrounds. Secondly, learning tasks allow for a multiplicity of activities at any given time so that learners can decide which activities to engage in and how to engage in them.

Coughlan and Duff (1994), in accordance with the later studies of Pennycook, Toohey and Kubota also found that sociocultural variables arising from group or pair interactions can potentially create a wide variety of activities based on the same task. In Coughlan and Duff's study several Hungarian students of English were given a picture to describe orally. The study details the varying responses by the students, who created several different activities based on the same task. Coughlan and Duff claim the complexity arising from the assignation of expert/novice roles to participants and the fact that the participants brought a communicative element to the task were major factors in determining the various types of descriptions created by the participants. This study effectively proved that any task that provides for communicative interactions is unique and cannot be accurately replicated. This serves as a caveat to those who have

lamented the lack of a taxonomy of SLA tasks by strongly implying that studies which embrace the sociolinguistic perspective investigate L2 learning processes and outcomes more deeply than any such taxonomy ever could. A taxonomical approach is ideal when seeking to describe the answers to the *what* questions. However, this approach is of very limited use when examining the more deeply significant *why* and *how* questions raised about the processes and outcomes relating to small group or pairwork tasks. Donato (1994) advanced Coughlan and Duff's study by illustrating how learning takes place in a social setting. He analysed the discourse for evidence of collective 'scaffolding', and noted, "...the speakers are at the same time individually novices and collectively experts, sources of new orientations for each other and guides through this complex linguistic problem solving" (1994: 46). Donato's findings are analogous to those of Vygotsky when he states, "individual knowledge is socially and dialogically derived, the genesis of which can be observed directly in the interactions among speakers" (1994: 51). Yet Donato's study builds on Vygotskian theory and emphasizes peer-peer interactions as catalysts for learning. Ohta (1995) undertook a similar study with Japanese students of English and found that peer dyads displayed greater linguistic accuracy than in those tasks fronted by the teacher. She also observed that the expert – novice role alternated between them. Ohta's findings support the proposition that guided pair-work enabled the learners to acquire language by sharing their strengths in the zone of proximal development. A further study arising from Vygotskian theories was that of de Almeida Mattos (2000) who focused on the concept of *scaffolding*. Students were asked to work together on formulating a story using pictorial stimuli and then recount the story individually. She found evidence of scaffolding in both peer-peer and individual phases of the task. Consequently, de Almeida Mattos suggests that language teachers give students the opportunity for scaffolded interactions in the class, especially before examinations.

The Research of Neomy Storch (2002)

The final part of this article features a rare example of robust sociolinguistic research. Neomy Storch's (University of Melbourne) research has been selected because her findings clearly illustrate how a sociolinguistic approach to language learning creates measurable increases in performance. Storch analysed the dialogues of 10 pairs of ESL learners not only for their linguistic competence and language acquisition but also according to the social interactions that took place. Her study attempted to explore the gap in the extant research on the social context of classroom learning. The purpose of the study was to determine what patterns of social interaction were exhibited between pairs, the influence that performance of the linguistic task exerts upon pair interaction and the impact of the passage of time upon observable dyadic outputs. In summary, therefore, the over-arching aim of the study was to analyse whether the differences between types of dyadic interaction result in different outcomes in terms of second language acquisition.

In an attempt to determine how the sociolinguistic roles affect language learning across a variety of tasks, Storch combined the following roles and relationships into a common research framework: expert; novice; collaborative; passive; dominant. These

dimensions were created by unifying the concepts of collective scaffolding and the sociocultural dynamics of dyadic interaction already discussed in the preceding sections of this article. In order to realise her research goals, Storch analysed the transcripts of students in an academic ESL program. The dialogues were transcribed from tape-recorded interactions during the completion of three tasks. In addition to the transcripts, Storch collected data through: (i) an editing task that served as a pre- and post-test; (ii) a survey issued at the beginning of the study aimed at determining the students' attitude toward group and pair work; (iii) Storch's research notes and (iv) students' output arising from a range of writing tasks. Storch analysed the transcripts by looking for significant features exhibited by pairs of pre-tested learners who were then arranged according to their L2 proficiency. From this she identified four patterns of interaction that described the role relationships between the participants: a) collaborative; b) dominant/dominant; c) dominant/passive; d) expert/novice. As seen in figure 1, Storch blended her framework with the notions of *equality* and *mutuality* found in the work of Damon and Phelps (1989). *Equality* is defined as the level of authority or control over the task. Pairs exhibiting a high level of equality have the ability to take direction from each other. *Mutuality* means the extent of engagement between each other's contributions. Pairs which exhibit a high level of mutuality share ideas and give reciprocal feedback. The relationships between the different elements of Storch's *model of dyadic interaction* may be seen below; as one would expect, the collaborative quadrant is characterised by both high mutuality and high equality.

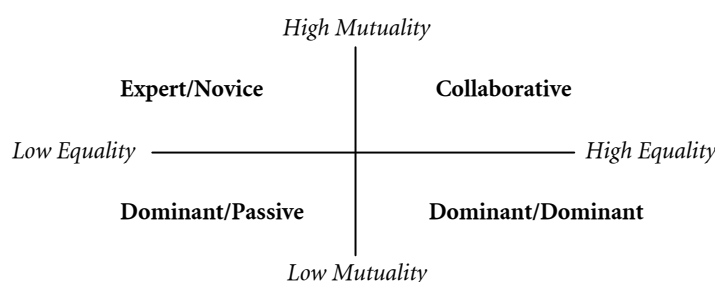


Figure 1. A model of dyadic interaction (Storch 2002: 128).

Storch found that students who worked collaboratively learnt more than pairs who were observed in any other role. Expert/novice relationships also performed well but less so than their collaborative counterparts. This suggests that the existence of high mutuality in peer-peer interactions is more important than a relationship which emphasises high equality. Storch (2004) has stated that she intended her taxonomy of roles/relationships to exist in the affective domain. However, if one uses the pre-study placement tests to interpret the terms *expert*, *novice* and *collaborative* to refer to different levels of knowing and comprehension, they then become cognitive elements. When applying this interpretation it is to be expected that pairs exhibiting cognition-type relationships (relationships dedicated to acquiring and transmitting knowledge) provide evidence of better learning. The essential pedagogical point arising from Storch's findings is that teachers should be acutely aware of how the different social

roles and relationships arising from learning interactions facilitate or frustrate the quality of the learning process and the outcomes of that process.

Further Investigation: A Small-Scale Study

Toussaint-Clark (2007) undertook a small-scale qualitative case study as a precursor to her continuing research. A central aim of Toussaint-Clark's research is the attempt to refine existing descriptions of learning behaviour from a sociocultural perspective. In her initial case-study she observed two pairs of low level students learning English. The purpose of their study was to improve their ability to negotiate meanings in the 'real-world' rather than for specific examinations or another specific purpose. Four tasks were chosen for analysis: 1) asking and answering questions about the location of different items on a map; 2) describing a map they had drawn to their partner; 3) describing a picture to their partner; 4) organising sentence strips. The utterances of the participants were recorded, codified and then described by using the categories devised by Storch. Toussaint-Clark found that collaborative relationships featured almost exclusively throughout the observation and that the other categories (dominant, passive, expert, novice) were absent. Where some evidence of expert/novice roles existed it was decided by panel analysis that these were much closer to Storch's definition of a collaborative relationship. A transcribed example of collaborative interaction is presented in Table 1, below, with the street names removed to protect the identity of the participants (Toussaint-Clark 2007: 48-49).

In this excerpt the students are collaboratively engaged because, "they often interrupt each other with positive corrections, positive confirmations, completions of their partner's sentences, or with questions" (Toussaint-Clark 2007: 49). Thus, Storch's original definition of the collaborative relationship is satisfied.

47. Jorge	Here's my apartment (2- <i>second pause</i>) ((points to map)) here is
48. Tai Huan	Macdonal?
49. Jorge	No es (1- <i>second pause</i>) apartments
50. Tai Huan	Apartment
51. Jorge	yeah (+) he he is a *consulton (+) *consul *consul to (<i>street name removed</i>)
52. Tai Huan	Oh
53. Jorge	and a (<i>street name removed</i>)....do you know *consul (+)*constulton to (<i>street name removed</i>) (+) here in the corner
54. Tai Huan	*consco?
55. Jorge	*consular (+) to (<i>street name removed</i>)
56. Tai Huan	*Consulat (2- <i>second pause</i>)
57. Jorge	Here in the corner is a (+)
58. Tai Huan	coffee shop

59. Jorge	coffee shop barber (+) barb barber shop yep barber shop
60. Tai Huan	Barber shop
61. Jorge	yes barber shop next to the coffee shop (1-second pause) is a barber shop
62. Tai Huan	yes

Table 1. An example of collaborative interaction (from Toussaint-Clark 2007: 48-49)

Parallel Work

Toussaint-Clark noted an additional category of interaction which did not feature in Storch's 2002 foundation study. She called this new role relationship *parallel work*. Parallel work is described as a relationship in which “the participants work side by side with some interaction while they work individually” (Toussaint-Clark 2007: 55). Therefore, parallel work is characterised by an individual studying style but with some limited interest in the progress of the other member of the dyad. For example, in the following excerpt the students talk to themselves during the task as they write the phrases under the pictures on their worksheet. Parallel work occurs because they look at each other's work while they are talking to themselves. It also provides an opportunity to discuss Coughlan and Duff's “behavioural blueprint” (1994: 175). In Toussaint-Clark's study one member of the dyad made initial attempts to work collaboratively with the other (lines 74-82); he then abandons the collaborative learning behaviour which the teacher intended to arise from the task and so begins a different activity type phase of parallel work (lines 83-86 in Table 2, below, from Toussaint-Clark 2007:50-51).

74. Jorge	Ok (11- second pause) ((puts worksheet in between Tai Huan and himself))
75. Tai Huan	((gets worksheet from another student)) he is a thinker ah? ((writes on worksheet))
76. Tai Huan	He (2- second pause)
77. Tai Huan	He-is (+) thinker
78. Jorge	(laughs) a what?
79. Tai Huan	think (+) t-h-i-n-k ((writes on his worksheet))
80. Jorge	thinking _thinking_ thinking_ ((looks at Tai Huan's worksheet and starts to write on his worksheet))
81. Tai Huan	Think
82. Jorge	thinking think think ((points to his own head))

Table 2. Initial attempts to work collaboratively (from Toussaint-Clark 2007: 50-51)

It is at this point that Jorge abandons his attempts to work collaboratively with his partner and, as seen in table 3, a task-phase of parallel work arises from the activity.

83. Jorge	He (2- second pause) is (+) writing ((writing on paper))
84. Jorge	((writes on worksheet))he (+) he(+) is (2- second pause) he is think thinking_ thinking_ he is thinking (2- second pause) ((looks at Tai Huan's worksheet)) he he write (+)he writing the ((writes on own worksheet))
85. Tai Huan	he is (3- second pause) sign
86. Jorge	he (+) is writing write (2- second pause) ((looks at Tai Huan's worksheet)) he writing he he (2 second pause) is he writing he write he ((writes on own worksheet))writing (+)writing (2 second pause) the date he writing he writ writing writing he writing writing writing he writing the (3- second pause) date_ date_ date_ what ((looks at Tai Huan))

Table 3. Task-phase of parallel work (from Toussaint-Clark 2007: 50-51)

At this point both students work for several minutes speaking aloud to themselves while writing on their worksheets and checking each other's work visually. As one would expect, the longer the phase of parallel work lasts the less effective the activity becomes, and thus the learning process is frustrated.

Conclusion

Storch's foundation study adds valuable and much needed data to the discussion about the sociolinguistic variables that impact on peer-peer interaction in L2 classrooms. It goes some way to raising the profile of highly significant yet often denounced (Gregg *et al* 1997) research that accounts for social context, power and identity. Yet perhaps the real experience is the irony felt when such a valuable contribution compels one to look more deeply into this body of research in the hope of garnering even greater understandings, but instead further investigation merely brings the realisation that very few studies on sociolinguistic variables and language learning exist at all. For example, at the time of writing this article no studies could be found that look at sociocultural dyadic interaction in a non-academic context or with low level language learners in any context. As a consequence, a vast population of L2 learners remains undiscovered. The discussion and studies presented in this article clearly point to the benefits of collaborative peer interaction for second language acquisition. What are needed now are more dedicated and robust studies which advance research regarding sociocultural roles in the classroom and how they operate to inhibit or promote learning to a very significant degree.

Works Cited

- Askew, Susan 2000: *Feedback for Learning*. London: Routledge/Falmer.
- Bruffee, Kenneth A. 1993: *Collaborative Learning*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U.
- Coughlan Paul and Patricia Duff 1994: 'Same Task. Different Activities: Analysis of SLA Task from an Activity Theory Perspective'. James Lantolf and Gabriela Appel, eds. *Vygotskian Approaches to Second Language Research*. Norwood: Ablex. 173-91.
- Damon, William and Erin Phelps 1989: 'Critical Distinctions among three Approaches to Peer Education'. *International Journal of Educational Research* 58: 9-19.
- de Almeida Mattos, Andréa Machado 2000: 'A Vygotskian Approach to Evaluation in Foreign Language Learning Contexts'. *ELT Journal* 54.4: 335-445.
- DiNitto, Rachel 2000: 'Can Collaboration be Unsuccessful? A Sociocultural Analysis of Classroom Setting and Japanese L2 Performance in Group Tasks'. *Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese* 34: 179-210.
- Donato, Richard 1988: *Beyond Group: A Psycholinguistic Rationale for Collective Activity in Second-Language Learning*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. University of Delaware, Newark..
- Donato, Richard 1994: 'Collective Scaffolding in Second Language Learning'. James P. Lantolf and Gabriela Appel, eds. *Vygotskian Approaches to Second Language Research*. Norwood: Ablex. 33-56.
- Duff, Patricia 1986: 'Another Look at Interlanguage Talk: Talking Task to Task'. Richard R. Day, ed. *Talking to Learn: Conversations in Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Newbury House. 147-81.
- Dulay, Heidi, Marina Burt and Stephen Krashen 1982: *Language Two*. New York: Oxford UP.
- Ellis, Rod 1994: *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Eisner, Elliot, and Alan Peshkin, eds. 1990: *Qualitative Enquiry in Education*. New York: Teacher College P.
- Foster, Pauline 1998: 'A Classroom Perspective on the Negotiation of Meaning'. *Applied Linguistics* 19: 1-23.
- Fuchs, Lynn S., Douglas Fuchs, Johnell Bentz, Norris B. Phillips and Carol L. Hamlett 1994: 'The Nature of Student Interactions during Peer Tutoring with and without Prior Training and Experience'. *American Educational Research Journal* 31: 75-103.
- Gebhard, Meg 1999: 'Debates in SLA Studies: Redefining SLA as an Institutional Phenomenon'. *TESOL Quarterly* 33: 544-57.
- Gregg, Kevin R., Michael H. Long, Geoffrey Jordon and Alan A Beretta 1997: 'Rationality and its Discontents in SLA'. *Applied Linguistics* 18: 539-59.
- Harrison, Roger, Fiona Reeve, Ann Hanson and Julia Clarke, eds. 2002: *Supporting Lifelong Learning*, vol.1. London: Routledge/Falmer.
- Johnson, David and Roger Johnson 1990: 'What is Cooperative Learning?' Mark Brubacher, Ryder Payne and Kemp Rickett, eds. *Perspectives on Small Group Learning: Context and Opportunities for Acquiring Academic English*. *TESOL Quarterly* 30: 253-80.
- Johnson, David and Roger Johnson 1996: 'The Role of the Cooperative Learning in Assessing and Communicating Student Learning'. Thomas R. Gusky, ed. *1996 ASCD Yearbook: Communicating student learning*. Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. 25-46.
- Krashen, Stephen 1982: *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon P.
- Kubota, Ryuko 2004: 'Critical Multiculturalism and Second Language Education'. Bonny Norton and Kelleen Toohey, eds. *Critical Pedagogies and Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 30-52.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. 1993: 'Maximizing Learning Potential in the Communicative Classroom'. *ELT Journal* 47.5: 12-21.

- Lantolf, James P. 1996: 'SLA Theory Building: Letting All the Flowers Bloom!' *Language Learning* 46: 713-49.
- Lantolf, James. P. and Steven Thorne 2006: *Sociocultural Theory and the Genesis of Second Language Development*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Long, Michael H. 1983a: 'Native Speaker/Non-Native Speaker Conversation and the Negotiation of Comprehensible Input'. *Applied Linguistics* 4: 126-41.
- Long, Michael H. 1983b: 'Linguistic and Conversational Adjustments to Non-Native Speakers'. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 5.2: 177-93.
- Long, Michael H. and Patricia A. Porter 1985: 'Group Work. Interlanguage Talk and Second Language Acquisition'. *TESOL Quarterly* 19.2: 207-28.
- Norton, Bonny 2004: 'Critical Pedagogies and Language Learning: An Introduction'. Bonny Norton and Kelleen Toohey, eds. *Critical Pedagogies and Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 1-17.
- Ohta, Amy Snyder 1995: 'Applying Sociocultural Theory to an Analysis of Learner Discourse: Learner-Learner Collaborative Interaction in the Zone of Proximal Development'. *Issues in Applied Linguistics* 6: 93-121.
- Pennycook, Alastair 2001: *Critical Applied Linguistics: A Critical Introduction*. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Pennycook, Alastair 2004: 'Critical Moments in a TESOL Praxicum'. Bonny Norton and Kelleen Toohey, eds. *Critical Pedagogies and Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 327-46.
- Pica, Teresa, and Catherine Doughty 1985: 'Input and Interaction in the Communicative Classroom: A Comparison of Teacher-Fronted and Group Activity'. Susan Gass and Carolyn Madden, eds. *Input in Second Language Acquisition*. Rowley: Newbury House. 115-32.
- Porter, Patricia A. 1986: 'How Learners Talk to Each Other: Input and Interaction in Task Centered Discussions'. Richard R. Day, ed. *Talking to Learn. Conversation in Second Language Acquisition*. Rowley: Newbury House. 200-21.
- Rampton, Ben 1995: 'Politics and Change in Research in Applied Linguistics'. *Applied Linguistics* 16: 233-56.
- Slavin, Robert E. 1990: 'Research on Cooperative Learning: Consensus and Controversy'. *Educational Leadership* 47: 52-54.
- Storch, Neomy 2002: 'Patterns of Interaction in ESL Pairwork'. *Language Learning* 51.1: 119-58.
- Storch, Neomy 2004: 'Using Activity Theory to Explain Differences in Patterns of Dyadic Interactions in an ESL Class'. *The Canadian Modern Language Review* 60.4: 457-80.
- Swain, Merrill, Lindsay Brooks and Agustina Tocalli-Beller 2002: 'Peer-peer Dialogue as a Means of Second Language Learning'. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 22: 171-85.
- Toohey, Kelleen 2003: *Learning English at School: Identity, Social Relations and Classroom Practice*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Toussaint-Clark, Colby A. 2007: *Patterns of Interaction between Low-Level Non-Academic ESL Learners*, Unpublished Master's thesis. Portland State University, Oregon.
- Wagner-Gough, Judy and Evelyn M. Hatch 1975: 'The Importance of Input Data in Second Language Acquisition Studies'. *Language Learning* 25: 297-308.
- Wiliam, Dylan; Clare Lee, Christine Harrison and Paul Black 2004: 'Teachers Developing Assessment for Learning: Impact on Student Learning'. *Assessment in Education* 11.1: 49-65.

Received 1 December 2007

Revised version received 22 January 2008