Peer Speech Repairs in EFL Classroom Activities

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Introduction

In the last few decades, the conjunction of, on the one hand, pedagogical approaches tried in foreign language English (EFL) classrooms, such as task-based teaching (e.g., Candling, 1987; Fotos & Ellis, 1991; Kumaravadivelu, 1993; Long & Crookes 1992) its variants such as the procedural approach (Prabhu, 1984, 1987), or task-oriented teaching (Johnson, 1982), communicative language teaching (e.g., Breen, 1987; Brumfit, 1978, 1979; Munby, 1978; Nunan, 1985, 1989), "prosocial" approaches — such as peer-teaching, cooperative/collaborative learning (Bitzer, 1994; Ghaith & Shabban, 1995; Olsen & Kagan, 1992; Slavin, 1983a, 1990, 1991) and, on the other hand, empirical research from a sociolinguistic perspective on non-native speakers' (NNS) language in small groups (Doughty & Pica, 1984; Pica & Doughty, 1985, 1988) have concurred to strengthen the underlying claim of the interaction hypothesis.

Task-based approaches to teaching have been adopted on several grounds. These include their emphasis on the learning process as appropriate content during language learning (Breen, 1987, p. 161) and their focus on the process of communication and/or language learning by confronting learners with the unpredictable nature of language in use (Hull, 1992, p. 81). Other proponents have cited the potential of task-based approaches to promote language fluency through practice (Johnson, 1982, p. 149) and their influence on learners by directing attention to particular aspects of content and specified ways of processing information (Gibson & Levin, 1975; McConkie, 1977). Further benefits include their potential to offer real benefits in diagnosing students' particular problems, opportunities to demonstrate and improve communication skills by aiding fluency through the use of natural and spontaneous language, and contributing to the learners' linguistic development by improving accuracy through the discovery of new linguistic terms (Nobuyoshi & Ellis, 1993, p. 203). Communicative language teaching has been part of this movement.

Peer-teaching/learning or collaborative teaching/ learning in the EFL classroom took a cue from research from several disciplines. In social psychology especially, it has been theorized (and empirical research has corroborated the claims) that cooperative learning (i) promotes learning and intellectual abilities (see Kagan, 1989; Smith, Johnson &

Johnson, 1991), and (ii) shows gains in various aspects of academic performance (see Armstrong, Johnson & Johnson, 1981), and in the improvement of interpersonal relations and skills (Cohen, 1980; Slavin, 1979, 1983b). This teaching/learning approach has, therefore, been strongly recommended for use in teacher programs (e.g., Shaw, 1992; Whitaker, 1990; Woodward, 1992).

Concurrently, empirical research on non-native speakers' (NNS) language in small groups (see mainly Doughty & Pica, 1984; Pica & Doughty, 1985, 1988) has suggested that this teaching/learning format is more effective than the teacher-fronted type of classrooms because it (i) promotes comprehension (Wintsch, 1984); (ii) creates opportunities to achieve facility in using the target language (Long & Porter, 1985; Rivers, 1987); (iii) allows the provision of feedback, one of the ingredients for acquisition (Pica, Kanagy & Falodun, 1993); and (iv) contributes to increasing the learners' linguistic accuracy (Nobuyoshi & Ellis, 1993).

On the other hand, peer learning through interaction can be faulted for the risk to which learners are exposed, namely: the possibility of sharing incorrect input (e.g. Schweers, 1995), the risk of encouraging the use of learners' first languages (Lls) (see Prabhu, 1987), and the finding that interaction might not have the purported effect on learning (see Schweers, 1995). The learners' low level of attainment in English might result in them not having anything new or useful to share and might instead involve sharing faulty input. This fear of sharing faulty input, the need, called for by Ramani (1990), to gain understanding of the theoretical justification for the use of classroom procedures, and the lack of data on the real effect of interaction on L2 learning all warranted an in-depth case study. Thus an empirical study was carried out on the effect of peer interaction on EFL learning among Zairean students.

The present paper reports on a portion of the results of that study, namely peer speech repairs and the potential positive and negative effects on the learning of the target language. Both space and the need to present a detailed description of speech repairs do not allow a full discussion of other aspects of interaction.

Assumptions

EFL learning (as is the case in Zaire) is assumed to be more difficult than ESL learning because in the former context learners operate in a language environment in which exposure and practice opportunities in English are few and far between. This poor provision of input is compounded by the school-home language switch from English to mother tongues.

One way of improving the learning environment might be to encourage the learners to seek practice opportunities in and outside the classroom by involving them in interaction-inducing tasks in the classroom and extracurricular activities in which the use of English is very likely, if not inevitable. The creation of an input-rich environment, our study assumed, would create a pattern of language use and a set of interactional routines among the learners, which, in turn, would have a positive effect on their English language development.

Context, Subjects, Procedure, and Hypotheses

A cross-sectional study (see Kasanga, 1994) was conducted at the University of Lubumbashi, Zaire, in early 1993, with several aims, two of which are most relevant here. Firstly, the study set out to critically test the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1980, 1981). This theoretical model, drawing largely from Krashen's (1977, 1980) claim that comprehensible input is necessary for acquisition, sustains that interactional modifications through negotiated conversation, help to make input comprehensible, and are therefore conducive to learning. Secondly, a need was felt to provide theoretical backing to current classroom procedures worldwide (also adopted in Zaire) requiring students' involvement in communicative-rich activities.

The study involved 54 subjects selected out of a total population of 150 multilingual, French-speaking students majoring in English language and literature at the University of Lubumbashi in Zaire. A stratified random selection was used to obtain a representative cross-gender sample within and across proficiency levels. English language proficiency was equated with the year of study, following previous studies (e.g., Nsakala, 1990; Ntahwakuderwa, 1987) which showed that the use of the year of study was a fairly reliable estimate of the level of attainment in English.

The subjects were paired within, then across proficiency levels. Each pair was asked to perform two types of tasks: a map task and a topic discussion task. In both tasks, the activity was repeated (with a second map or topic) so that the members of each pair could alternate positions. By so doing, the researcher could ensure that in no instance could a subject be given unfair advantage to dominate the activity. If there was any evidence of domination, this should only be a result of the level of proficiency, one of the variables posited as likely to affect the rate of interaction.

In the map task, the two subjects had at their disposal colored maps of the same African country (Angola, then Liberia), but with different information. This created an "information gap" (Doughty and Pica, 1986; Pica and Doughty, 1988) which would require both participants to contribute information to find the solutions to sub-tasks. In the topic discussion task, each member of a pair was asked to suggest a topic for discussion.

Three main working hypotheses were formulated for statistical testing (t-tests). Seven subsidiary hypotheses were derived from the first hypothesis above. Each these subsidiary hypotheses is relevant to a type of modifications of interaction. Each of the main hypotheses is stated and justified below.

Hypothesis #1. It was predicted that convergent tasks (map tasks) would result in more modifications of interaction than divergent tasks (topic discussion tasks). If they were concurrent with the above prediction, the results would strengthen earlier suggestions that the type of task is a determining factor in speech performance (e.g., Nsakala, 1990) and interactional behavior (e.g., Pica, Holliday, Lewis, Berducci & Newman, 1991; Young & Milanovic, 1992).

As for the seven subsidiary hypotheses derived from the above main hypothesis, a "blind prediction," as it were, was formulated to the effect that the rate, in percentages per T-units and fragments, of the production of individual modifications of interaction (clarification requests, confirmation and comprehension checks, other- and self-repairs, elaborations, topicalizations) in both types of tasks would not show a significant difference.

Hypothesis #2. It was predicted, in the second main hypothesis, that in mixed-proficiency dyads in both tasks, the more proficient students would initiate and achieve significantly more modifications of interaction than their less proficient counterparts. This prediction was based on the assumption that more proficient students would feel confident about their knowledge and in their use of the target language and would therefore check their interlocutors' comprehension, make their speech more comprehensible, or initiate and achieve repairs of their own and their interlocutors' incorrect or infelicitous speech.

Hypothesis #3. Following the prediction made in the second main hypothesis of the study, it was hypothesized that the proportion of modifications of interaction achieved by learners would increase with their level of proficiency.

To strengthen the validity of the statistical results, qualitative data were also collected. These consisted of students' verbal protocols collected by means of a semi-structured interview. It was hoped that through a triangulated interpretation, a better picture of the interaction and learning processes would emerge and concurrent quantitative and qualitative results would confirm (or disconfirm) the theoretical claims. To date, few studies of interaction and L2 acquisition (SLA) have included such additional probing procedures to establish the strength of the quantitative results. There is more than one reason for using both quantitative and qualitative procedures: Not only can they be combined in one study (see Strauss & Corbin, 1990), but the use of both in some studies

can ensure that "quality research" is not represented only by one particular paradigm (Johnson & Saville-Troike, 1992).

The Data: Results and Discussion

Although both the quantitative and qualitative data were tape-recorded, only the former were transcribed for statistical analysis. The recorded interviews were submitted to a content analysis (see Mostyn, 1985) in which a set of pre-determined categories allowed us to group the data before an inferential analysis was performed. For the purpose of this paper, data and results relevant to repairs will be discussed extensively, whereas those relevant to other modifications of interaction will only be briefly stated. A summarized account of the results is provided in the next section, but a fuller discussion can be found in Kasanga (in press-a).

Strong or partial support was found in the data for the three main hypotheses. The results for Hypothesis #1 (see Table 1, Appendix B) overwhelmingly supported the prediction: task type appeared to be a critical factor in the amount of peer interaction. The results thus reinforced those of a previous study by Pica & Doughty (1988) in which it was found that manipulation of the task pattern produced significant differences in the rate of interaction.

The blind prediction of no difference in performance on individual modifications of interaction between the two types of tasks was rejected in five of the seven cases (Table 2, Appendix C), viz.: clarification requests, confirmation checks, comprehension checks, self-repairs, and topicalizations.

Although the results for other-repairs and elaborations showed no statistical difference at alpha .05, this failure was outweighed by the results for all the other interactional modifications. The above results for the main hypothesis and the blind prediction seemed to confirm previous assertions that the type of task in which the learners were engaged was a determining factor in the speech performance (Nsakala, 1990) and interactional behavior (Pica, Holliday, Lewis, Berducci, & Newman, 1991) .

Hypothesis #2 was partially supported by the data: The results of all seven modifications of interaction taken together suggested that the level of proficiency was an influential factor in the production of modifications of interaction: More proficient students outperformed their less proficient interlocutors.

Strong support was found for Hypothesis #3: The ability to initiate and achieve modifications of interaction seemed to increase with the increase in the level of proficiency. Only between the modifications of interaction by Third and Second Year students was the difference weak.

At this stage, a partial conclusion can be made. If modification of interaction is posited as important to second language comprehension (e.g., Doughty & Pica, 1986), and, in turn, to the acquisition process itself, as is implied in the Interaction Hypothesis, participation pattern stands as an important ingredient in the increase of the potential for learning.

In the search for convergence (or divergence) of the quantitative results and the qualitative data, the students' verbal protocols were examined. The self-report data relating to the perception of dominance by peers at a higher level of English proficiency seemed to support the quantitative results on the level of proficiency and the rate of interaction by showing a link between the level of English proficiency and the increase in proportion.

Regarding the possible effect on interaction of the types of task, in their responses to the relevant questions, the interviewees, in their majority, expressed their preference for the topic discussion tasks over the map tasks, citing the demand of completing the sub-tasks and finding the appropriate solutions in the map tasks as the main reason for their preference. The majority of the respondents in the interview perceived the map tasks as being more conducive to a greater amount of modifications of interaction than the topic discussion tasks.

This perception seemed to be in agreement with findings from a study of pausological aspects of speech development by Sabin, Clemmer, O'Connell and Kowal (1979, pp. 51-52) in which they stated:

> The tasks of reading aloud, retelling and narration yield distinct levels of verbal performance, reflecting variations in the complexity or demand characteristics involved in planning, organizing, and formulating utterances, retrieving material from memory; making decisions; monitoring one's utterance, etc.

The increase of the ability to initiate and achieve modifications of interaction as a function of the increase in the level of proficiency could not be verified from the students' protocols. However, it may be tentatively assumed from the results regarding the possible dominance in the course of interaction that the higher the level of proficiency in the target language, the greater the potential (ability) for initiating and achieving modifications of interaction.

Now, let us turn to the discussion of the significance and effect of repair in the learning process. As mentioned earlier, repair is one of the interactional features extensively mentioned in the SLA literature, although under different labels, such as

"correction", "repairing repetition" (Doughty & Pica, 1984; Ellis, 1985; Pica & Doughty, 1985). Repair is a generic term that encompasses corrective and non-corrective moves, and as such, was chosen to serve as a superordinate term which could best define ways in which errors, unintended forms, or misunderstandings are corrected by speakers or others during interaction (see also Richards, Platt & Platt, 1992). To conceal the students' identity, two precautions were taken: only initials, not related to their names were used and they are all referred to in this paper as "she" or "her". The symbols used in this and other excerpts of transcripts are described in Appendix A.

la)	NL	So I know that our country is=have many many possibility
•	OM	Uhh ↑
•	NL	possibilities to pay a bus.
b)	NL	The second reason is that it is one of the co the language I I I love
	OM	Yes
•	NL	Er if I can say it. One of the languages I love
•	OM	You prefer.
c)	MF	Yes. I think that we have to: to look for er the transp transportation which is er which cost er lower
•	KK	Lower ↑
	MF	Yes
•	KK	Which is cheap ↑
	MF	Yes.

In (la), NL, a First Year student, initiated a self-repair, in other words a repair of her own speech, and finalized it without the assistance of her partner, OM, a Third Year student. However, in (lb), although she also initiated the repair by a trigger (Er, if I can say it.), and eventually achieved the self-repair (**One of the languages I love,**) her partner, OM, moved to further repair (**You prefer**) the repaired speech which she found still inaccurate. But in (lc), MF did not realize the incorrectness of her speech; her partner, KK, on realizing the incorrect speech initiated the repair (**Lower↑**) and after realizing that MF did not repair her speech, she (KK) repaired it for MF (**Which is cheap↑**). This is called an "other-repair", as is the second move by OM in (lb). In this instance, only after the other-repair by KK did MF realize the defect of her speech and acquiesced (**Yes**) to it.

The cases above of self- and other-repairs which are achieved implicitly, that is without any attendant accounting, are called "embedded repairs" (see Jefferson, 1987). Day, Chenoweth, Chun, and Luppescu (1984) would call this type of repairs "off-record feedback" and, unlike Jefferson's embedded repairs, which apply to both self- and other-repairs, off-record feedback would refer only to other-repairs. Repairs achieved explicitly with an accounting of the error provided are referred to by Jefferson as "exposed repairs".

In Day et al.'s nomenclature, these repairs are called "on-the record feedback"; once more, this designation applies only to other-repairs.

Jefferson's classification, which seemed more pertinent to the data of the present study, was adopted. Exposed repairs are illustrated in the excerpt below:

2a) AY Umm I can give you another datum for instance by (1.5) er by car
MC By car ((?)). Let's say by road.
b) AY That's a natural that's a natural effect. You can't be afraid of it. And er (.5) you know I I love the:: the rainy season again
ME Just say I like it.
AY Yes I like it. I like I can say. Thank you for the correction.

In (2a), the other-repair also includes a side-comment by MC, a Third Year student who repaired faulty speech by AY, a First year student. In (2b), ME, who repaired AY's faulty speech, made a side-comment about the repair (**Let's say . . .**), as did AY (**. . . I can say. Thank you for the correction**).

In the following discussion, repairs will not be differentiated along the lines mentioned above. Both self- and other-repairs, exposed or embedded, will simply be lumped together, given that the research design and questions did not require the examination and analysis of individual types of repairs.

As predicted in one subsidiary hypothesis, the results showed a significant difference between the rate of repairs initiated and performed by the students at different levels of proficiency. The students at a higher level of English proficiency initiated more often repair moves of their own and their partners' speech at a lower level of attainment than did the latter.

Repair moves frequently occurred throughout the activities and across aspects of the language, such as: pronunciation, syntax and grammar, and vocabulary. However, looking at the proportions, it was found that grammar and syntactical repairs outnumbered by far the other types. Also noteworthy were the findings that (i) students at a higher level of proficiency tended to repair their own speech and that of their interlocutors at a lower level more often than the latter, and (ii) against expectations, male students outperformed female students in repairing faulty or infelicitous speech, regardless of the proficiency level of the female students (for a detailed description of gender effect on interaction as found in this study, see Kasanga, in press-b).

The students' verbal protocols confirmed the above quantitative findings. The protocols also suggested that the students were aware of slips, mistakes, and errors that

went unrepaired, mostly after the recorded activities had been played back, or belatedly when it would seem inappropriate to attempt a repair move. An examination of some students' recorded performance in both tasks revealed a number of instances of long pauses being followed by a variety of phenomena: hesitation, repetition of previous stretches of speech, drawls, and even self-repairs. These phenomena confirmed the students' statements suggesting widespread monitoring of their own speech.

One more phenomenon, as part of the study, needed close examination: the extent to which the fear, expressed by some (e.g., Carroll & Swain, 1993), that misleading input would be shared by learners, could be justified. Out of the more than 18 hours of tape-recordings converted into over 400 pages of typescript, only one case of incorrect speech repair, illustrated in the following excerpt, was found:

3 ME (. . .) And the ball goes at er over the other:: team. °Do YOU say team↑°

AY | Yes team |

ME *Steam.* And what happen↑. If for instance the man who: has to::to kick the ball kick it in order to go again in the er the first *steam* it goes outside (56 turns)

AY Mmmm

ME They are going towards the other *steam.* So they have to keep the ball in order to kick it in the basket.

The italicized mispronunciation (*steam*) in the excerpt above was an unfortunate and freak occurrence of a misleading speech repair. The repair was provided by AY, a first year student, at the request of her interlocutor, ME, a second year student, who appealed for assistance regarding the use of the word "team." Unfortunately, AY's feedback (**Yes team**), although a correct repair, was misheard and misconstrued by ME as (**Yes steam**). Sadly, the misunderstanding persisted throughout the stretch of the free talk, as can be seen in the excerpt: 56 turns later, ME still used the incorrect word and AY could not realize the mistake, or if she realized the mistake, she did not attempt to repair it.

Although the above misrepair was the only case of incorrect input found in the data, there were quite a number of cases of errors that went unrepaired, such as the following:

4 ME You may be right but you must take into consideration (.5) er what you call (.5) the engagement. And you ((?)) take into consideration the engagement. Since you've been engaged with someone your area is *limit limitated*. You can't just

MJ So in which way

| |

ME for instance
MJ Is it *limitated*?

The above example was the most infelicitous, and hopefully, one of the very few cases of misrepairs in which an inaccurate self-repair (**limitated**)—a coinage—was offered by one student (ME) to her peer (MJ), who accepted unquestionably and even used it, probably with a view to incorporating it in her lexicon. MJ seemed uncertain about which of the misrepair (**limitated**) and the alternative word previously used (**limit**) was correct.

Surely, the help of a teacher or a native speaker would be desirable in both these cases in which incorrect input was provided or a misrepair was adopted by the interlocutor. In one semi-structured interview, another student expressed her disappointment that neither she nor her interlocutor could provide the correct pronunciation of one word (**spiritually**) which she desperately wanted to use. She obtained the correct pronunciation only later when she looked it up. The desirability to have assistance from the teacher at hand was also clearly expressed by another student in the interview in the following terms:

> (. . .) [T]eacher-fronted lectures and teacherless small-group or pair-work in my view, (. . .) cannot be compared equally favorably: in lectures we learn from the teacher many new items and notions which help us to improve our knowledge and grade, but in peer activities, we have only practice opportunities which may not be enough to improve our vocabulary.

However, it must be borne in mind that (i) these cases of misrepair and incorrect input were few and far between, and (ii) the context in which they occurred was a speech simulation of an L2 classroom, not a stretch of naturally occurring classroom speech. Even if it was an occurrence in a real classroom situation, unless it is individual, self-directed, self-instructed, most learning, including through pair-work or small-group activities, occurs under the watchful eyes and close guidance of a competent instructor who can provide correction and feedback.

Some Implications

In considering the findings of this study, the first thing to observe is that on the balance of evidence from this study, the support for the interaction hypothesis, as currently discussed, is strong enough to warrant its use as theoretical justification for the use of classroom procedures involving peer activities. Here perhaps, Holec's (1984, p. 2) idea of linking individual learners' capacity, in self-access learning, to assume responsibility for their learning with the contribution of other learners finds an echo.

The pattern of peer-correction found in the study reported in this paper seemed to diverge from that in native-nonnative interaction: It has been found, both in longitudinal (Gaskill, 1980) and in cross-sectional (Chun, Day, Chenoweth and Luppescu, 1982) studies, that native speakers tend to ignore nonnative speakers' errors. In Chun et al.'s study of 28 ESL learners of mixed proficiency interacting with native speakers, not only was there a low incidence of other-repairs (below 9% of the total number of errors committed), but it was also found that only factual and discourse errors, rather than language-based ones (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) were attended to. Schwartz (1980), too, in a study similar to the one reported in this paper, found a low incidence of other-repairs among nonnative speakers and a much higher rate of self-repairs. One explanation for the differential distribution of the types of repairs found in previous studies might be sociocultural differences. These may influence individual learners' choice of the types of repairs with which they feel at ease. In some socio-cultural contexts, other-repairs may be face-threatening to one party (or to both), a feeling that may not be felt strongly in other contexts.

Regarding the finding in the study reported here about the low incidence of misrepairs, one implication is that, despite a relatively higher number of unrepaired inaccurate speech confirmed by students' reports, this should convince those who might be skeptical about the use of peer-led activities that there is very little to fear from these procedures.

Also evidenced by the data is the low incidence of the use among the students of languages other than English in the fire of the debate. This alleviates the fear by Prabhu (1987) that learners sharing one or two languages would tend to use one of these in the classroom instead of the target language. One explanation of the low incidence of the use of L1 could be, to borrow from Kramsch (1993), a set of parameters of the context, such as time constraints, stated purpose of the activity, interactional pull, and size of the group.

APPENDIX A:
Symbols Used

| |	simultaneous speech by two speakers
=	latched speech
(.5)	interval or pause
↑	rising intonation
o o	soft speech
((?))	inaudible
((...))	omitted stretch of speech
•	presentation symbol to draw attention to an utterance or part thereof
(*n* turns)	number of turns deliberately ellipted from the data by the analyst.
italicized words/prhases	particular stretch of speech which needs highlighting.

APPENDIX B

Table 1

Difference between Percentages of Individual Interactional Modifications per T-unit and Fragments for Convergent and Divergent Tasks

	CR		ConC		OR		CC		E		SR		T	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Convergent	25.2	20.75	22.76	3.3	8.02	5.32	11.53	8.64	7.64	6.87	34.7	7.3	5.94	5.36
Divergent	4.28	6.87	7.9	13.75	1.02	1.97	1.8	4.59	5.9	4.86	9.64	6.7	3.74	3.86
	6.78		5.5		8.4		7.05		1.46		18.02		2.36	

(CR= clarifications requests; ConC=confirmation checks; OR= other-repairs; CC= comprehension checks; E=elaborations; SR= self-repairs; T=Topicalizations. N=54; df=53; p= .05; underlined values indicate statistical significance).

APPENDIX C

Table 2

Difference in Performance on Individual Interactional Modifications (2A= comprehension checks; 2B= elaborations; 2c= self-repairs, 2D= topicalizations; 2E=confirmation checks and clarification requests + other-repairs)

	2A		2B		2C		2D		2E	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
More proficient	2.76	2.11	1.45	1.82	4.9	3.9	1.39	1.8	2.76	1.29
Less proficient	2.16	1.03	1.19	1.81	1.1	1.06	.59	1.16	1.16	1.03
t	1.33		.53		<u>15.75</u>		1		<u>3.437</u>	
df	52		52		26		52		52	
N	54		54		28		54		54	

(N= means; SD standard deviation; underlined values indicate statistical significance.)

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