

Interaction Patterns and Support for Learning in the Primary Foreign Language Classroom

CAROLYN E. LESLIE

Universidade Nova de Lisboa

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ABSTRACT: In this study, both sociocultural and cognitive perspectives are used to investigate how learners in the primary foreign language classroom support each other's learning during peer oral interaction, and how this is influenced by different interaction patterns. Learners were recorded taking part in 3 spot-the-difference tasks in a year 4 primary class, and Storch's model of interaction patterns (2002) was used as a framework to classify learner interaction. Transcripts were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively, and show how learners used a variety of strategies to support their partner's output. It also shows how the majority of learners worked collaboratively, how collaboration increased with task repetition, and how pairs who engaged in collaborative interaction provided most support for their peer. However, other dyads showed less mutuality and engaged little with each other's contributions, with quantitative analysis showing these learners provided each other with the least support for language learning, as they were unlikely to ask their peer for help, one of the most common strategies used by other dyads.

Key words: Peer interaction, interaction patterns, primary language learning, foreign language learning, support for language learning.

Patrones de interacción y apoyo: el aprendizaje en el aula de Primaria y lenguas extranjeras

RESUMEN: En este artículo empleamos perspectivas socioculturales y cognitivas para investigar cómo los estudiantes de lenguas extranjeras se apoyan mutuamente durante la interacción entre pares y qué influencia ejercen diferentes modelos de interacción. Se grabó a los estudiantes participando en tres tareas orales en una clase de 4º año de Primaria y se utilizó el modelo de patrones de interacción de Storch (2002) para clasificar las interacciones. El análisis cualitativo y cuantitativo muestra cómo manejaron una variedad de estrategias para apoyar la producción de sus compañeros. También revela que la mayoría trabajaron de forma colaborativa, que la colaboración aumentó con la repetición de la tarea y que las parejas que se implicaron en una interacción colaborativa proporcionaron mayor apoyo. Sin embargo, otros pares mostraron menos reciprocidad y se implicaron poco en las contribuciones de los demás. El análisis cuantitativo indica que estos participantes son quienes menos apoyo se brindaron unos a otros para el aprendizaje de la lengua, puesto que no solicitaron ayuda, una de las estrategias empleadas por otros pares.

Palabras clave: Interacción entre pares, modelos de interacción, aprendizaje en Primaria, aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras, apoyo en el aprendizaje de lenguas.

1. INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Many children around the world today learn English in foreign language (EFL) settings, where learners study English for a mere one or two hours a week, (Enever, 2015), with few opportunities to use the language outside the classroom. Consequently, it is imperative that research helps clarify the pedagogical practices which support language learning. As noted by Halliwell (1992), children have an instinct for interaction and talk, and teachers should harness this desire to communicate. Although initially learners can only interact in well-rehearsed situations involving repetition of chunks of language, what Tognini et al. (2010, p.28.3) call 'interaction as practice', such activities are necessary for proceduralising knowledge. Nonetheless, learners also need to be given the opportunity to be creative with language, and to communicate their own thoughts and meanings, which may oblige them to engage with both form and meaning (Tognini et al., 2010). In the primary context, peer interaction provides an occasion for learners to try out their hypotheses and 'grapple with the target language at a more challenging level' (Philp et al., 2008, p.12). It also affords learners the opportunity to interact with others at a similar level of cognitive and social development, thereby benefiting them socially, academically and culturally (Oliver & Philp, 2014). In addition, peer interaction creates a more relaxed environment than teacher-fronted instruction, encouraging learners to take risks with language, and try out language functions they would not employ when interacting with the teacher (Oliver & Philp, 2014). Oral interaction also contributes to developing learners' literacy skills (August & Shanahan, 2006), so its importance should not be underestimated. Perhaps more importantly however, interaction has been posited as necessary for language learning, and this will be discussed in the following sections.

1.1. Peer interaction and support for language learning

Although peer interaction activities may lead to inaccuracies, and a breakdown in communication, the need to make themselves understood can drive learners to produce appropriate, accurate linguistic forms, and the use of peer oral interaction activities with both adults and children has been shown to lead to improved learning. Much of the research has been carried out from a cognitive perspective with adults, based on the work of Long (1996), who claimed that optimum input for language learning occurs when learners have the opportunity to negotiate for meaning when communication problems occur, thus allowing learners to obtain comprehensible input. Oliver's studies with children, (1998), demonstrated how young learners in an English as a second language (ESL) setting were able to cooperatively engage in conversational interaction, and benefit from their own output and the input they received. This was achieved using repetition, and conversational adjustments, (CAs) such as clarification requests, confirmation checks and comprehension checks. However, when the use of negotiation strategies between adults was compared to their use by children aged 8 to 13, Oliver (1998) showed there was a proportional difference in the extent to which each CA was used, with comprehension checks, (where one learner verifies the other has understood), being using less frequently between children. This the authors attributed to the more egocentric nature of children, who were more concerned in making meaning clear for themselves, than their partner.

In an EFL setting, Lázaro Ibarrola and Azpilicuta Martínez's study (2015) on the conversational strategies used by 7-8 year old EFL learners with very low levels of proficiency, showed these children used repetition and corrective feedback. However, their use of CAs was much less than values reported by Oliver (1998, 2002), which the authors attributed to the fact that the proficiency of the learners they studied was too low to negotiate, suggesting a 'minimum threshold level' of proficiency for negotiation could be necessary (2015, p.17). Notwithstanding, these learners could cooperate with each other, negotiate for meaning, and successfully completed the task. García Mayo and Lázaro Ibarrola, working with 3rd and 5th year CLIL and EFL learners (2015), agreed that a minimum level of proficiency was necessary for negotiation of meaning, and suggested that the 3rd year EFL learners in their study had not yet reached this level. However, they also reported that younger children in both the EFL and CLIL groups negotiated more than those in 5th year, a fact they attributed to the more positive attitude of 3rd year learners, who worked hard to impress the teacher. Hidalgo (2019) investigated 8-9 year old EFL learners' use of negotiation strategies using a broader definition of interaction strategies, and found learners negotiated for meaning, and interacted autonomously using clarification requests, self-repair, acknowledgements, utterance completions, explicit correction and recasts, which she suggested showed a greater understanding of how learners were able to cater for their interlocutor's needs.

Researchers studying oral interaction between young learners have also looked beyond negotiation for meaning, and examined interaction from a sociocultural approach, where development is viewed as taking part in social activity. These researchers believe that the language learners manifest while interacting with others is eventually internalised, so learners can use these new forms and functions autonomously. Here, the "distinction between 'use' of the L2, and 'knowledge' of the L2 becomes blurred, because knowledge is use, and use creates knowledge" (Ellis 2003, p.176). Within this framework, unskilled learners require the support of a more capable other during interaction, and evidence suggests that primary learners are cable of supporting each other's language production in ESL, EFL and English as an additional language (EAL) contexts. Pinter (2007), working with two 10-year-old, low-proficiency EFL learners carrying out a spot-the-difference task, found these children were able to assist each other over a series of repeated tasks. They did this by both supplying vocabulary and focusing on more formal aspects of language, such as correcting the lack of the plural suffix. She posited that results supported the introduction of information gap activities with low proficiency young learners, as it allowed them to experience real communication beyond interaction as practice activities, but suggested children younger than 10 could have difficulty collaborating with each other, as younger children have greater difficulty taking their partner's needs into consideration. Using a mixed-method approach with grade 6 ESL learners, Gagné and Parks (2013) showed that students were able to use a range of supportive strategies, including requests for assistance, co-construction, other-correction and use of resources. Of these, the two most commonly used strategies (requests for assistance and other-correction) accounted for almost 80 % of all strategies used. Negotiation of meaning strategies were rare, and comprehension checks were never used. The authors proposed that the classroom culture, where the teacher encouraged learner cooperation, led to students viewing the oral tasks as an opportunity for language learning, emphasising the situated nature of learning. However, peer interaction between primary learners is not without its constraints. For example, Oliver et al. (2008) found that children went off-task, were untruthful, and at times failed to agree with their partner.

To date, studies in this area seem to indicate that primary English learners can negotiate for meaning, and mutually support language production during oral interaction, suggesting the value of this activity in children's language learning. However doubts remain as to whether young learners require a minimum level of proficiency for interaction to be effective, and whether disregard for their partner's needs could render interaction less effective, justifying further research, especially with EFL learners.

1.2. Interaction patterns

With an increasing understanding of the role of social interaction in learning, researchers have turned their attention to patterns of interaction between learners, in an attempt to determine which are more conducive to language learning. Storch's research (2002) into peer interaction between adults revealed 4 patterns of interaction – collaborative, dominant/dominant, dominant/passive and expert/novice. These categories emerged from considerations of equality, that is, 'the degree of control of authority over the task', and mutuality, or 'the level of engagement with each other's contribution' (Storch, 2002, p.127). Collaborative dyads exhibited high levels of equality and mutuality which resulted in learners working together to complete the task. Dominant/dominant dyads contributed equally, but levels of mutuality were low, and learners ignored or rejected the suggestions of their partners, as each attempted to control the task. Later studies (Tan et al., 2010) sub-divided the dominant/dominant interaction pattern into two – dominant/dominant and cooperative, and Butler and Zeng (2014) later renamed the latter passive parallel. Here, neither learner endeavoured to control the task, and there was minimal engagement. Dominant/passive dyads were characterized by low levels of both equality and mutuality. One learner controlled the task, while the other contributed little, and there was little mutual engagement. Finally, in the expert/novice interaction pattern, one learner took the lead and encouraged the less-able learner to contribute. Storch (2002, p.148), concluded that learning was more probable amongst learners who took part in collaborative or expert/novice interaction patterns, and suggested that knowledge transfer was greater in dyads engaging in these interaction patterns, that is, those with greater mutuality, as they worked 'to co-construct knowledge about language'.

While research on interaction patterns in second and foreign language contexts with adults has been carried out, (Chen, 2017; Tan et al., 2010), fewer studies describe interaction patterns between young learners. Research on the social aspect of child interaction has suggested that underlying social goals and language learning are closely intertwined (Bigelow & King, 2016), and Oliver et al. (2017) propose that the success of language learning during peer interaction may depend on the manner in which learners relate to each other. Collaborative peers (average age 6) in Ahmadian and Tajabadi's study in an EFL context (2017), showed higher scores on vocabulary tests following an oral peer task than expert/novice and dominant/dominant dyads, which the authors believe was related to the focus on vocabulary and engagement in task completion shown by these learners, demonstrating a possible relationship between interaction patterns and learning with young learners. García Mayo and Agirre (2016), working with 3rd and 4th grade EFL learners, explored the effect of task repetition on negotiation of meaning strategies and pair dynamics. They found that 75 % of 3rd year learners showed collaborative patterns of interaction the first time the task was carried out, increasing to 100 % after task repetition. 4th year students however showed

a passive parallel mode of interaction on both occasions. Butler and Zeng (2014), reported how the majority of 4th grade students' interaction patterns in their study were also passive parallel. These learners' participation was equally minimal, mutuality was low, they had more difficulty taking their partner's perspective, and used more formulaic language than 6th grade learners, where greater mutuality was seen. This prompted the authors to speculate that 'the potential for eliciting a wide range of interactional skills/functions and dynamics of interaction, which is the primary advantage of introducing paired assessments, may not apply well to younger learners who are not yet able to mutually engage with each other in pair work' (Butler & Zeng, 2014, p.68). Lastly, in an ESL setting, Oliver and Azkarai (2019) showed how low proficiency 8-13 year old ESL learners interacted as effectively as higher proficiency learners, and showed slightly higher levels of equality and greater levels of negotiation than their higher proficiency colleagues, when interacting with young native speakers. These authors speculated that task type and learner proficiency influenced the patterns of interaction seen

These results highlight the uncertainty surrounding the relationship between age and the ability of primary English learners to interact and mutually engage with each other during peer interaction. Furthermore, studies on both how primary EFL learners support their partner's output, and how this may be influenced by interaction patterns remains scarce. The present study attempts to contribute to the existing literature on these topics, drawing on both cognitive and sociocultural orientations to provide data on the benefits (and possible limitations) of peer interaction. The research questions guiding this study are the following:

- How do primary EFL learners support their partners' language production during peer oral interaction?
- How do interaction patterns influence primary EFL learners' support of their partners' language production during peer oral interaction?

2. METHODOLOGY

The following section sets out the methodological instruments used to investigate the two research questions in this study.

2.1. Context and participants

English was introduced in the primary curriculum in Portugal in September 2015 and is taught by specialist, peripatetic teachers. The course objectives, (Cravo et al., 2015), stipulate that speaking has a privileged position in the classroom, but how this can be achieved in terms of instruction is not discussed.

The present study was carried out in a private school, and involved a total of 36 learners in two year 4 classes (9-10 year olds). Learners studied English for 2 hours per week and their level of English, based on results of class tests, was pre-A1. Learners had not previously taken part in activities where they had the opportunity to use English without preparation or rehearsal.

2.2. The tasks

Learners engaged in 3 spot-the-difference tasks, the first based on parts of the body and the second and third on food vocabulary, and tasks were designed by the researcher in collaboration with the English teacher. In all three tasks, the objective was to find the 6 differences in their pictures.

2.3. Data collection procedures

2.3.1. Audio recordings

Before research started, consent for recording students was sought from the school board of directors and parents. Learners were randomly paired by their English teacher, and tasks were carried out as part of normal classroom teaching over a 3 week period. Before the first task, an isomorphic version of the task was used to demonstrate the activity. Learners were encouraged to use English whenever possible and to give their partner help when requested. They were not provided with any specific language to use, nor was there a time limit to complete the tasks. In each class, 3 randomly chosen dyads were recorded during each task, ensuring that all learners who had consented to the research contributed. For technical reasons, one recording was not included in the data. This resulted in a total of 17 recordings lasting on average between 5 and 6 minutes each.

2.4. Coding Categories and Data analysis

2.4.1 Transcription

All recordings were transcribed verbatim including speech signals such as hesitations and phatic utterances. Transcription conventions were those used in Oliver and Philp (2014), with an indication of pauses in seconds shown in brackets.

2.4.2. Patterns of interaction

Butler and Zeng's variation (2014) of Storch's 4 quadrants, was used as a framework to classify learner interaction. Complete transcripts of all 17 recordings were read and re-read, and two researchers independently classified interaction patterns. Inter coder agreement was thus assured. Results for the occurrence of each interaction pattern were expressed as a percentage of the total number of recordings.

2.4.3. Support for language production

Through an iterative process of reading and re-reading the data, strategies related to support for language production emerged. In addition to qualitative analysis, the number of turns supporting language production were counted and expressed as a percentage of the total number of turns per dyad. The number of each individual strategy and conversational adjustment used to support language production was also calculated, and expressed as a

percentage of the total number of turns supporting language production. The proportion of successful use, employed to indicate the provision of accurate assistance, was also calculated, and expressed as a percentage of the total number of turns supporting language production.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Support for learning and interaction patterns: Qualitative analysis

Examples of collaborative, expert/novice, and passive parallel interaction patterns were found in the data. Examples of the dominant/passive interaction pattern were absent. Excerpt i shows an example of how learners supported language production while interacting as expert and novice.

Excerpt I

In Excerpt i, learner A positions herself as the language expert. In turn 2, B requests help to form her next utterance, and in turn 3, A models a solution, then co-constructs the phrase with learner B over the next 6 turns. This co-construction sequence also includes an example of correction through use of a recast (turn 5). In turn 16, B again requests help, whereupon A redirects B in line 17 by giving information on task procedure, then co-constructing the utterance by initiating a solution in turn 19, which B repeats and completes in turn 20. Mutuality is high with learners engaging with each other's contributions. Episodes such as these allow B to discover new knowledge about language while simultaneously allowing A to produce output, which could provide an opportunity for language development.

Excerpt I

-
- 1 A My monster have short hair.
 2 B Eh (2.0). *Como é que eu digo que é igual?* [How do I say it's the same?]
 My monster>
 3 A My monster have short hair too.
 4 B My monster have=
 5 A =Has.
 6 B Eh ... short hair.
 7 A too.
 8 B too.
 9 A OK. It's not a difference.
 10 B My monster have a one head.
 11 A Me too. It's not a difference. My monster have one eye.
 12 B Me too. My monster have a three mouth.
 13 A My have one. A difference. (9.0). My monster have one arm, one arm.
 14 B Me too. Eh... My monster have a (6.0)
 15 A Can I help?
 16 B Yes. *Como é que eu digo que ele não tem?* [How do I say it doesn't have?].
 Don't have>
 17 A *Tens que dizer alguma coisa que tem.* [You have to say something it has].
 18 B *Más não tem nariz.* [But it hasn't got a nose]. My monster have a>
 19 A *Não. Tens que dizer* [No. You need to say] my monster don't have...
 20 B My monster don't have a nose.
-

However, not all interaction patterns were conducive to learning, and in task 1 the passive parallel mode of interaction, which Butler and Zeng describe as existing when 'both participants work on the task but do not engage with each other's contribution' (2014, p.49) was seen. Excerpt ii shows how learners take turns to contribute information, and appear to have an equal degree of control over task direction, but who engage little with each other's contributions. In other words, equality is high, but mutuality is low.

Excerpt II

1	F	My monster three hands.
2	E	My monster (3.0) four hands.
3	F	Hmm
4	E	My monster a hair.
5	F	Hm?
6	E	A hair.
7	F	(2.0).My monster is hair.
8	E	(2.0).My monster a two legs.
9	F	(4.0). My monster two legs.
10	E	My monster have got=
11	F	= <i>Sou eu</i> . [It's me]. My monster is a big (5.0).
12	E	My monster=
13	F	=Big, Big <i>barriga</i> [belly].(11.0)
14	E	My monster=
15	F	= Monster big belly. [After consulting notebook].
16	E	<i>Agora sou eu</i> [Now it's my turn] (5.0).My monster is very big. (7.0).My monster is a four hands.

In turns 4-7, learners fail to confirm if a difference has been established, and although clarification requests are occasionally attempted later in the interaction to resolve ambiguity, they are often left unanswered. From turns 11 to 15, learner F focuses on his own output. His utterances in turns 11, 13 and 15 form a cohesive text and do not acknowledge the utterances of his partner. Children's ability to focus on the ideas of others changes with age (Oliver et al., 2017), and it would appear that these two learners still have difficulty determining what is adequate and inadequate information. Furthermore, the less collaborative nature of interaction is evident in the difficulty these learners have managing the task. Due to the ambiguity of the interaction, they are unable to verbally establish differences, which leads them to repeat themselves throughout the task, and ultimately leads to disagreement on the number of differences found. In addition, they fail to verbally confirm turn taking, leading to interruptions (turns 10-16).

Learners also engaged in collaborative interaction characterised by high levels of mutuality, and excerpt iii shows an example of this.

Excerpt iii

1	G	My monster has two (3.0) three arms.
2	H	(2.0) Three arms?
3	G	Three arms
4	H	My monster is (.) one feet. Ai, no, no, two feet.
5	G	Oh, my monster have two feet.
6	H	<i>Tens quantos?</i> [How many]? Two feet? OK, no difference.
7	G	OK
8	H	My monster...(2.0)
9	G	My monster have four eyes
10	H	Four eyes? My monster have four eyes
11	G	Four?
12	H	Four eyes. No difference. My monster (2.0). <i>Como é que se diz orelha?</i> [How do you say ear]?
13	G	Ear
14	H	Eh?
15	G	Ear.

In this dialogue we see equality of contributions, as learners work collaboratively to complete the task. Learners acknowledge each other's utterances through the use of OK on lines 6 and 7, and repeat each other's utterances throughout, showing interactive cohesion. This excerpt also illustrates how these learners employ CAs through the use of confirmation checks in lines 2, 6, 10 and 11, and a clarification request on line 14.

These excerpts demonstrate how learners were able to mutually engage with each other in pairwork, and use strategies contemplated by both interactionist and sociocultural approaches, for example, CAs, requests for assistance, providing assistance, explaining, modelling and co-constructing language, self and other correction. Although examples of comprehension checks were rare, learners made meaning clear for their partners by responding to requests for clarification and confirmation, and through translation. Moreover, they were able to assure their partner that no communication problem had occurred through the use of repetition and acknowledgments. However, at times mutuality was low, and some learners were unable to attend to their partner's needs.

3.2. Support for learning and interaction patterns: Quantitative analysis

As can be seen in Figure 1, the predominant interaction pattern between learners was collaborative. From a total of 17 dyads, 9 exhibited collaborative interaction, 4 expert/novice interaction pattern, and 4, passive parallel interaction patterns. This contrasts with results reported by Butler and Zeng (2015), and García Mayo and Agirre (2016) for learners in 4th year EFL classes, where pair dynamics were predominantly passive parallel for 4th year learners, but is in agreement with the results of Oliver and Azkarai (2019) in an ESL setting, and Ahmadian and Tajabadi (2017) in an EFL setting. By task 3 however, all interaction patterns were collaborative, in agreement with results of Garcia Mayo and Agirre's (2016)

study on task repetition and pair dynamics, where learners' interaction patterns also became more collaborative after task repetition. Predominance of the collaborative interaction pattern in the present study could have been due to increasing task familiarity due to task repetition, or the interpersonal relationships between learners, who knew each other well having studied together for 6 years.

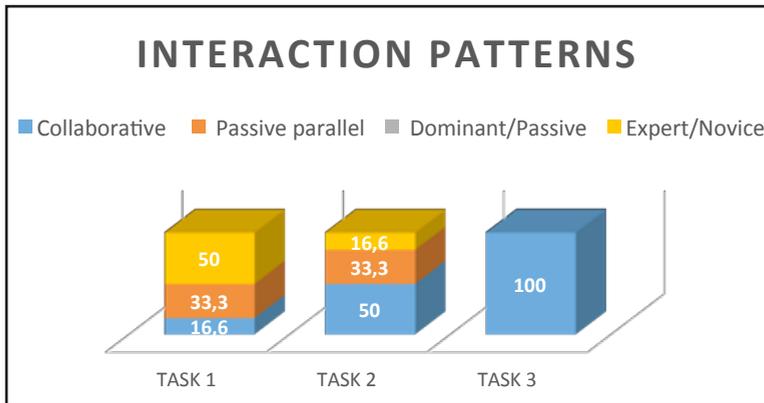


Figure 1. Interaction patterns over 3 tasks (n= 17 dyads, 34 students in total).

The number of turns supporting language production were counted, and are expressed in Table 1 as a percentage of the total number of turns per dyad, grouped by interaction pattern. The table also includes the median score for each category of interaction pattern (Expert/novice, Passive parallel or collaborative).

Table 1. Percentage turns supporting language production per dyad.

DYADS AND INTERACTION PATTERNS	TOTAL N° TURNS	% TURNS SUPPORTING LANGUAGE PRODUCTION
Dyad 1 Expert/novice	45	22,2 % (10)
Dyad 2 Expert/novice	68	33,8 % (23)
Dyad 3 Expert /novice	44	27,3 % (12)
Dyad 9 Expert/novice	58	17,2 % (10)
Median % turns supporting language production – Expert/novice		24,7 %
Dyad 5 Passive parallel	54	5,5 % (3)
Dyad 6 Passive parallel	58	10,3 % (6)
Dyad 11 Passive parallel	37	16,2 % (6)
Dyad 12 Passive parallel	51	7,8 % (4)
Median % turns supporting language production – Passive parallel		9 %
Dyad 4 Collaborative	46	32,6 % (15)
Dyad 7 Collaborative	28	25,0 % (7)
Dyad 8 Collaborative	35	20,0 % (7)
Dyad 10 Collaborative	19	0 %
Dyad 13 Collaborative	43	6,9 % (3)
Dyad 14 Collaborative	22	18,2 % (4)
Dyad 15 Collaborative	35	20,0 % (7)
Dyad 17 Collaborative	54	9,2 % (5)
Dyad 18 Collaborative	25	16 % (4)
Median % turns supporting language production - Collaborative		18,2 %

The highest median score of turns supporting language production (24,7 %) was recorded for the expert/novice interaction pattern. One of the features of this interaction pattern is that the expert 'provides assistance that will help the novice learn from the interaction' (Storch, 2002, p.135). These young learners were able to focus on the language necessary for the task and provide support for language production, and this was also true for learners who took part in collaborative interaction, although the median percentage of turns which served to support language production in this group was slightly lower at 18,2 %. Learners with a passive parallel interaction pattern provided each other with the least support for language learning, and a median of 9 % of turns served this function.

Studies with adult learners have shown that expert/novice or collaborative interaction patterns are more beneficial to learning (Storch, 2002), and results in the present study would appear to corroborate this, with greater mutuality leading to greater support for language production. However it should be noted that there is some variation amongst learners. For example dyads 10 and 13, who both engaged in a collaborative interaction pattern, had some of the lowest percentage of turns which focused on support for language production. In both these interactions, learners used more formulaic language chunks (On my table there are.../My table's got one.../On my table it's...), suggesting the task could have been too easy for them.

Of a total number of turns (722), 126, that is approximately 17 %, supported language production. Table 2 shows the strategies used to support language production, expressed as a percentage of the total number of turns supporting language production per interaction pattern, and how successful these were.

Table 2. Strategies used to support language production per interaction pattern and their success.

STRATEGY USED	EXPERT/NOVICE	PASSIVE PARALLEL	COLLABORATIVE	TOTAL
1 Seeking and providing language	13,4 % (17) 100 % successful	1,6 % (2) 100 % successful	8,7 % (11) 64 % (7) successful	23,7 % (30) 86 % (26) successful
2 Encouragement to use FL	0,8 %	0 %	0 %	0,8 % (1)
3 Use of explanations	4,7 % (6) 100 % successful	4,7 % 83 % (5) successful	10,2 % (13) 61 % (8) successful	19,6 % (25) 76 % (19) successful
4 Modelling language	3,1 % (4) 100 successful	0 %	2,4 % (3) 33 % (1) successful	5,5 % (7) 71 % (5) successful
5 Co-construction	7,9 % (10) 90 % (9) successful	2,4 % (3) 100 % successful	1,6 % (2) 50 % (1) successful	11,9 % (15) 87 % (13) successful
6 Prompting	0 %	0,8 % (1) 100 successful	0 %	0,8 % 100 % successful
7 Correction	6,3 % (8) 62 % (5) successful	3,1 % (4) 100 % successful	4,7 % (6) 100 % successful	14,1 % (18) 83 % (15) successful
8 Conversational adjustments (CAs)	7 % (9)	3,1 % (4)	13,4 % (17)	23,5 % (30)

Overall, the most commonly used strategies were seeking and providing language (23,7 %), and the use of CAs (23,5 %), 11,7 % of which were clarification requests, 11 % confirmation checks and 0,8 % comprehension checks. CAs accounted for approximately 4 % of the total number of turns, which is similar to the 4 % described by Garcia Mayo and Lázaro Ibarrola (2015) with 3rd year EFL learners, but much higher than the 1,15 % in Lázaro Ibarrola and Azpilicueta Martínez's study with 7-8 year olds (2015), which could be explained by a difference in maturity or proficiency levels. The use of explanation accounted for 19,9 % of turns to support language production, 16,3 % of which related to the provision of a translation to Portuguese and 3,3 % an explanation of task procedure. The use of correction accounted for 14,1 % of support for language production, 7,9 % of which were recasts, and 5,5 % self-correction, with one episode of explicit correction. The least commonly used strategies were encouragement to use the FL and prompting, of which there was one incidence each, and modelling language (5,5 %). Gagné and Parks (2013), found the young ESL learners in their study used similar strategies, however proportions differ from the current study (requests for assistance 46-61 %, co-construction 3,6-9,6 %, instructing 0-2,7 % other correction 5,3-20 %), which could be explained by the use of different task types. Analysis also revealed that in those categories where the success of strategy use was calculated, over 70 % of assistance provided was accurate, which should reassure teachers who feel reluctant to use such activities in class, fearing their learners could repeat their partner's errors.

Seeking and providing language, encouragement to use the foreign language, modelling language, co-construction and the use of correction were more common amongst learners with an expert/novice interaction pattern. The use of explanation and CAs was highest amongst collaborative dyads, and although the strategies used between learners in passive parallel interactions were successful in nature, these learners used all supportive strategies least often.

Results from these primary EFL learners support the belief that higher levels of mutuality are more conducive to knowledge co-construction in peer interaction. Engaging in more cooperative styles of interaction encouraged learners to ask questions and receive feedback, which was to a large extent accurate, to focus on form through modelling, co-construction and correction, and to work reciprocally to maintain a joint focus on the task, which was facilitated through their use of conversational adjustments. However, learners who engaged in a passive parallel interaction pattern differed in that they were much less likely to use their partner as a resource. They corrected their partners, co-constructed language and provided translations, but made markedly fewer requests for assistance, and when requests were made, they often went unanswered. There was little clarification of ambiguous utterances and this, plus the fact that they tended to focus more on their own output than that of their partner, led to a lack of focus on language, and difficulty in managing the task. Sato and Ballinger (2012) in a study with 3rd and 4th grade French immersion students found that the effectiveness of student collaboration in raising language awareness was dependent on the degree to which they had confidence in and trusted their partner's contributions. This trust, necessary for effective collaboration, was missing between the passive parallel learners in this study.

4. CONCLUSIÓN

This research set out to provide answers to two research questions: how primary EFL learners support their partners' language production during oral interaction, and how interaction patterns influence this support.

Regarding research question 1, learners used a variety of strategies, both those contemplated by interactionist and sociocultural theoretical frameworks, showing the variety of foreign learning processes in the primary EFL classroom. The proportional use of CAs was comparable to previous studies with 3rd year EFL learners (4 %) but higher than the value found for 5th year EFL learners (2,8 %) in the same study (García Mayo & Lázaro Ibarrola, 2015). Furthermore it was considerably higher than the value (1,15 %) found for 7-8 year old EFL learners (Lázaro-Ibarrola & Azpilicueta-Martínez, 2015), which these authors attributed to the fact that learners lacked a minimum level of proficiency for negotiation to take place. Although differences in how data were calculated means values cannot be directly compared, learners in Lázaro-Ibarrola and Azpilicueta-Martínez's research studied English for 5 hours per week, in comparison to 2 hours a week in the present study, and therefore although younger, their proficiency levels could have been similar. It would appear that the very low level proficiency learners in the present study *were* able to negotiate for meaning and obtain comprehensible input. Results further suggest that although age and proficiency levels may be important, motivation and attitude may also play a role, and this is an area which requires further study.

Although the use of comprehension checks was extremely low, this did not indicate that learners were unconcerned about making meaning clear for their partner, nor that they failed to take their partner's needs into consideration. Learners were able to use other strategies to support language production to focus both on linguistic forms and lexis, to clarify meaning, and to cooperate with their partner to complete the task. Learners used assistance identified in previous research such as explanation, self and peer correction, and seeking and providing language. In addition, they were also able to use teacher-like support such as showing their partner solutions to problems, demonstrating whole utterances and asking their partner to repeat, or by initiating a solution and co-constructing language when their partner was unable to finish the utterance (Guk & Kellog, 2007). Furthermore, the support provided was overwhelmingly successful in nature, and interaction enabled partners to produce output they might otherwise have been unable to, and provided opportunities for language development.

Regarding research question 2, results showed that interaction patterns seen with adult learners could also be identified in these primary learners, and that dyads showing greater mutuality provided more support for language production, suggesting an increased potential for learning. This reinforces the possibility of a link between how individuals relate to each other and learning, which could also be the case for the children in this study. The majority of learners worked collaboratively to successfully complete 3 spot-the-difference tasks, even though they study in an EFL context, and therefore have little exposure to the language, and few opportunities to use it outside the classroom, leading to very low proficiency levels. Contrary to suggestions that primary learners are unable to mutually engage due to age, the 4th year learners in this study negotiated for meaning using conversational adjustments, and a variety of other strategies to scaffold each other. Furthermore they were able to recognise the ambiguity of messages, and work to repair breakdowns in communication. Moreover,

although Butler and Zeng (2014) suggested that the 4th year EFL learners in their study used fewer communicative functions than 6th year learners, especially asking for and giving information, these were the most common strategies used between learners in the present study. Learners also suggested, instructed, encouraged, agreed and disagreed, showing how they were able to use interaction to express a range of functional language.

However, although the majority of interactions showed mutuality and equality, interaction was at times less successful. Dyads with low mutuality used fewer strategies to support language learning and were much less likely to ask their partner for help. Even so, with the exception of modelling language and encouragement to use English, they were able to use all identified strategies, and again strategy use was largely successful. By task 3, all interaction patterns were collaborative, underlining the benefits of regular use of such activities in the classroom.

Limitations of the study include the fact that it was carried out with a low number of students over a short period of time and employed only one task type. Nevertheless, it does show that even in an EFL context, primary learners are capable of working collaboratively to mutually support each other's language production, and that learning is best supported in dyads who show higher levels of mutuality.

Although recent studies on peer interaction have contributed to our knowledge of the nature of pairings, much is still unknown about the various factors which influence peer interaction in the primary English classroom. Light and Littleton (1998) for example have suggested that mutuality is more likely to be higher amongst pairs who are friends, but Garcia Mayo (2018) claims that pairs who choose to work together exhibit more off-task behaviour than teacher-selected pairs. Further studies with an impact for pedagogical practices could usefully be carried out on how learner motivation changes in relation to task type or learner pairing. Learner engagement with the task could also be investigated using Philp and Duchesne's classification of engagement into 3 types: cognitive, behavioural and emotional (2016). The role of pairings, classroom culture, age and proficiency levels in peer interaction would help inform teachers who include such practices in their teaching.

In conclusion, it would seem that the use of peer interaction activities with low proficiency learners can support language learning in the primary EFL classroom by providing an opportunity for children to pool their knowledge, create their own utterances and develop new language competences. Denied this opportunity, learners will struggle to make meaning themselves.

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