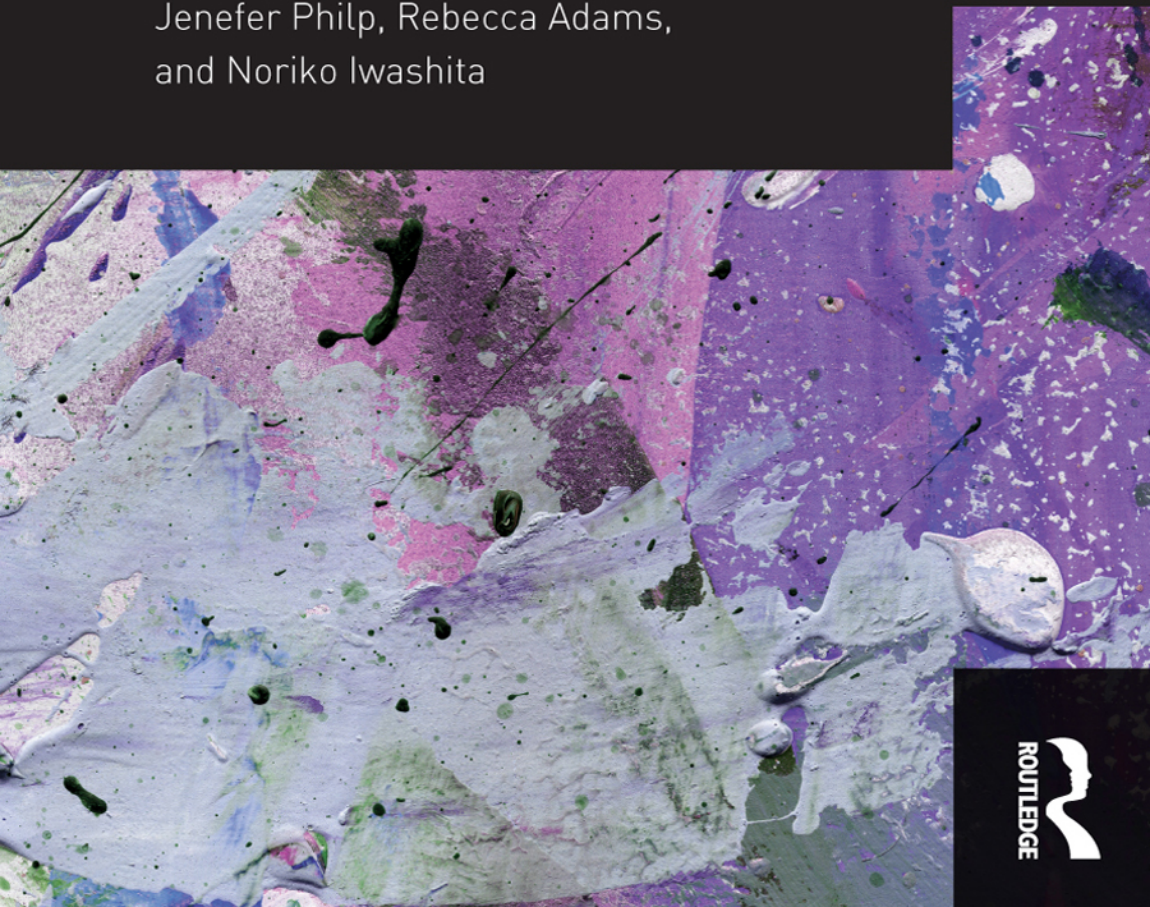


Second Language Acquisition Research Series

PEER INTERACTION AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Jenefer Philp, Rebecca Adams,
and Noriko Iwashita



ROUTLEDGE

PEER INTERACTION AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Peer Interaction and Second Language Learning synthesizes the existing body of research on the role of peer interaction in second language learning in one comprehensive volume. In spite of the many hours that language learners spend interacting with peers in the classroom, there is a tendency to evaluate the usefulness of this time by comparison to whole class interaction with the teacher. Yet teachers are teachers and peers are peers—as partners in interaction, they are likely to offer very different kinds of learning opportunities. This book encourages researchers and instructors alike to take a new look at the potential of peer interaction to foster second language development. Acknowledging the context of peer interaction as highly dynamic and complex, the book considers the strengths and limitations of peer work from a range of theoretical perspectives. In doing so, *Peer Interaction and Second Language Learning* clarifies features of effective peer interaction for second language learning across a range of educational contexts, age spans, proficiency levels, and classroom tasks and settings.

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1

DEFINITIONS, DESCRIPTIONS, AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF PEER INTERACTION

Why a Book on Peer Interaction?

In spite of the many hours of class time that learners spend in pair and group work with other learners, we still continue to think about and evaluate the usefulness of this time in comparison to whole class interaction with the teacher. Often our reference point is the principles developed from research on interaction between native speakers and nonnative speakers, between teachers and students (Block, 2003; Ellis, 2008; Mackey, 2012). Yet, as we'll see, teachers are teachers and peer are peers—as partners in interaction, they are likely to offer quite different kinds of learning opportunities. Now that there is a growing body of research on peer interaction, it is time to take a step back and consider peer interaction in its own right. What is it really like? What are its strengths? What are the limitations? Specific to instructed language learning, how can we make the most of peer interaction? This is the principal purpose of the book: to examine what the literature to date has to say about peer interaction as a context for language learning, within a range of classroom settings. We'll explore how peers contribute to language learning, acknowledging this context as highly dynamic and complex and unlikely to be readily understood from any one perspective.

The central focus of this book then is a particular context. Within the classroom environment as a whole, peer interaction is a context in which the participants are all language learners who are together for the purpose of learning. As we will see, the nature of this context is somewhat of a kaleidoscope: It changes with the shifting combinations of those involved, how they relate to one another, the activity in which they are engaged, their purposes and means, and so on. In this book, we explore the complex patterns of peer interaction and its potential contribution to second language (L2) learning by children, adolescents, and adults within the classroom setting.

2 Definitions, Descriptions, and Understandings of Peer Interaction

In traditional language classrooms, peer interaction wasn't considered a context for learning. Teaching was solely the province of the teacher, and peers were no more than classmates. Perhaps this was largely due to a very different conception of teaching and learning. The view of *learning* as essentially transmission of "knowledge" from teacher to student has now changed dramatically. Current theories describe learning as being less about transfer of knowledge (what the teacher tells the student) and more about learners' appropriation of the new within existing understandings. This is realized not in the sole context of the teacher's instruction to a class of students, but through a diversity of contexts. This view emphasizes the role played by learners themselves in the teaching and learning process (Duchesne, McMaugh, Bochner, & Krause, 2013; Wray, 2010).

Child, adolescent, and adult language learners, in second or foreign language contexts worldwide now spend significant amounts of time interacting with other students in the class, rather than only with the teacher. One reason that peer interaction has been advocated in language classrooms is because it is different from teacher-learner interaction and, therefore, allows for different types of language use and practice. Long and Porter (1985), for example, suggested that peer interaction allowed for learners to practice communication patterns beyond the "teacher-led lockstep" mode, granting learners opportunities to engage in negotiation as well as to take on new conversational roles. Harmer (2001) points out that teacher-learner interaction in a full class setting guarantees each learner very little time to actually speak, but talking time for any one student is dramatically expanded in peer interactions.

This greater reliance on peer interaction as a context for language practice and use is matched by a steadily growing multidisciplinary body of research, from social, cognitive, and other perspectives. It includes research within the field of education on the role of peer interaction for learning and, more recently, in the field of L2 acquisition. This richness of perspective is vital, as O'Donnell (2006), speaking of the role of peers in learning, notes: "No single theoretical perspective on peer learning (. . .) can explain how knowledge and skill is acquired in the widely varied tasks and demands of the classroom" (p. 781). For this reason, this book endeavors to represent the contribution of peer interaction from a range of perspectives.

This first chapter provides a platform from which to explore the contribution of peer interaction to L2 learning and its limitations. We begin by considering what we mean when we talk about "peers" and peer interaction, including the varied types of peer learning, and common goals in the use of peer interaction in the classroom. We then briefly outline cognitive and social perspectives of peer interaction and learning as these underlie the research surveyed in this book. We conclude with an overview of the structure of the book, which is based on three key dimensions shaping the nature of peer interaction. This provides a framework for considering strengths and limitations of peer interaction within the classroom setting.

What Is Peer Interaction?

We describe as peer interaction any communicative activity carried out *between learners*, where there is minimal or no participation from the teacher. This can include cooperative and collaborative learning, peer tutoring, and other forms of help from peers. Blum-Kulka and Snow (2009) describe peer talk as having a “collaborative, multiparty, symmetrical participation structure.” It is collaborative in the sense of participants working together toward a common goal. It is multiparty, in that it can involve at least two, but often more, participants. And it is symmetrical, in contrast to the teacher–student relationship, in which the latter is vested with a certain authority and is perceived to hold greater knowledge and experience.

“Peers” can be defined in a number of ways, for example, in terms of equivalence of age, skill, proficiency, or class group, yet they may differ for any of these categories. Specific to the context of this book, a fundamental characteristic of peers, as we describe them here, is that they are *L2 learners*, not native speaker peers and not teachers (although peers may adopt a teaching role at times).

The Role of the Teacher

Although we acknowledge the significant role of the teacher in successful management of peer interactions, it is beyond the scope of this book to discuss this in any detail. We focus particularly on those situations in which there is minimal assistance or intervention from the teacher. Suffice it to say that teachers play an essential, if sometimes unseen, role (e.g., Dörnyei & Malderez, 1997; O’Donnell, 2006). They are an obvious and ever-present participant in the classroom, setting the tone by how they set up the peer work, providing motivation, and equipping students with both linguistic and relational skills. They may provide a model prior to peer work, as well as guidance and correction during it. They can facilitate progress through encouragement when confidence or interest flags. They may intervene when peer talk becomes unproductive, in situations of off-task behavior, conflict, disengagement, exclusion, or dysfunctional interaction. After peer talk, teachers help learners to evaluate their progress and provide feedback on unresolved issues in language use. Research on peers in group learning in school settings emphasizes the necessity of training for effective interaction to take place (see, e.g., Mercer, 1996; O’Donnell, 2006), and the same may be true of adults (Dörnyei & Malderez, 1997).

Types of Peer Learning

There are many varieties of peer learning, but those most common to language classrooms are collaborative learning, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and peer modeling. Collaborative learning involves a strong sense of mutuality and joint effort (Damon & Phelps, 1989a, 1989b; see also Topping & Ehly, 1998)—that is, it

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does not simply refer to learners seated together and who work on the same task (Galton & Williamson, 1992). Students must depend on one another to complete the task. An example of this often occurs through dictogloss tasks (Wajnryb, 1990), involving group reconstruction of a short text. In this task, the pace of the dictation precludes accurate or complete notation but allows students to glean the principle ideas of the short text and to record key vocabulary items and phrases. Working together in groups, students then share notes to reconstruct the text. This task promotes attention to language form and a need to connect form and meaning. Swain (2000) describes such collaborative dialogue as “dialogue in which speakers are engaged in problem solving and knowledge building” (p. 102). She argues that such dialogue mediates language learning; the students are socially constructing their understanding of the language in the text, as they talk and write together. Although not guaranteed, mutuality is more likely in such collaborative tasks where students have to share opinions and listen to one another to complete the task.

Cooperative learning is used as an umbrella term that includes collaborative learning. It is also often used as a synonym for collaborative learning (McCafferty, Jacobs, & DaSilva Iddings, 2006); however, cooperative learning does not always involve mutuality to the same degree. It essentially involves peers working together to a common goal, though not necessarily together. An example of cooperative peer interaction often occurs in a jigsaw task, in which a group of students individually contribute information to complete a task. Students are each assigned a particular topic to research or a piece of information to read or listen to. They each work on their individual assignment; then, as “expert,” they report back to the group as a whole. By piecing together the information through discussion and feedback, the group problem-solves the task to produce a report on what they have discovered (sometimes with assigned roles such as scribe, leader, and reporter). The following example, from a class of undergraduate university students learning French as a foreign language, is from a listening jigsaw murder mystery task in which pairs of students first listened to select segments, before coming together as a group to piece together the information. In this extract, Sal and Al report on the movements of two of the suspects in the story to other group members who compare with their own notes.

Example 1.1

Sal: il a dit que il ah le premier avec les Blancs XX et ils rentraient à 18 et 30

[He said that he ah the first with the Whites and they came back at 18:30]

MI: pardon?

[sorry?]

Sal: 18 et 30

Al: ah um et aussi M Le Blanc um dit a dit um il était um avec sa femme et aussi doux autres um so donc

[ah um and also Mr. Le Blanc um says said um he was um with his wife and also two (mispronounced as soft) others um so then]

S1: Mme Martin

Al: yeah Mme Martin et M Brown et sa femme ah sa femme

[Yeah Mrs. Martin and Mr. Brown and his wife]

S1: avec sa femme

[with his wife]

Al: ah M Brown

S1: qui

[who]

S2: M Brown

Al: M Brown et Mme Martin so

S2: well mines the same

Al: right

S1: Mme Martin

S2: cos we're all together

Al: right OK at least we've got that

S1: how about I do mine XX elle a dit qu'elle est qu'il rentrait à apres 6 heures
(..) oh um XX ils ont Monsieur et Madame LeBlanc XX

[she said that she had that he was coming back at after 6:00 oh um XX they have Mr. and Mrs. LeBlanc]

(Philp, 1993, unpublished raw data)

Such tasks require learners to depend on one another for information. They may or may not be equals in this task, in terms of competence and/or proficiency, and mutuality may also vary. For example, group members may each actively participate, listen to one another, and take account of one another's suggestions. Alternatively, certain group members may take control of working out how everything fits together, to the exclusion of others. Peer interactions that are "characterized by high degrees of both equality and mutuality" (Damon & Phelps, 1989a, p. 18) have been found to foster active involvement in problem solving and exchange of ideas, by researchers in both education (e.g., Damon & Phelps, 1989a) and applied linguistics (e.g., Storch, 2002).

A common form of peer-assisted learning includes *peer tutoring*, in which one peer assumes a position of tutor and instructs or assists the other in some way. This includes peer review of a writing or performance task. Typically, this involves a more proficient learner (expert) with a less proficient learner (novice). This is

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associated with the Vygotskian notion of a more expert person providing scaffolding to support the performance of a novice learner (O'Donnell, 2006). Researchers of mainstream classroom contexts (Damon & Phelps, 1989a; Topping & Ehly, 1998) note key differences between the peer tutor and the teacher, and these are equally relevant to contexts of instructed language learning. The advantage of peer-assisted learning compared to teacher-learner instruction is that the peer tutor is less removed in status than the teacher, less distant a model in terms of competence, and closer in age and experience. For these reasons, peer tutors may be more approachable and more easily contested in their feedback, thus giving the novice a chance to try out options and experiment with their language.

Additionally, peers may offer particular insights into difficulties of classmates that the teacher does not have by virtue of his/her expertise. Further, the expert peer may benefit emotionally in being placed in a teaching role, and linguistically and cognitively through having to articulate explanations to the partners (van Lier, 1996; Watanabe & Swain, 2007). A potential threat to positive peer assistance is the risk of increasing social status differences in the classroom, where “expert” students are perceived as having more to contribute or being more valuable members of the class (O'Donnell, 2006).

Peer tutoring is illustrated in Watanabe and Swain's (2007) study, which compares writing between unmatched pairs. Interestingly, when working with a higher proficiency partner (Chie), Mei perceives her partner as being of equal proficiency, and their dialogue reflects high mutuality. After the session, Mei acknowledges ways in which working with Chie assisted her writing, both in language and strategy. Working with this peer, Mei appears comfortable to contribute equally with Chie and to accept her suggestions (this study is discussed in more detail in [Chapter 5](#)).

Example 1.2

Mei: I noticed that Chie corrected my mistake [of adding “s” to “make”]. I always forget to put “s” so I appreciated her help. Then I was absorbed in extending the thesis statement and was struggling with it. But Chie told me that we now need to write about specific examples. I thought like “yeah, you're right” (laughing).

(Watanabe & Swain, 2007, p. 123)

Peer modeling is often reflected when heritage learners, who have been exposed to the target language in the home environment, are matched with L2 learners who have only experienced target language use in classroom contexts (heritage learner interactions are further discussed in [Chapter 5](#)).

There are many potential problems in peer work in language classrooms: relational, linguistic, and cognitive. To some extent, such problems are resolved or exacerbated through choices of group size, assignment of roles, the goals of the

task, the use of incentives or level of accountability, the relative ability within the group, and the physical arrangement (Johnson, Johnson, Holubec, & Roy, 1984; O'Donnell, 2006). Given the many practical books on classroom management of cooperative learning and group work (e.g. Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003; Johnson et al., 1984; McCafferty et al., 2006), this is not a focus of this book.

Having explained the scope of this book, and what we mean by peer interaction, we now explore the theoretical rationale for peer work as a context for L2 learning in classrooms. We will consider this from four perspectives: interactionist theories of L2 learning, sociocultural theories of L2 learning, language socialization, and age-related differences in learning.

Perspectives on Peer Interaction and L2 Learning

Within L2 acquisition theory, interaction per se is seen, from both cognitive and social theoretical perspectives, as a prime context for language acquisition and development. By interaction, we refer to either dyadic or multiparty talk that has a primary focus on communicating meaning, rather than on language form in isolation. Early interactionist research on peer interaction was often carried out under experimental conditions and focused on particular communication strategies employed by the participants to address difficulties in mutual comprehension. These strategies involve adjustments to both language form and the structure of the conversation itself. This is seen in [Example 1.3](#) below (Duff, 1986) in which two learners, “J” and “CH,” debate the topic of age and wisdom. In response to CH’s questions, J repeats key words and reformulates his language to assist comprehension.

Example 1.3

- | | |
|---|---|
| | J: . . . Bad bad influence (3) . . .
Experience sometimes uh
worked for people for people
as a MAL influence |
| CH: Influence? | J: Yeah. . . mal |
| CH: More? | J: Bad-bad influence . . . mal
influence |
| CH: Oh (2) I don't know what
do you meaning? | J: Mal means bad |
| CH: M-A-L? (looks in dictionary). Oh
I see . . . mal oh MAL influence
Your meaning is a | J: Even if the same experience |
| CH: Yeah | J: One person uh |
| CH: Can get some useful idea but other
can get some bad idea from that | J: Yeah |

(Duff, 1986, p. 178)

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From a cognitive perspective, Long's (1983, 1996) interaction hypothesis proposes that such interaction facilitates learning. Specifically, as Pica (1992, 2013) notes, in *negotiated* interaction participants adjust how they express meaning in response to communication difficulties (e.g., through repetition, restructuring, or rephrasing of language). This promotes mutual comprehension and provides learners with opportunities to hear the target language, to pay attention to how meaning is expressed in the target language, and to try out that language themselves (Mackey, 2012; Philp, 2012; see Mackey & Goo, 2007, for a meta-analysis of research on interaction and learning). As illustrated in [Example 1.3](#), J treats the prefix “mal” as if it were a single word, a complication of peer interaction is the potential introduction of non-targetlike input and feedback. This is one reason why teachers and students alike have questioned the benefits of peer interaction for language learning.

Complementary to cognitively oriented research is work based on sociocultural perspectives of L2 learning. This research emphasizes the social nature of interaction and the co-constructed nature of learning. Within an interactionist perspective, learning is primarily seen as something unique to, and situated within, the individual's own mind. It is an outcome or product of interaction with others. From a sociocultural perspective, learning is a jointly developed process and inherent in participating in interaction. Thus, Swain (2000) describes problem solving and knowledge building through collaborative dialogue as *learning*. In the following example, she illustrates this notion of co-construction. Two learners in the process of reconstructing a text together are puzzling over partitives (*des* or *de*) and adjective agreement (masculine or feminine) in the non-targetlike phrase “des nouveaux menaces” (new threats). They do not achieve this simply through individual reflection; it helps them to verbalize each possibility and try it out. Ultimately, they solve part of their problem by finding the gender of the noun in the dictionary. Swain argues that it is through verbalizing the form reciprocally, trying to produce the phrase correctly, that they come to reflect on language form, identify knowledge gaps, and find solutions.

Example 1.4

17 Rachel: Yeah, nouveaux, des nouveaux, de nouveaux. Is it des nouveaux or de nouveaux?

[new, “des” news; “de” news (checking which partitive form to use) is it “des nouveaux” or “de nouveaux”?]

18 Sophie: Des nouveaux or des nouvelles? (masculine plural form of the adjective or feminine plural form)

19 Rachel: Nou[veaux], des nou[veaux], de nou[veaux]

20 Sophie: It's menace, un menace, une menace, un menace, menace ay ay ay! (exasperated) [*It's threat*] (then checking if threat is masculine or feminine)

- (. . .) (they look up “mece” in the dictionary)
- 22 Sophie: (triumphantly) C’est des nouvelles!
 [Its “des nouvelles”!] (i.e., the feminine form)
- 23 Rachel: C’est féminin; des nouvelles menaces.
 [Its feminine “des nouvelles menaces.”]

(Swain, 2000, p. 299)

After finding the gender of the noun “menace,” they successfully apply this knowledge to supply correct adjective agreement (“nouvelles”). As such, learning is the very substance of interaction, the co-construction that evolves through collaborative dialogue, as much as it is an outcome for each individual learner. As we will see in later chapters in this book, peer interaction is a primary context for such “languaging,” as Swain (2010) calls it, because of the very nature of peers’ social interaction—as nonexperts, they must puzzle through things together. Sfar (1998) emphasizes the dangers of seeing learning only in terms of acquisition by an individual or only in terms of participation. In this book, we see both cognitive and social perspectives as essential to understanding the contribution of peer interaction to L2 development.

Another view, important to understanding the contribution of peer interaction to L2 learning relates to work on language socialization and language identity, and the process of becoming a member of a community of users of the target language (Miller, 2003; Pavlenko, 2002; Swain & Deters, 2007). From this perspective, for example, peer interaction in first language (L1)–medium schools is an important context in which immigrant children and adolescents negotiate their identities and how they are seen by others. In this process, they appropriate or reject the discourses of their peers, and they become accepted or marginalized in the school community, with positive and negative consequences for L2 learning.

Another difference in perspectives on peer interaction relates to age and developmental factors. Research on peer interaction among children is quite distinct from the literature on peer interaction among adults. There is a large body of literature within educational psychology concerning peers and learning, and much of this is highly relevant to our understanding of peer interaction and L2 learning in the school years. As described in [Chapter 7](#), the maturational trajectory of social and cognitive development from childhood to adolescence to adulthood manifests in qualitatively different ways of thinking and behaving (Duchesne, McMaugh, Bochner, & Krause, 2012; Muñoz, 2007) and thus has implications for the nature of peer interaction and its contribution to L2 learning among children of different ages. We draw on these four perspectives in order to understand the potential contributions of peer interaction to learning.

Organization of This Book

This book is arranged in three sections, reflecting the different dimensions that we suggest shape the nature and outcomes of peer interaction: language, participants, and task. In [Section I](#), we describe three main ways in which learners engage with language in the context of peer interaction and the potential outcomes for language learning. In [Section II](#), we explore factors associated with the participants in interaction. In [Section III](#), we conclude and discuss factors associated with the purpose and mode of interaction. The final chapter of this book brings together what we consider to be the principal contributions of peer interaction, based on research to date. Although the majority of this book focuses uniquely on peer interaction, in this concluding chapter, we consider the relationship between peer interaction and the wider context of the classroom, including how it functions in relation to teacher–student interaction.

Peer Interaction as a Context for Learning

A primary premise of this book is that peer interaction is a context for language learning and use, and it is a context within the wider setting of the classroom. Although we focus here uniquely on peer interaction, it is crucial to retain the fact that peer interaction operates as it does because of its place in the classroom setting. That is to say, peer interaction is *one* of other contexts for learning, including teacher–student interaction. Peer interaction itself is thus nested within the framework of the classroom, and its contribution to learning is colored by this. As such, peer interaction is both influenced by and complements other types of interactions and experiences that occur, most notably teacher–student whole class interaction. We return to this idea in [Chapter 12](#).

Peer interaction tasks can take various guises, encompass different aims, and accordingly, have diverse advantages (and disadvantages). The value of some types of peer interaction stems from an *unequal* relationship between peers during the task, where one peer is more competent than others. The potential of this is best understood from Vygotskian-based principles (Berk, 2013; Corden, 2000; Duchesne et al., 2013) and the notion of working within the learner’s zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD represents the range of performance between a learner’s ability to complete a task unassisted and achievement with the assistance of a more expert partner. Other types of peer interaction have alternative benefits when they involve learners of *equivalent* levels of proficiency or competence for the task. Understood from a cognitive perspective, particularly from a Piagetian heritage, peers contribute to learning by providing a context in which they may challenge one another’s preexisting conceptions. This conflict provides the impetus for interlanguage change, in a process of continual construction and reconstruction in response to their experience of language use. Throughout this book, we explore these differing

aspects of peer learning. In addition, we illustrate the varied goals of formally organized peer interaction in the language or content-based classroom, including the practice or rehearsal of forms pretaught by the teacher (see [Chapter 4](#)); the provision of correction and feedback ([Chapters 3 and 10](#)); and the use of problem solving, creative language production, and exchange of information ([Chapters 2, 9, and 10](#)).

The nature of peer interaction as a context for learning is shaped not only by the wider framework of the classroom, but by other dimensions too, such as the central emphasis of language use in the interaction (e.g., experimental, corrective, or fluency based); the participants within the group (e.g., their social relations, age, experience, and proficiency); and the medium and mode of instruction (whether oral or written, face-to-face, or online), including the task (purpose, specifications, and content). The structure of the book is based on these three dimensions.

Section I: Language Use, Misuse, Modification, and Development

The first section of the book explores the role of peer interaction in promoting different aspects of the language-learning process. The three chapters in this section each explore one aspect of language use and the potential contribution of interaction as a result, from sociocultural, cognitive, and information-processing perspectives. [Chapter 2](#) investigates peer interaction as a site for linguistic exploration, for learners to stretch their linguistic resources, notice gaps in their interlanguage knowledge, and try out or further explore new forms. [Chapter 3](#) examines the occurrence of corrective feedback and other types of focus on form during peer interactions. It investigates the role of peer interaction in promoting mastery of linguistic form. [Chapter 4](#) presents an evaluation of peer interaction as a site for language practice to promote automaticity, from the perspective of skill acquisition theory. These are three areas of language use identified in the literature as contributing to language learning. Each chapter pinpoints benefits of peers and limitations in these areas, based on research findings. This section as a whole highlights those areas in which peer interaction is most likely or least likely to be of benefit.

Section II: The Participants of Peer Interaction

The three chapters in the second section each focus on attributes of the participants in peer interaction and how they may make a difference to the nature and outcomes of the interaction. [Chapter 5](#) explores the effects of L2 proficiency and L1 use. In some contexts and for some learners, L1 use can be a hindrance, but in other contexts, L1 use may provide a useful scaffold for target language production. What is interesting here is the *reciprocal* influence of each participant's respective nature because every participant influences the interaction in association with all others. When learners of matched proficiency interact, high or low proficiency is not necessarily predictive of particular outcomes. Rather, L2 proficiency and

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individual difference characteristics such as personality, affect, and motivation contribute to the shape and outcomes of the interaction in complex ways.

Even when homogenous groups are all working on the same task in a class, the quality of each group's interaction and the outcomes for learning can differ, simply because the members of the group and how they relate to one another differ. Hartup (2011), an educational psychologist, makes the point that peer interaction "always involves specific [individuals] with unique socialization histories, differing histories of interaction with one another, specific content (what the interaction is about), and a unique setting (a situation in time and place)" (p. 8). Although these differences are evident, it is not clear to what extent peers' relations with one another underlie the potential contribution of peer interaction to learning. [Chapter 6](#) investigates how learners' perceptions of themselves and their peer interlocutors, and their relationships and past experiences with one another can affect the way in which they interact together. [Chapter 7](#) concerns peer interaction among school-age learners and differences due to age. We examine differences and similarities in younger and older children's interaction in terms of their engagement with the task, with one another, and with language, including linguistic feedback to one another.

Section III: The Purpose and Mode of Peer Interaction

Peer interaction operates in different modes. Most common perhaps is oral interaction, but learners may also be involved in written interaction with one another, in either face-to-face environments or through computer-mediated communication. Another distinction in types of interaction concerns formality and the role of the teacher. Peer interaction can be formally created, for example, pair or group work set by the teacher for purposes of assessment or practice. Conversely, it may be informal and spontaneous, for example, a whispered conversation between two friends during whole class interaction (see Batstone & Philp, 2013). Often a combination occurs—for example, during an assigned classroom practice activity, partners may go "off task" to talk about their social life. Thus, the term *peer interaction* covers a wide spectrum of activity in which learners converse or engage with one another for a common purpose, either orally or by a written medium.

This final section considers relationships between the task, purpose, mode, and nature of peer interaction. [Chapter 8](#) considers the dynamics of peer interaction according to task, including the type, structure, and complexity of tasks, and how these features impact outcomes of interaction. [Chapter 9](#) provides an overview of research on computer-mediated peer interaction, including synchronous, asynchronous, and multimodal environments. This chapter gives insights into the particular benefits of virtual interaction in contrast to face-to-face contexts. Although interaction research has tended to focus on oral interaction, in classroom settings peer interaction often occurs as learners collaboratively engage in reading and writing tasks. Interestingly, this appears to be beneficial in ways that are different from those found in

Chapters 2–4. Chapter 10 focuses on how peer interaction shapes and is shaped by engagement in reading and writing. Finally, Chapter 11 provides an overview of the use of peer interaction for assessment purposes and issues concerning validity, reliability, and the appropriateness of peer interaction in assessment.

The concluding chapter of the book evaluates the implications and applications of the research on peer interaction for theory of instructed language learning and for language pedagogy. It reflects on the limitations of the research to date and important directions for new research. We discuss the potential of peer interaction for L2 learning in different contexts and the limitations: As noted in L1 research on peer interaction, peer interaction cannot be assumed always to be beneficial or to have blanket effects (De Lisi & Golbeck, 1999), and thus we consider how the dimensions of language, participants, and task may mediate the nature of peer interaction and its outcomes for L2 learning. In particular, we reflect on combinations of features of peer interaction that appear to either promote or inhibit learning. Finally, we discuss the relationship between peer interaction and teacher–student interaction, and how these two contexts complement one another, in ways not often researched or discussed with regard to L2 development.

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