A Framework for Characterising Collaborative Group Discussion in Language Classrooms

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語学教室において、協調的である事を特徴とするグループ討論の構成について

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要　約

　語学学習者が語学を習得する方法は様々な視点から述べる事ができ、この過程における「協調的な対話」の持つ価値は広く受け入れられている。しかしながら協調的言語活動の実際の作業は、討論に入る以前の環境要因が幾重にも重なる事によって形成される、複雑で多面的な活動であり、更にそれは多様な認知的、身体的、言語的態度を通して実現される。この論文では、語学学習者によってなされる協調的活動を明確にし、その重要性が理解されるような方法を多角的に調査する。まず初めに、この論文ではある特定の協調的活動を形成する文化、性別、教育歴といった環境要因を考察する。第二に「協調」を理解する為の方法論的アプローチとして、会話分析の直接的関連性を考察する。最後に、パラ言語的行動、返答、助け合いといった、学習者による「協調」の独特な側面を詳細に記述している。特に日本のEFL（外国語としての英語）教育という状況の下で行われる協調的な行動を説明する事に焦点をあてている。
　パラ言語（発話に伴う声の調子など、言語構造の範囲外で行われる伝達行為）

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Introduction

Small-group discussion in language classrooms is an activity by means of which learners can complete tasks and acquire language by collaborating in a variety of ways. Collaboration, in this context, has been described by Gumperz et al. (1999, p. 2) as

> *a group phenomenon in which complex tasks are managed through close, step-by-step, apparently casual monitoring by participants of each other's actions*

This collaboration is shaped by the histories of individual learners. The behaviour of students participating in discussion is strongly affected by their existing social, cultural and individual experiences and attitudes. In addition, they bring to L2 discussion a background in discussing ideas in their own native language. During discussion students apply their linguistic abilities and cognitive frameworks to the challenge of cooperating with others to achieve a meaningful interaction and an exchange of ideas. The full range of communicative resources, including gaze, posture and gesture, are applied in order to supplement and support their linguistic interventions. Crucially, group members shape and reshape the contributions of other speakers through the ways in which they listen, respond and offer support. Individuals take responsibility at various times for collaboratively maintaining group direction and task orientation. Linguistic resources are both consciously and unconsciously shared.

This multifaceted process of collaborative discussion is an example of what has been described (Goffman 1967; Goodwin and Goodwin 2000) as a situated activity system and is a process deeply influenced by the institutional setting in which it takes place. As a result, when considering L2 group discussion the focus of analysis should be placed on what Lave describes as "the activity of persons-acting in setting" (1988 p. 177). The object of study in this paper will, therefore, be neither the individual nor the environment, but the relationship between the two (Nardi, 1996).

This paper provides a description of collaborative discussion in L2 that is founded on both macroanalytic and microanalytic approaches to understanding. The paper begins by defining collaborative discussion and the role it plays in language learning. Environmental factors such as culture, gender, personality and motivation that shape collaborative activity are examined. Methods for analysing spoken collaboration and for describing the important features of how collaboration operates are outlined. This paper consists of a general review of research-based descriptions of collaborative discussion but also includes

particular considerations of how language study in Japanese universities has been described from the perspective of understanding collaborative activity among language learners.

1. Defining Collaborative Discussion in Language Learning Settings

Webster's Dictionary defines discussion as "an extended communication (often interactive) dealing with some particular topic". Discussion, therefore, can be described as a communication that proceeds in time sequence beyond a brief conversational exchange and which has a concentrated focus on one topic, rather than moving rapidly from topic to topic. While a discussion can take place between two people, or even through indirect methods such as by telephone or internet, small-group discussion involves a definite number of people conversing in a unified location. Padilha & Carletta (2002, p. 117) define such a discussion as involving "three to seven equal-status participants engaged in unstructured conversation". This limitation on the group size is explained by Fay et al. (2000, p. 487) when they suggest that communication in small groups takes place as 'interactive dialogue' whereas in larger groups communication takes on the character of a 'serial monologue'. Small-group discussion should therefore be regarded as a scenario where individuals are relatively unconstrained by power relations within the group, are not proceeding by speaking rehearsed lines and are actively responding to the utterances of other group members.

One approach to defining the kind of interaction that takes place in L2 discussion is through the concept of communicative competence. Communicative competence was first described by Hymes (1972) in an attempt to develop Chomsky's (1965) view of linguistic competence. Hymes wished to present a description of human communication in which education played an important role. His view has been developed by Canale and Swain (1980) who defined communicative competence as having four elements:

> ***grammatical competence:*** *the ability to use vocabulary and the rules of the language*
> ***sociolinguistic competence:*** *the ability to speak in a manner that is appropriate to the situation*
> ***discourse competence:*** *the ability to speak in a cohesive and coherent manner*
> ***strategic competence:*** *the ability to apply successful communication strategies*

Dialogic interaction among language learners, therefore, requires a number of competences which push the interactive task beyond the requirement of simply producing grammatical English. Kramsch (1986) has described this wider view of competence as interactional competence, and she regards the development of this competence as being

the chief aim of language education—a process that involves a learner in developing the ability to express, interpret and negotiate meanings in L2. Kramsch suggests a three step approach to developing interactional competence that begins with teacher-student interaction, continues with peer to peer interaction and finally involves a study of the kind of interaction which can comply with the social and cultural rules that define interaction in the world outside the classroom. Participation in collaborative discussion in language learning settings can therefore be described as both a display of, and a way of further developing, interactional competence. Involvement in L2 discussion requires the learner to possess a degree of grammatical, discourse and strategic competence in their L2. It may not necessarily require sociolinguistic competence, and certainly does not require the kind of sociolinguistic competence available to a native speaker of English (cf. Leung 2005), but will more closely approximate real-world discussion in the L2 as a form of sociolinguistic competence develops.

2. Macro-environmental Features of Collaboration in L2 Discussion

Learners engaged in discussion with other learners via a language they are in the process of acquiring are involved in an activity that is deeply contextual. The utterances made by participants in discussion are shaped by the preceding utterances of other learners and by the institutional setting where learning is taking place. They are also, however, shaped by a range of pre-existing environmental factors. These factors include the national and local culture which may strongly influence the approach taken by an individual to open discussion, as may the gender of the participant and the gender roles expected of them culturally. The individual personality, learning style and motivation of a participant can be important in shaping the energy and approach they bring to discussion, as can the educational background of the speaker. Finally, institutional factors, including the role played by the teacher in setting up group discussion and power relations in the classroom, can also play an important role. This section will describe findings in relation to these environmental factors, including particular considerations of environmental factors affecting Japanese learners.

2.1 Culture

From a sociocognitive perspective, language is inextricably bound up with the social and cultural context within which it is used and within which learning takes place. This context creates and shapes both the language and the identity of an individual. In second-language learning contexts social and cultural factors play an equally important, if different, role as they are filtered through the pre-existing matrix of the first culture and language. Language learning should be considered as a culture learning process,

according to writers (cf. Byram, Morgan et al. 1994; Kramsch 1993) who have argued that languages are not 'codes' which can be translated from one to another but rather the containers, and the products, of a vast repertory of cultural knowledge. The cultural information that comes bound up with language includes gesture, intonation, codes of dress and behaviour, values, morality and attitudes. Communication is not only an exchange of information but also a highly cognitive as well as affective and value-laden activity.

This context-bounded property of language has led to suggestions from researchers such as Kramsch (1993) that language teaching should aim to impart to students a sense of the appropriate cultural behaviour that normally accompanies language. Kachru & Nelson (1996) make a strong case that language teachers should transmit to learners a sense of the communicative behaviour of native speakers of the language they are studying. The implications of this reasoning for classroom discussion are important. If discussion in English is to be regarded as a culture-bound phenomenon, then the teaching of appropriate cultural attitudes may be an important part of enabling L2 speakers to participate in discussion in English.

Calls for this kind of cultural training as preparation for discussion have been particularly prevalent among EFL educators in Asia, due in part to the view widely held among both foreign educators in Asia and among Asian educators themselves that Asian communication styles are inimical to open discussion (Ishii and Bruneau 1994). There have been corresponding suggestions that educators need to adapt their methodology in response to this environment and suggestions that language students need to be trained in the appropriate cultural conventions of conversation in English (Gumperz 1982). However, several recent papers in the EFL field (Littlewood 2000; Guest 2002) have strongly questioned the validity of this approach. For Guest (2002, p. 156), the tendency of much EFL/ESL scholarship to create fixed notions of cultural 'essences' reveals "more of colonial discourses than of cultural realities". When dealing with members of our own culture, Guest suggests, we do not search for cultural explanations for behaviour and to do so to members of another culture is unfairly deterministic. Teachers should rather, according to Yoshida (1996), regard individuals as being composites of several different cultures including gender, age, interests and nationality. They should also respect the reality that individuals from every culture are willing to "make adjustments when operating outside their own turf" (Guest, 2002, p. 159) and are not necessarily bound by their established cultural background to a particular form of communication.

While learners from many different cultures are undoubtedly able to make use of English to collaboratively discuss ideas and cooperatively seek solutions to tasks, it seems clear that there will nonetheless be a cultural dimension as to how this discussion

proceeds. The language teacher needs to be aware of three things: that L2 speakers are likely to behave differently from native speakers of the language in discussion contexts, that students should be educated about the cultural varieties of approach to discussion and that students should always be regarded as individuals who are more than the products of a single culture and who are capable of adjusting their communication style in the appropriate context and learning environment.

The first of these ideas is particularly important to an understanding of how learners perform in L2 discussion settings. Language learners will have typically spent many hundreds or thousands of times more hours engaging in dialogic interaction via their L1 with teachers and adults as they went through the process of becoming socialized into their L1 culture. Learners participating in L2 discussion are making use of not only interlanguage but also a kind of interculture (Kramsch 1993). Their collaborative behaviour may draw on aspects of the L2 culture that they have absorbed, but will be very likely to be influenced by their L1 cultural background. Values, morality, attitudes, gestures and codes of behaviour will be drawn from both native and target cultures in different ways according to the learner and to their individual experience of learning. L2 discussion, therefore, is deeply influenced by the cultural shaping and attitudes that individuals have encountered through their L1 experience.

2.2   Japanese Culture and Collaborative Discussion

There are several ways in which Japanese learners in discussion environments may be influenced by their cultural background. Asian students are widely characterised as having a greater than average focus on receiving information from the teacher and of giving a lower priority to self-expression. Lim (2002), for example, suggests that the influence of Confucianism leads South Korean students to be quieter and less opinionated than Western students and to be reluctant to challenge the ideas of an elder authority figure such as a teacher. In relation to Japanese learners, Ellis (1991) summarizes the widely held views on Japanese communicative style as follows:

In comparison to L1 speakers of English, Japanese speakers:
are less verbal and more inclined to accept silence in interactions
use more backchannelling devices
are more conscious of status relationships and change communication strategies according to these relationships
tend to be more formal
are more concerned with face-saving strategies
are less explicit in giving reasons for their verbal behaviour

These cultural tendencies have an obvious import for how learners in Japan deal with discussion situations. In relation to making arguments, Mizutani (1981) suggests that the average Japanese speaker is averse to using language to convince others and to bend them to the speaker's point of view. Where such persuasion is necessary, the speaker will usually regard it as a distasteful and uncomfortable activity and will try to avoid direct persuasion through the use of nemawashi (informing all concerned of one's views prior to the actual discussion).

While Japanese culture may be relatively discouraging of individual expression, it can be said to strongly encourage collaborative activity. Benjamin (1997) describes the educative process in Japanese elementary schools as being based around a system of han, or small groups, in which children work collaboratively to find answers and to correct each other's work. Group discussion, therefore, does play an important role in Japanese education, particularly at the elementary level. According to Murphy-Shigematsu (2002) almost all Japanese schools work hard to create an 'empathetic community' by requiring students to regularly discuss the needs of the students, the class and the school. Cooperative planning, led by students themselves, begins at an early age and by the age of twelve most Japanese students have extensive experience of group-based collaboration. At the high school level, collaborative work between students is commonly encouraged and supported. According to a report for the US government by the National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching for the 21st Century (2000):

> In Japan[....] closely supervised, collaborative work among students is the norm. Teachers begin by presenting students with a mathematics problem employing principles they have not yet learned. They then work alone or in small groups to devise a solution.

In summary, the literature suggests that average Japanese learners of English can be expected to be somewhat less inclined towards individual expression and somewhat more inclined towards collaborative, consensus-seeking activity than average native speakers of English would be in a group discussion.

2.3   Gender

The early stages of research into the gender-based nature of interaction tended to focus on defining differences in speech behaviour. However, more recent investigations of this issue have had a greater focus on the socially-constructed and situational nature of gender in relation to speech. Mulac et al. (2001), for example, found that women were more likely to produce indirect speech, particularly in situations that encouraged gender awareness. The role played by gender in speech comprehension has also been

investigated, with Macaulay (2001) finding that the sexes interpret instructions in different ways that can be linked to the perceived gender relationships at play.

In relation to the speech behaviour of Japanese women, traditional academic views have focused on gender-based patterns of communication and have described social norms which require women to speak politely, submissively and humbly (Reynolds 1990). However, several studies of modern speech among Japanese women (Inoue 1994; Okamoto1995) have argued that these are culturally constructed norms which Japanese women can both use or discard according to the situation. The use of female speech patterns by Japanese women is a choice based on the identity of the speaker and on their relationship to other speakers (Kobayashi 2002; Okamoto 1994). In practice, Japanese women are often assertive in L2 speaking situations, a reality partially explained by Kobayashi (2002) who finds that social factors such as the relatively low status of women in Japanese society and the importance of English in professions such as academia, travel and trade which are relatively open to women, mean that Japanese women have a comparatively positive view of English study and of speaking English.

2.4 Personality and family background

That language learners have various kinds of personality is both a matter of common sense and also a fundamental factor in understanding behaviour in L2 discussion settings. Ehrman & Oxford (1990) described nine different individual factors relevant to second language learning. One important factor is sensory preference, with differences according to whether visual, auditory or kinaesthetic activities are preferred. Reid (1987) found that Japanese students tend to be highly visual and nonauditory in their learning preferences. Learners can also be differentiated, according to Ehrman & Oxford, on extroversion/ introversion, intuitive-random/sensing-sequential, thinking/feeling and judging/perceiving scales. These factors can have important consequences for how learners perform in learning situations. Students who score highly on judging, for example, are likely to perform well in structured classroom learning but relatively poorly in the free-flow of discussion tasks.

Personality has an important genetic component but can also be strongly affected by environmental factors such as family background. An explanation of how family influence can be an important determining factor for the ability to participate in discussion is provided by Halberstadt (1991). In a study of the influence of family expressiveness on children's development she found that young children from highly expressive families were likely to be expressive themselves and were also more sensitive to nonverbal communication than children from less expressive families. She found, however, that by early adulthood children from less expressive families had become more sensitive to

nonverbal communication than others. Halberstadt explains this shift by suggesting that children from less expressive families have more training in interpreting non-verbal communication than do those from families where communication is always clear.

Personality difference among learners can have important consequences for the degree of language learning made possible by collaborative talk in the classroom. In classrooms where discussion is led by the teacher, it can be very difficult for less assertive students to obtain opportunities for output (Chaudron 1988). This may even be the case for less confident speakers working within a small group who may be intimidated by more able speakers (Allan 1991). One solution to this problem is offered by Cohen & Lotan (1997) in their description of multi-ability tasks that enable groups to create an environment where all participants feel they have something to offer.

2.5   Educational Background

The educational experiences of language learners have a direct bearing on their ability to participate in L2 discussion. Previous study of English will have helped the learner to acquire knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. It will also, however, have profoundly shaped the attitudes of the learner towards oral production and to discussion. Ferris (1988), in a study of ESL learners in America, discovered that around70%of students reported having serious difficulties in engaging in classroom discussion by means of English. Ferris found that these learners, regardless of a generally high level of English comprehension, had low confidence in their ability to participate in English discussion. He attributes this lack of confidence primarily to the previous educational experiences of the learners, most of whom lacked experience in aural comprehension and oral production activities.

Japanese education is generally regarded (McCurry 2003) as giving English learners inadequate training in speaking skills. All Japanese children study English as a compulsory subject in junior high school from the ages of 12 to 16 and most continue English study until the age of 18 at senior high school. High school education in English is dominated by preparation for university entrance exams which prioritise knowledge of grammar and vocabulary over the development of production skills.

3.   Conversation Analysis and Investigations of Collaborative Talk in Language Learning

The preceding factors that shape collaborative talk form the background to the actual production of communicative acts in the classroom. Historically there have been a range of methodological approaches to examining communicative activity. This paper takes the view that collaboration in discussion is best understood by analysing actual examples of collaborative talk, rather than by creating idealised models of linguistic discourse in the

Chomskyan fashion. In contemporary research the two most important theoretical approaches to achieving this analysis of actual speech have become known as Discourse Analysis (DA) and Conversation Analysis (CA) (Levinson 1983; Seedhouse 2004). Discourse Analysis, which emerged in the 1950s and developed in the 1960s and 70s had its primary origins in sociolinguistics and has developed into a variety of analytic approaches which often take a theory-driven position on the social orientation of the language at use. DA is applied to all forms of human communication, including written and spoken forms. It commonly makes use of coding systems which attempt to identify the purpose and functions of each unit of interaction and has consequently been influential in the development of pragmatics, a branch of linguistics that focuses on the functional nature of language (Parker 1992). An issue for DA is the lack of any agreement on how language coding should procede. Brown and Rodgers (2002) report over 200 different observation systems and Chaudron, in 1988, described 26 systems specifically designed for analysis of second-language classroom interaction.

Conversation Analysis shares with Discourse Analysis an approach based on a careful reading of texts that have been extracted from recordings of spoken interaction. The two approaches also share a view that the meaning of speech acts "derives from the intersubjective contexts in which they are set" (Cohen et al. 2000, p. 298). Conversation Analysis can be differentiated by the fact that it attempts to reveal the patterns and deep structures that exist within conversation by conducting highly detailed analyses rather than by attempting to categorize discourse. CA has roots in ethnomethodology and emerged in the 1960s at a time when audio recording was becoming accessible as a standard research method. The key figures in the development of CA, Harvey Sacks and Emanuel Schegloff, were among a group of researchers looking for new ways of doing sociology by means of systematically examining how human beings interact. They developed a view that all interaction has its own organisation and method (Sacks 1992) and that the very depth of the structures beneath language demands a close study that can respond to the complexity at play. Proponents of CA argue for a preconception-free approach to analysis, an "unmotivated looking" (Seedhouse 2004, p. 38) which leads to the discovery of "new phenomena rather than searching the data with preconceptions or hypotheses" (ibid.). Analysis, therefore, consists of several stages that may include, but are not limited to, a consideration of the functional role of language turns as in DA.

Conversation Analysis is beginning to play a significant role in describing the kinds of interaction that take place in language learning situations. However, the possibility of a role for CA in explaining language acquisition and in creating guidelines for teaching practice has been disputed by some researchers (cf. Gass 1998; Kasper 1997) on the grounds that CA is primarily concerned with interaction whereas SLA is a study of

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cognitive processes. The answer from proponents of CA methodology reveals that they are positioned closely to the sociocognitive approach to learning. From a sociocognitive standpoint, cognition and interaction are fundamentally related and consequently inseparable for purposes of analysis. As Markee (2000, p. 33) notes, researchers should "view the conversational resources that individuals potentially draw on to learn new language as collaboratively achieved micro-moments of cognition".

From a CA perspective, collaborative talk in language classrooms, however much teachers and learners attempt to shape their interaction as imitative of real-world conversation or discussion, must be regarded as a kind of institutional talk (Heritage 1995). Drew and Heritage (1992) outlined three key distinguishing features of institutional talk: it is oriented towards goals shaped by the institution, contributions are constrained by what participants feel are allowable in the institutional context, and the "inferential frameworks and procedures" (p. 22) of the institution shape the content of the interaction. Individuals in language learning situations, in other words, collaborate in ways that they consciously and unconsciously feel are expected of them. An important element in the CA approach has been the explication of how institutional talk differs from ordinary conversation and, when considering language acquisition, "how naturalistic SLA differs from instructed SLA" (Markee 2004, p. 70).

The key contribution CA can make to SLA, according to Seedhouse (2004) is by helping to reveal the "architecture of intersubjectivity" (p. 237). In mutually organising collaborative talk through sequencing, turn taking, preference and repair, speakers are demonstrating to each other both their own social actions and "their understanding of the other's social actions" (p. 237). CA can help to reveal in detail how a learner views the previous contribution of an interlocutor, how they go about responding to that contribution, and how they do so in the particular institutional environment of the language classroom.

A further important area of investigation for Conversation Analysis is the production of Adjacency Pairs, linked interactive moves where "on production of the first part of the pair [....] the second part [....] becomes conditionally relevant" (Seedhouse 2004, p. 17). Adjacency Pairs, of which question and answer pairs are a common example, are the "basic building-blocks of intersubjectivity", according to Heritage (1984, p. 256). Conversation Analysis takes interest in how these linked utterances reveal collaborative acceptance, or disregard, of social norms. As Seedhouse (2004, p. 19) states, the interest of Conversation Analysis is not so much in language itself, but in how it is "used to embody and express subtle differences in social actions."

4. Micro-analytic Features of Collaboration

The complex processes at work in collaborative talk can be analysed from many points of view. This paper has a particular focus on three important aspects of collaboration in L2 discussion. Firstly, collaboration is a whole-body activity involving not only language but also a wide range of paralinguistic activities. Secondly, collaboration is responsive—it entails a careful monitoring of input from other participants and then construction and delivery of appropriate responses. Thirdly, collaboration involves assistance—participants monitor their interlocutors for signs of difficulty and, when able to assist, intervene in various ways. These three approaches to analysing collaboration are by no means the only vehicles for understanding the process. An example of other approaches would be an analysis of the role cognition plays in collaborative interaction. It is also important to note that these three groups of features are not mutually exclusive but overlap and intertwine in many ways.

4.1 Paralinguistic Features
Paralinguistic Communication

The intrinsic role played by non-verbal activity in the process of communication has been stressed by Poyatos (2002), who says that it is impossible to "isolate the verbal language, the 'speech act'" (p. xvi) from the rest of communication. The particular roles played by the paralinguistic elements of communication are described by Samovar & Porter (1982, pp. 284–285):

> nonverbal behaviours [....] constitute messages to which people attach meaning [....]
> Nonverbal messages tell us how other messages are to be interpreted. They indicate
> whether verbal messages are true, joking, serious, threatening, and so on

Nonverbal behaviour, in other words, enriches group communication by adding emotional content and by displaying the relationships between speakers (Scheflen 1972). These activities also have important regulatory roles in group interaction, according to Padilha and Carletta (2002), as they help to organise the patterns of interactive talk. In language learning situations the use of paralinguistic behaviours forms an important part of strategic competence, according to Dörnyei & Thurrell (1991), enabling an L2 speaker to transmit "meaning across successfully to communicative partners, especially when problems arise in the communication process" (p. 17).

For Japanese learners, non-verbal elements of communication may be particularly significant. The common description of Japan as a high-context culture is given

importance for language learning situations by Hall (1976) when he states that, for Japanese speakers, non-verbal communication is an important part of the message that they expect the listener to be able to interpret. Clancy (1986) notes that "the Japanese have little faith in verbal expression and when verbal communication does enter in, it will often be inexplicit and indirect" (p. 214). While clear cultural differences do seem to exist between the importance and the role of paralinguistic communication in Japan from the way it operates in Western countries, there is some evidence that the cultural gap in this area is becoming less pronounced. Established views on Japanese paralinguistic behaviour, i.e.: relatively limited use of eye-contact and gesture, are criticized by Schmidt-Fajlik in a comparison (2007) of the actual feelings of contemporary Japanese university students about their non-verbal behaviours to the literature on the subject. He finds that the literature cannot account for current behaviour, which he describes as having become more similar to American paralinguistic behaviour.

Gaze

Gaze and eye contact are important markers of both intention to convey information and of active listening during discussion. As Goodwin (1980, p. 277) remarks, collaboration requires an effort to involve co-collaborators: "in conversation speakers are thus faced not simply with the task of constructing sentences but also with the task of constructing sentences for hearers". Speakers need to know that they are being listened to, according to Sacks (1992) who points out that a speaker "wants not merely to occupy the floor but to have the floor while others listen". Language learners both receive and process linguistic signals of recognition through a developing interlanguage and, as a consequence, may not always be able to recognize verbal signalling of intention by another speaker. Gaze, therefore, becomes a particularly important method of confirming that two-way communication is taking place. Gaze also plays an important role in turn control. Argyle & Cook (1976) found that speakers tend to look away from listeners as they think about what they are attempting to say and then refix gaze to monitor uptake as they complete the turn. Other research (Steinzor 1950; Lobb 1982) has shown that the person who receives gaze at the end of a turn is more likely to take the next turn as they have extra information about when the turn is likely to end. For Japanese learners, there is some evidence (Hattori 1987) that a Japanese cultural background tends to inhibit eye-contact, especially when dealing with people of superior status. This inhibition is greatly reduced when speaking with 'in-group' peers (McDaniel 1993).

Posture

The importance of posture in demonstrating interest, friendliness and involvement in

conversation can be linked to the concept of immediacy, explained by Mehrabian (1969, p. 203) as behaviours that "enhance closeness to and nonverbal interaction with another". Shifts in posture can signal turn-finishing and turn-taking intentions. Although Asian cultures are often reported to promote highly controlled posture and larger body space between communicants, McDaniel (1993) has shown that, for Japanese culture, these rules differ greatly depending on the relative in-group or out-group status of the participants. Where members of an in-group are communicating, personal distance is greatly reduced.

Gesture

Gesture is widely recognized as an aid to verbal communication, as a useful but expedient 'extra' to the essential linguistic process of conveying meaning. Gesture may also be viewed, however, as a fundamental part of the production of language. According to Alibali et al. (2000, p. 170), "gesture plays a role in speech production because it plays a role in the process of conceptualization". Gesture, from this point of view, is closely linked to thought and to the translation of thought into language. Kita (2000) suggests that gestures are actional, rather than representational, and that gesturing is thus used as part of the cognitive process. McCafferty (2004) applies these ideas to the efforts of language learners to communicate. Because of the difficulties they face in fully controlling L2 discourse, learners make particular use of their ability to embody thought in gesture. Gesture can be regarded, according to McCafferty as a mediating tool that makes the externalisation of thought quicker and easier.

Voicing

Native speakers of a language often make use of extra-linguistic vocal information in order to provide additional information about the meaning of their interaction. Voicing has been described by Gumperz et al. (1999, p. 1) as "contextualization cues such as intonation, stress, and volume" that are used particularly often by children to control interaction and to demonstrate the function of the message. In L2 discussion the use of voicing may often take the form of imperfect attempts to imitate native-speaker voicing patterns or direct use of L1 voicing patterns in the L2.

Silence

Maintaining silence in response to an idea or even in response to a turn-offer is one choice for the language learner. Silence regularly occurs in discussion situations when all students are preparing contributions or are unwilling to take a turn. However, the ability of an individual, and that of a group, to tolerate the prolongation of silence in discussion

contexts is something that is said to have a clear cultural framework. According to Capper (2000) Japanese students are relatively comfortable with extended silences and may consider talkativeness to be a sign of insecurity or disrespect.

4.2 Response Oriented Features

Response Tokens

The production of non-verbal sounds by listeners is an important part of the collaborative co-construction of meaning by both speakers and listeners in a discussion group. Response tokens (Schegloff 1982) are a subset of the backchannelling produced by listeners in both verbal and non-verbal forms. Gardner (2001) has described the most common response tokens in English such as *yeah, mm, uh-huh* and *oh*. Response tokens play a variety of roles in collaborative talk and are used to indicate agreement and attention or to encourage continuation by the speaker (ibid.). For language learners, response tokens often operate in a very different manner in L2 from the way in which they have been used in their native language. Maynard (1989), for example, found that Japanese speakers backchannel at double the rate of Americans. Ward & Tsukahara (2000) found that Japanese speakers respond twice as quickly to speech cues which invite backchannelling. Typical Japanese response tokens are *um* or eh to indicate agreement while a longer *eeeeh* sound with rising intonation indicates pleasant surprise at what is being said. L2 speakers may use non-verbal sounds from both L1 and L2 in discussion, the balance being related to their relative exposure to L2 in authentic contexts.

The Organization of Turn Taking

The collaborative organization of turns in L2 discussion is the fundamental way in which respondents work together with the speaker to structure the discussion and is a key example of responsiveness by discussion participants to the interactive situation. The complex group of activities, including gaze, body posture, syntax and prosody, involved in constructing turns have been outlined by, among others, Ford & Thompson (1996) and Schegloff (1996). These activities involve both speaker and listeners in a co-construction of turn sequence.

Small-group discussion is patterned through members of the group taking unplanned turns at talk and these turns are organized through a continual process of monitoring by both speaker and listeners of each others' intentions. The signaling of intention takes place through verbal cues, but also through postural and gestural signals and through other methods such as gaze. Such signaling leads the speaker to create transition relevance places (TRPs) which are opportunities for other speakers to begin speaking. Sachs et al. (1974) found that most turn-taking begins at, or close to, TRPs, although other procedures

such as interruption and simultaneous speech can also occur. The organization of turn-taking is dependent on a key feature of discussion-the audio monitoring that occurs each way between speaker and listeners at all times, except when individuals are planning what to say (Butterworth 1980).

4.3   Assistance Oriented Features
Co-construction and Scaffolding

Learners can be regarded as mutually assistive when enabled to work collaboratively. This mutual assistance produces a co-construction of meaning, a process that has been described by Jacoby & Ochs (1995) as "the joint creation of a form, interpretation, stance, action, activity, identity, institution, skill, ideology, emotion, or other culturally meaningful reality" (p. 171). The concept of scaffolding applies a slightly different view of the process of mutual engagement, focussing on the difference between interactants where the support of one helps the other to make progress. The key features of scaffolding have been described by Bransford, Brown, & Cocking (2000), in relation to teacher-student interaction, as motivation of interest in a task, simplification of a task, provision of direction, frustration reduction and modelling of how the task should be performed. Hartman (2000) lists the teaching activities involved in scaffolding as including the provision of models, cues, prompts, hints and partial solutions. In L2 discussion scaffolding takes place between peers who have somewhat differing linguistic, strategic and foundational knowledge bases. Peers can assist each other to contribute effectively to the discussion through scaffolding activities such as asking questions to clarify meaning or to stimulate further thought, simplifying or clarifying the statements of peers in order to achieve mutual understanding, suggesting missing items of knowledge or vocabulary in order to assist completion of an unfinished utterance and recasting or repair of defective statements.

Recasting/ Repair

Recasting is an important mechanism for teacher-student interaction by which the teacher can reformulate what a student has just said in a corrected form, thereby scaffolding the efforts of the student to achieve coherent English expression (Long 1996; Lyster & Ranta 1997). Students can and do provide this type of scaffolding for other students at times when they notice a vocabulary item or phrase that does not sit comfortably with their own knowledge of the target language and are able to provide language that meets the needs of the speaker. The importance of this kind of repair in L2 interaction has been stressed by Markee (2000, p. 101) who describes it as the "principal resources that conversationalists have at their disposal to maintain intersubjectivity, that is

to construct shared meanings". Markee warns, however, against an over-reliance on repair as a teaching method, or on seeing it as the only element in peer interaction. In the first place, he argues, recasting can be discouraging for speakers who want to maintain 'face'. It can also lead to an over-reliance on knowledge of language mechanics when language learning also requires an understanding of the real-world environment that the language applies to: "systemic knowledge is only truly validated when supported by schematic knowledge (background knowledge of the factual/ historical world)" (p. 159). Despite his description of repair as a 'principal resource', Markee finds that self-repair is much more common in second language use situations than repair by peer interactants. This kind of activity has been described elsewhere as self-initiated repair (Jung 2004).

5. Characterization of Language Learning Processes in Collaborative Discussion

The key ideas in SLA explaining how language acquisition can stem from learners engaging in collaborative talk with peers are the Output Hypothesis and Negotiation of Meaning. The output hypothesis was later developed by Swain & Lapkin (1995) into a description of how, through being in situations where it is necessary to produce language in L2, learners are stimulated to notice problems in their interlanguage ability. The fact of noticing a gap in their ability to produce effective L2 discourse pushes learners to stretch their interlanguage to fill the gap and therefore produces both semantic and syntactic learning. Negotiation of meaning takes place when difficulties arise between peers in achieving mutual comprehensibility and involves collaboration by means of comprehension checks, recasts, simplifications and elaborations. This process is believed to produce language acquisition because it produces more comprehensible input (Gass & Varounis 1994; Holiday 1995), because it helps the speaker to produce more comprehensible output (Long 1996; Pica, Young & Doughty 1987), and because it enables learners to access and subsequently modify the form and meaning of their L2 (Pica 1994). Shehadeh (1999) found that more negotiation of meaning takes place between L2 learners than between learners and teachers and that this was a reflection of "the pressure placed on NNSs in the NNS-NNS interaction to stretch and exploit their interlanguage capacity to the limit in order to make themselves understood" (p. 685). The best format for this process is small-group work, according to Ellis, as it is more likely to produce opportunities for "acquisition-rich discourse" (2005, p. 18).

Summary

Small group discussion can be defined as an interaction between three to seven people in a single location that continues for more than a brief period of time and has a focus on one particular topic. Participants are not constrained by large power differences,

or by the need to speak in pre-rehearsed forms and are responsive to the utterances of other members of the group. In language learning settings small group discussion is a display of L2 interactional competence that involves a substantial degree of grammatical, discourse and strategic competence.

Both the ability to participate and the way in which individuals participate in L2 discussion is shaped by a number of environmental factors that control the nature of learner collaboration. These factors include culture, gender, personality, learning style, motivation, family background, previous education and the institutional surrounding. Individual learners should be regarded as the product of a wide range of such environmental factors and also as having the ability to adapt their communication style to suit the institutional environment and the cultural framework of the L2.

Collaborative discussion in L2 has been analysed from a range of theoretical perspectives which have produced a number of analytical methodologies including Discourse Analysis and Conversation Analysis. Conversation Analysis has been important in revealing some of the key mechanisms in collaborative talk, including turn taking and adjacent pairs. Other approaches to analysing collaborative talk include studies of peer scaffolding and of paralinguistic features of interaction. Collaborative discussion in L2 is regarded in this paper as having three key sets of characteristics—paralinguistic, responsive and assistance oriented features. Paralinguistic features include gaze, posture, gesture, voicing and silence. Responsive features include response tokens, agreement, disagreement and the organisation of turn taking. Assistance oriented features, generated through co-collaboration and scaffolding, include questioning, clarification, suggestion and repair. Collaborative talk in L2 settings stimulates language acquisition by increasing both comprehensible input and comprehensible output. It requires learners to stretch and therefore modify their interlanguage. L2 discussion is an example of a situated activity system in which learners are both shaped by and reshape the mutually constructed learning environment.

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