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FOCUS ON FORM IN PEER COLLABORATIVE DIALOGUES IN AN OMANI EFL CONTEXT

By

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Abstract

Classroom interaction and peer learning are essential aspects of the learning process. Thus, it is crucial to incorporate classroom peer interaction into second language learning situations. Drawing on sociocultural theory (SCT), the present study explored students' focus on form while collaboratively completing pair/group activities, and investigated the students' and teacher's perceptions of, and attitudes towards focusing on the formal properties of the language during peer interaction in their regular English lessons. The research data were collected using quantitative and qualitative instruments: the students' recorded audio dialogues, a students' survey, and a teacher's interview. One English language teacher and 22 Grade 7 learners who were studying English as a foreign language (EFL) at a basic education school in the Sultanate of Oman participated in ten pair/group collaborative tasks. The students' collaborative dialogues (CDs) resulted in 40 audio recordings that were quantitatively analyzed for language-related episodes (LREs). The findings showed that the students generated 152 LREs in 140 minutes. These LREs were analyzed according to Shehadeh's (2001) model. The findings revealed that the students produced more phonological LREs (76.3%) than morphosyntactic LREs (13.8%) or lexical LREs (9.9%). Other-initiated LREs (53.9%) were slightly higher than self-initiated LREs (46.1%). The students were able to correctly resolve most of the LREs with 77% of the episodes correctly resolved in comparison to 21.7% of the episodes being incorrectly resolved and only 1.3% left unresolved, while there were more comprehension signals (80.3%) in the LREs than continuation moves (19.7%). The findings concerning the students' perceptions towards focusing their attention on the formal properties of the language while being engaged in pair and group activities showed their positive attitudes toward CDs. The students were able to offer help to each other and contribute to the overall language improvement, particularly in pronouncing the English words correctly. Thus, they preferred to continue working on CDs in the future and suggested arranging the groups differently and balancing the use of individual, pair, and group work. Similarly, the teacher expressed her positive attitude towards implementing CDs in her teaching because she believed that CDs teach students to cooperate and learn from one another. However, she was concerned about the collaborative activities' time allocation, students' dominance, and silent learners. The findings of the present study emphasize that EFL learners can identify different linguistic problems, and address and resolve them while they are engaged in peer CDs. The findings further support the link between social interaction and second/foreign language (L2) learning since students' collaboration and peer interaction result in learning the language, as well as in the co-construction of knowledge. It is recommended that EFL educators promote peer interaction in their classes by providing their learners with the necessary scaffolding and support for a metalinguistic talk in L2 via clear instructions and guided pre-task training on CDs.

Keywords: Classroom interaction, peer interaction, second language learning, sociocultural theory, focus on form, collaborative dialogues, language-related episodes, English as a foreign language.