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ESL Children's Second Language Learning through Cooperative Learning

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In the field of education, there has been a growing interest in cooperative learning. Cooperative learning is an instructional strategy in which two to six learners work together in the completion of a group task, relying on mutual help. This article explores how cooperative learning affected opportunities for learning English as a second language. Sixteen children were frequently involved in cooperative learning in a fourth grade ESL classroom. Methods of data collection included participant observation, audio-taping, interviews with the teacher, and field notes. Using classroom discourse analysis as a framework, this study analyzed naturally occurring classroom discourse to look at verbal interaction patterns and their influence on L2 development. The present study also examined the roles the teacher played in the students' learning experiences during cooperative learning. Careful analysis of the classroom discourse identified four different types of verbal interaction, which might influence opportunities for L2 development: a) self-correction, b) peer correction, c) repetition, and d) request for assistance. Data analysis also showed that fruitful cooperative learning requires a combination of macro (e.g., lesson planning and organization) and micro level (e.g., moment-to-moment classroom interaction) of teacher's responsibility.

I. INTRODUCTION

This article explores how cooperative learning affected opportunities for learning English as a second language (ESL) in a fourth grade ESL classroom in the U.S. In the field of education, there has been a growing interest in cooperative learning. Cooperative learning is an instructional strategy in which small groups of two to six learners work cooperatively in the completion of a group task, relying on mutual help. Interest in cooperative learning has been spurred by the view that learning is a social phenomenon, rather than an individual endeavor (Mercer, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985).

Second or foreign language (L2) education is no exception (Oxford & Nyikos, 1997). In addition to the acknowledgement of the socially constructed nature of language learning, there is another source of impetus for the acceptance of cooperative learning in the L2 field: shift of emphasis in L2 learning from structural competence, i.e., knowledge of a set of linguistic rules, to communicative competence, i.e., ability to use the rules and communicate meaningfully and appropriately. In this communicative approach to language teaching, the importance of maximizing the use of the target language is strongly highlighted. Cooperative learning, which involves communicative interaction, is thought to facilitate the development of communicative competence by offering opportunities to practice the language meaningfully and purposefully.

In spite of claims for the benefits of cooperative learning in L2 development and its increasing incorporation into L2 classrooms, not many studies have been conducted about cooperative learning and L2 development (Jacob, Rottenberg, Patrick, & Wheeler, 1996), particularly in L2 classroom context (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Thus, little is known about the ways in which cooperative learning is actually implemented in L2 classrooms, especially for child ESL learners. This study aims to address this gap by examining social interactions in cooperative learning in a fourth grade ESL class. Specifically, this study examines the following issues: how cooperative learning works in a real L2 classroom; how L2 learners verbally interact in cooperative learning situations; how the verbal interaction influences the L2 development; what roles the teacher plays in the learners' L2 development during cooperative learning. Using classroom discourse analysis as a framework, this study analyzes naturally occurring discourse to look at social interactions and their influence on L2 development.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual frame of this study comes from two sources: sociocultural theory and cooperative learning.

1. Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory draws heavily on the work of Vygotsky (1978). One of the principles of sociocultural theory is that learning occurs through the process of social interactions. According to this theory, cognitive development takes place when a learner (a child or a novice) is engaged in dialogic interactions with a more knowledgeable person (a teacher, a parent, or an expert), in which the adult or the expert provides assistance for the learner to accomplish a task. Through the interactions, the learner internalizes the skills and

becomes able to achieve the task by him/herself. After the learner becomes able to complete the task independently, s/he can complete another task of more difficulty, when given appropriate assistance. In this way, collaborative interaction between an expert and a novice in the process of problem solving results in an ongoing process of cognitive growth in the novice.

Two concepts are of significance in association with sociocultural theory: the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and scaffolding. ZPD is defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). In the ZPD, the expert offers assistance to the learner, so that the learners can carry out a task which the learner could not achieve without assistance. The current view of the ZPD, however, has gone beyond novice-expert interactions. Wells (1998) redefined the ZPD as "an opportunity for learning with and from others" (p. 345). According to Wells, the ZPD could be associated not just with the novice and expert, but with all participants in a learning situation, for instance, even two novices. The present study incorporates both views of ZPD as related to expert-novice interactions and novice-novice interactions.

Scaffolding refers to the assistance that an expert offers to a novice during problem solving (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). Wood et al. (1976) described six features of scaffolding:

1. Recruitment: enlisting the learner's interest in the task
2. Reduction in degrees of freedom: simplifying the task
3. Direction maintenance: keeping the learner motivated and in pursuit of the goal
4. Marking critical features: highlighting certain relevant features and pointing out discrepancies between what has been produced and the ideal solution
5. Frustration control: reducing stress and frustration during problem
6. Demonstration: modeling an idealized form of the act to be performed by completing the act or by explicating the learner's partial solution (p. 98)

Currently, sociocultural theory is increasingly used as a framework for studies of interaction and language acquisition, though still having minimal influence on second language acquisition (SLA) research (Lantolf & Appel, 1994). Sociocultural theory offers a useful way to examine SLA process in a different manner than dominant SLA theories. The dominant theories center around comprehensible input and the negotiation of meaning occurring during interactions as a prompt for language acquisition. Even though the SLA theories admit the importance of interaction, the importance is viewed in terms of opportunities for meaning negotiation that reportedly facilitate the comprehension of input. On the other hand, SLA researchers working within the framework of sociocultural theory

focuses on the inseparable, dynamic relationships between interaction and language development (Donato, 1994; Ohta, 1995). They view language learning as proceeding through concrete social interactions in which learners actively use L2, collaboratively working together. In this view, social interaction is an arena where individuals provide each other with support and guidance, jointly shaping language learning opportunities. In Ohta's (1995) words, "L2 acquisition takes place as the gap between what the learner can do alone and with assistance is filled with collaboration." (p. 97)

2. Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is proposed as an effective instructional approach involving dynamic group interactions (Kagan, 1992). In cooperative learning, a small group of learners shares responsibility for their learning, working together to fulfill a group task. Completion of the group task is achieved based on interaction and mutual assistance among group members.

Cooperative learning is diverse in its definitions, characteristics, and uses (Ovando, Collier, & Combs, 2003). In the strict version of cooperative learning, it is characterized by such elements as large amount of verbal interaction, mutual interdependence, individual accountability, social skills, and team reflection, as described in Kohonen (1992). On the other hand, in the broad version of cooperative learning reflected in a great portion of the literature, cooperative learning includes small group work which requires group members to work together but is not strictly governed by the features mentioned above. This paper uses the broad definition of cooperative learning, for the teacher in this study did not claim to be following the strict version of cooperative learning.

A substantial body of research across disciplines has provided evidence for the positive effects of cooperative learning on learners in various aspects, including academic achievement (Johnson & Johnson, 1981; Lazarowitz & Karsenty, 1990; Slavin, 1990), motivation to learn (Sharan & Shaulov, 1990), and social support among learners (Johnson & Johnson, 1989).

In the L2 field, the potential of cooperative learning for language development is well recognized in relation to the promotion of communicative interaction among learners (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). It is assumed that L2 learners can naturally use the target language for the participation in interactive group activities and develop their language abilities. In this light, cooperative learning shares the basic assumption of learning with sociocultural theory (van Lier, 1998) - social interaction is central to learning.

There are several classroom-based studies of children's interaction during cooperative learning. Some of the studies explored how bilingual children interacted in cooperative groups (e.g., Duran & Szymanski, 1995; Gumperz, Cook-Gumperz, & Szymanski, 1999;

Gumperz & Field, 1995; Tuyay, Jennings, & Dixon, 1995). In a study of interaction processes of Spanish speaking students in a third-grade language arts classroom in America, for example, Duran and Szymanski (1995) found that while engaging in cooperative events, the children corrected each other's language forms and elaborated on the previous utterances, which enriched students' learning opportunities. Some other studies investigated how cooperative interaction would affect the opportunities for limited English proficient (LEP) children's language learning in mainstream classrooms in America (e.g., Jacob et al., 1996; Klingner & Vaughn, 2000). Jacob et al. (1996) examined the small group interaction that the small group interaction that occurred in a sixth-grade social studies class when LEP and mainstream children worked together to complete given worksheets. In their study, Jacob et al. focused on what types of assistance were offered to the LEP children when they asked for help, how the assistance might influence the opportunities for learning academic English, and what aspects of academic English were acquired. The analysis of the classroom discourse revealed that the LEP children learned a range of academic English, including academic terms and conventions for written English. They had opportunities to receive comprehensible input from group members and to produce comprehensible output. Jacob et al., however, reported on missed and negative opportunities as well: the number of the instances of positive opportunities is low, considering the total number of time spent on interaction; the LEP children did not sometimes get any help from peers after they requested for assistance; they even lost face when they showed their limited English proficiency. Jacob et al. explained the reasons for the missed and negative opportunities in terms of several contextual factors, such as lack of structure of the group tasks and the children's perception of the small group work.

More recently, Klingner and Vaughn (2000) investigated how groups of bilingual and LEP children interacted in a sixth-grade science class in America when they encountered unknown words in reading materials. Klingner and Vaughn reported that the children helped each other to grasp the meaning of different words, get the main idea, and summarize the readings, while working as a facilitator for their classmates' learning. In particular, the bilingual children offered the LEP children assistance by translating English vocabulary into Spanish and sometimes explaining the concepts of key vocabulary words.

The present study aims to extend this line of classroom-based research conducted in bilingual or mainstream classes. This study examines social interactions among L2 children in an ESL class. Given that cooperative learning is claimed to be an effective instructional approach to L2 instruction, an understanding of how cooperative learning is implemented in L2 classes will be useful for a better understanding and a wiser incorporation of the approach into L2 classrooms.

Situated within the framework of sociocultural theory and cooperative learning, the present study uses qualitative analysis of classroom discourse for a close scrutiny of L2

learners' interactions during cooperative learning. Discourse analysis is the linguistic analysis of naturally occurring speech or written discourse (Fairclough, 2003). It is concerned with language in use and with interaction between speakers. The present study used discourse analysis as an analytical tool since it can reveal multiple features of interaction occurring in a cooperative learning setting. By examining the features, this study aimed to interpret the place of verbal interaction in language learning from the perspective of sociocultural theory. For this study, the following research questions are posed:

1. What are the patterns of verbal interactions in cooperative learning groups and their impact on ESL children's L2 use and development?
2. How does the teacher shape the children's L2 learning experiences in the process?

III. METHODOLOGY

1. The Setting and the Participants

This study was conducted in a fourth grade ESL class of a public elementary school in a mid-western city in the U.S. In this school, ESL students constituted approximately forty percent of the student population and the school offered ESL courses to ESL students with limited English proficiency. Every LEP student was required to attend the ESL class for forty-five minutes every school day.

The class primarily operated on two alternating cycles: a grammar-centered period and a small group activity-centered one. Priority lay in small group activities, because the ESL teacher reasoned that the small group activities could provide the children with maximal opportunities for language practice. Examples of group activities included creating a map of an imaginary fantasy land, making a signboard containing an invitation letter and pictures, and inventing a new game and its rules. For the signboard activity, for instance, imagining that they would take a trip to a place of their choosing, the children wrote a letter to a person that they wished to invite to the trip. The children cut pictures of the place to visit from a magazine and glued them on one half of a signboard and the letter on the other half. Although group activities varied in type, their final products took the form of artifacts, which were later displayed in the classroom.

Each small group activity generally lasted two weeks. For the first two days, the ESL teacher explained the overall guidelines of the new activity to the whole class and then involved the children in learning vocabulary words related to the activity. After the whole-class-based ground work was over, children worked for the rest of the period in

dyads or triads whose members were appointed by the teacher. For the activity, they were given a worksheet containing instructions to follow. A worksheet for the "Game Invention" activity was as follows:

GAMES

Games are fun! They can also teach us about a lot of things.

1. Name three things that games can teach us:
2. Name three games that you enjoy playing:
3. Name three kinds of games (e.g., board games):
4. Name three games that your partner/s enjoy/s playing:
5. Why are rules necessary?
6. In our discussion about games, we spoke about some of the positive things about game playing and some of the negative things. Write down as many of these words as you can think of. Then classify the words into two categories: positive and negative.
7. Create a board game that teacher something in English.
   a) Pick a topic
   b) Decide what skills the game will drill
   c) Decide number of players
   d) Decide rules
   e) Decide how to know when the game is finished
   f) Create materials
   g) Try out game, fine problems in it
   h) Rework it
   i) Try again
8. My game will look like this (sketch a picture of your game)

The small group activities were structured in ways that required collaborative interaction among members. The children interacted with their peers to co-construct an understanding of the requirements of the task, negotiate structures and content of their work, create final products together, and respond to each other's needs by asking questions or answering the questions. The teacher also kept reminding the children that they needed to work together to accomplish a given task, communicating in English. She stressed the importance of cooperation as a place for learning from each other and for practicing English. While the children were working together, the teacher walked around the pairs to provide assistance and to monitor their progress.

Participants in the present study were one teacher and sixteen students. Mrs. White, the ESL teacher, was a native speaker of English with three years of teaching experience. Experiences in living abroad and foreign language learning helped her to sympathize over

the students' difficulties in ESL learning and adjustment to new environments. The fourth graders are eight to nine years of age. Nine of them were boys and seven were girls. In terms of nationality, nine were from Korea; two from Mexico; one from Venezuela; one from Thailand; one from Vietnam; and two from Taiwan. The average length of their residence in America was seven months, with a range of one to twelve months at the beginning of data collection.

2. Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection primarily consisted of a) participant observation, b) audio-taping, c) interviews with the teacher, and d) field notes. I conducted observations during an eight-week period from early February to early April, 2001. I visited the class only in small group activity-centered periods with nine observations in total. During the observation, I paid primary attention to student-student interaction and student-teacher interaction during small group activities. During each observation, I audio recorded one small group to capture child-child interactions and child-teacher interactions. I tried to record a different group each time. In addition, on two occasions, I audio taped the whole class activity that preceded small group work. Audio-taped verbal interactions were transcribed. Audiotapes were transcribed in their entirety.

After every class, I had a conversation with the teacher regarding a broad range of topics covering school and district policies, her personal teaching philosophy, and how these influenced her teaching decisions. The interviews with the teacher were audio taped and transcribed as well.

I wrote field notes during the classroom observations. The field notes contained information on the subjects, settings, activities that the children were engaged in, and peculiar features of the verbal interactions that I noticed. I used the field notes to develop an understanding of what happened in the discussions and to crosscheck the audio taped verbal interactions.

For data analysis, this paper followed general strategies advocated by Glesne (1999). Glesne used a metaphor of "the code mines" (p. 135) for the process of coding in which researchers are classifying and categorizing the data and giving form and possible meaning to the data. I identified themes that emerged from the data instead of assigning data to pre-established categories. To be more specific, reading the transcripts of the small group interactions several times, I identified recurrent patterns of social interactions. I also identified representative interactional moments of each pattern. I then carefully examined the exemplary moments to understand the nature of interaction occurring and how it could be conducive to L2 learning. Audio taped data of the interviews with the teacher were transcribed and analyzed for themes related to the role of the teacher in the children's learning. Pseudonyms were used for all the participants in transcription.

IV. FINDINGS

1. Face-to-face Verbal Interaction

Regarding the first research question (i.e., What are the patterns of verbal interactions in cooperative learning groups and their impact on ESL children's L2 use and development?), this study finds that cooperative learning provided the ESL children with multiple opportunities for dynamic interaction. During the interaction, they practiced the target language for communicative purposes, testing out their current hypotheses about the language. Careful analysis of the classroom discourse identified four different types of verbal interaction during cooperative learning, which might influence opportunities for L2 development: self-correction, peer correction, repetition, and request for assistance.

1) Self-Correction

Self-correction reveals potential opportunities for L2 development (Allwright & Bailey, 1991; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; van Lier, 1988). In this study, self-correction occurred in two ways: with feedback and without feedback. In some cases, students monitored their own speech while talking and corrected their errors without any feedback. In some other cases, when faced with feedback from a peer, such as clarification requests, students tried to locate the source of the problems and corrected them on their own.

Excerpt 1 shows both types of self-correction: with and without feedback. This excerpt illustrates a series of self-correction by an ESL child, exemplifying the connections between social interaction and language learning. Two boys, Mana (from Vietnam) and Hosung (from Korea), were working on an invitation letter for a signboard activity. At this point in time, Dongwoo (from Korea), who was paired with a girl, approached them. Excerpt 1 begins with the teacher's comment on Dongwoo's appearance.

<Excerpt 1>

1. Teacher: Dongwoo, you are not in their group, right?
2. Hosung: He is she. He is her.
3. Mana: ((laughing)) What do you mean by 'he is her'?
4. Hosung: No, I mean…no…I mean he doing with her.
5. Mana: He? He doing hers? ((laughing))
6. Hosung: I mean, he is doing with her.

In line 1, unexpectedly discovering Dongwoo coming to the dyad, the teacher implied that Dongwoo should go back to his partner lest he should interfere with the dyad's (i.e.,

Hosung and Mana) work. In response to the teacher's words, Hosung, in line 2, attempted to explain why Dongwoo wanted to join his team by saying "He is she." In this class, the children explicitly expressed disappointment when paired with a partner of the opposite gender and it is likely that Hosung was implying that Dongwoo did not like to be paired with a girl. Immediately recognizing that the sentence was awkward, Hosung changed the sentence into "He is her." In line 3, Mana, aware that the new sentence was still incorrect, asked Hosung to clarify its meaning with laughter. After receiving a clarification request and laughter from his peer, Hosung attempted to correct the sentence again, saying "I mean he doing with her," in line 4. This sentence was much closer to what Hosung originally meant in meaning than the first two sentences (i.e., he is she; he is her), though it is still grammatically incorrect. Peer feedback allowed Hosung to improve his output. In line 5, however, knowing that it was not a correct expression, Mana rephrased the sentence. This reaction urged Hosung to try out a better sentence once again and, ultimately, in line 6, he successfully produced an almost correct linguistic structure of "he is doing with her."

This excerpt shows that the dyad went through a negotiation process involving several revision stages until mutual satisfaction was achieved. In the process, Mana provided Hosung with assistance for his improved language use and, with the Mana's prompts, Hosung gradually progressed in his ZPD. Mana's feedback served as scaffolding within the ZPD for Hosung to advance to a higher level of language use.

In regard to self-correction, Schwartz (1980) reported that language learners generally preferred self-correction to other-correction in discourses involving only language learners. Also, in SLA research, there has been a claim that language learners should be encouraged to self-correct their errors (Allwright & Bailey, 1991; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Schwartz, 1980; van Lier, 1988). For example, Lyster and Ranta (1997) argued that language learners' self-correction based on appropriate feedback contributes to L2 development by helping learners to recognize the inadequacy of their hypothesis of the target language and revise it.

2) Peer Correction

Excerpt 1 not only illustrates self-correction but also peer correction. Analysis of this class showed that cooperative learning also afforded ESL learners opportunities for L2 development through identification of errors in their peer's utterances and attempts to correct them. Such peer correction offered them input for correct use of the target language, leading the learners' attention to the sources of problems in utterances.

In the following excerpt we see another instance of peer correction. Here, a boy dyad, Jorge (from Mexico) and Youngjin (from Korea), were writing an invitation letter. As described in the 'settings' section, pairs were asked to write a letter to whomever they

wanted to invite to their planned trip, for example, friend, teacher, or relative. Before this excerpt began, Jorge wrote a beginning part of the letter, while Youngjin was talking with me about the place they had chosen to visit. What Jorge wrote was "*Dear Tom, Can you came with me in Valentine's day. Im having a trip*." This excerpt begins with Youngjin reading the part that Jorge wrote.

<Excerpt 2>

1. Youngjin:	Can…you…came? ((reading slowly))
2.	Can you come. COME ((in a commanding, loud voice))
3. Jorge:	It is wrong?
4. Youngjin:	Yeah, it is wrong. Can you come.
5. Jorge:	Oh! ((erasing 'came'))
6. Youngjin:	Write the letter o. You just a
7. Jorge:	I don't know the spelling.
8. Youngjin:	c.o.m.e. ((fast))
9. Jorge:	c…o…m…e…((writing the spelling))
10. Youngjin:	Question mark, question mark
11. Jorge:	((putting a question mark after '*Can you come*'))
12. Yougnjin:	OK. Oh, Jorge. No apostrophe here. ((pointing the part, 'Im'))
13. Jorge:	Where?
14. Youngjin:	Here ((putting apostrophe himself after '*I*'))

Excerpt 2 illustrates many instances of peer correction. In line 1, reading Jorge's letter, Youngjin detected a grammar error in verb selection and then read it aloud slowly and cautiously with rising intonation. And immediately, he corrected it to "Can you come. COME" with a confident voice. Not aware of his mistake yet, however, Jorge asked Youngjin if it was wrong. In line 4, Youngjin repeated the correct form, "Can you come," and indicated what was specifically wrong in line 6. With the use of "Oh," Jorge signaled that he understood what the problem was. At Jorge's indirect request for assistance for spelling in line 7, Youngjin informed Jorge of how to spell 'come' in line 8. Then, Jorge corrected "came" into "come" in the letter.

Another example of peer correction is found in Excerpt 2. In line 10, after recognizing the absence of a question mark in the interrogative sentence of "Can you come," Youngjin raised the problem by saying "question mark, question mark." Jorge properly responded by putting the question mark at the end of the sentence. Finally, in line 12, Youngjin began to talk about another mistake - the absence of the apostrophe in the sentence, "Im having a trip." As he sensed that Jorge was not sure of its proper place, however, Youngjin himself put the apostrophe in the right place in line 14.

Throughout this excerpt, Youngjin performed as a more knowledgeable person in guiding Jorge, his less knowledgeable peer, through language use. Youngjin brought Jorge's mistakes to his attention, corrected the mistakes, and responded to Jorge's request for assistance in spelling. These findings are consistent with the results of other L2 studies that language learners who are non-experts can also offer successful assistance to each other cooperative interaction (Anton & DiCamilla, 1998; Donato, 1994; Ohta, 1995; Swain & Lapkin, 1995).

In addition, the fact that all the alternative forms offered by Youngjin were correct deserves attention, given that there has been debate in the field of SLA over whether language learners can provide correct feedback for each other. Youngjin's performance is consistent with the findings of the study by Bruton and Samuda (1980) on error treatments in small group discussions. They found out that the L2 learners corrected each other's errors successfully, using a variety of error treatment strategies, such as providing explicit corrections and asking repair questions. Several other studies in L2 learning situations show that language learners who are non-experts can also offer successful assistance to each other in cooperative interaction (Donato, 1994; Ohta, 1995; Swain & Lapkin, 1995). Later when I discussed these incidents of peer correction with her, Mrs. White acknowledged that peer correction often proved more effective for children to remember and internalize linguistic features than teacher correction.

3) Repetition

Cooperative learning also provided the learners with opportunities for repeating peers' and teacher's utterances that they heard and producing them later on their own. Excerpt 3 shows a clear instance of repetition. In this excerpt, pairs of children were engaged in a 'picture Bingo' game with the teacher in preparation for inventing their own games and rules. Mrs. White read nouns aloud and the children matched them with pictures in their boards. She explained to the class that the game would end when any pair have made a horizontal, vertical, or diagonal line in the picture board and shouted "Bingo." This excerpt begins with a girl dyad shouting "Bingo" after ten trials. At that time, Sooil (from Korea), who needed only one more picture to make a straight line for Bingo, began to ask Mrs. White to continue the game, as he realized that she would stop the game.

<Excerpt 3>

1. Teacher: Number 18. House.
2. A girl dyad: Bingo
3. Teacher: You got Bingo?
4. Sooil: A:::::::h! Want Bingo. Want it Bingo.
5. Look at this ((showing his board to another student, Jihoon))

6.	Keep going. Keep going
7.	This is good cards. Keep going.
8.	Hurry up. Keep going.
9. Jihoon:	Keep going.
10.	Change the cards. Keep going.
11. Sooil:	Keep going.
12. Teacher:	Let's stop the game.
13. Sooil:	Look at this. ((showing his cards))
14.	Ugwoolhae (It's a pity). Ya, ugwoolhaega muyna? (Hey, how can I
15.	say 'ugwoolhae' in English?)

After the girl dyad shouted Bingo in lines 1 to 3, Sooil groaned with disappointment and then, in line 4, said loudly that he wanted to make Bingo. In line 5, he showed his picture board to Jihoon (from Korea) who belonged to other pair in order to show that he was on the verge of Bingo. Sooil then desperately shouted "Keep going" four times, appealing to Mrs. White. Suddenly, Jihoon also shouted "Keep going," but added "Change the cards," because his team did not get many matching pictures. Jihoon became affiliated with Sooil in the desire to continue the game, shouting "Keep going" together. After the class when I asked Jihoon whether he had already known the expression, he answered in the negative and explained that he had learned its meaning from the context on the spot. In spite of the boy's desire, Mrs. White announced that the game was over, and the excerpt ends with Sooil expressing regret in Korean.

In the activity, Jihoon was exposed to the expression, 'keep going,' several times. Repetition of the utterance by his friend helped Jihoon to pick up the utterance easily. In the meantime, contextual information assisted him in guessing its meaning. Jihoon eventually used the term in context, an important step for making the connection between a linguistic structure and its meaning. In this excerpt, Jihoon was not just parroting the expression that he had heard. Rather, he caught and internalized the utterance by understanding its meaning in the context and articulating it himself. The process of social interaction made the utterance meaningful and relevant to him.

Several SLA researchers have stressed the importance in L2 development of language learners reproducing language forms that they have heard, since repetition helps the learners to notice the gap between their own and others' production and to attempt to bridge it (Schmidt & Frota, 1986). Verbal interaction occurring in cooperative learning groups gave children chances to get exposed to novel expressions, comprehend the meaning of the messages from the context, and use the expressions for a genuine purpose, which implies that language learning is occurring.

4) Request for Assistance

One of the most frequent types of interaction in cooperative learning context involved L2 learners in requesting and receiving assistance regarding language problems. When the children had difficulty, particularly with lexical items, they turned to their peers for help. Assistance provided included spelling words and explaining their meaning. The examples include "How do you spell *friends*?", "How do you spell *English*?", and "how do you spell *Checkers*?" The children sometimes acted as a source of knowledge for their peers, providing correct forms of language and also explanation.

So far, I have described features of four verbal interaction patterns in an ESL class during cooperative learning (i.e., self-correction, peer-correction, repetition, and request for assistance) and their influence on the children's L2 use and development. As mentioned earlier, excerpts were presented as a representative example of each theme. Quantitative analysis of the discourse data revealed that six interactional moments fell under the category of self-correction, ten of peer-correction, three of repetition, and nineteen of request for assistance.

2. Teacher's Role

Putting learners in small group settings does not guarantee the realization of the potential of cooperative learning. Nor does pairing learners automatically generate opportunities for dynamic interaction, which is one of the desired goals in language classes. In relation to this, the role of the teacher within the learning community deserves careful attention. For this, this paper turns to Wells' notion of the macro and micro level of teacher's responsibility for student learning (1996). Teachers' macro responsibility concerns how well teachers structure and manage learning tasks and environments, whereas micro responsibility concerns how they interact with students on a moment-to-moment basis to bring about learning.

Seen from the Well's distinction, in a macro level, Mrs. White often involved her children in cooperative learning activities. She was an advocate of cooperative learning or, more precisely, small group work. She held the view that small group work can create meaningful opportunities to produce and practice language. In the class, the teacher emphasized the need for cooperation for a given task. "Work together," "Help each other," "Ask your partner," and "Work with your partners" were frequently heard.

In structuring small group activities, Mrs. White paid special attention to creating meaningful contexts for language learning. She viewed meaningful contexts as occurring when the activities are of relevance to the students' needs and generate opportunities for purposeful language use. With regard to the relevance to the children's needs, the teacher

took their interests, developmental levels, learning needs, and everyday life situations into consideration in planning tasks. Around the Valentine's Day, for example, the children were engaged in writing a letter to their beloved person, pretending to be St. Valentine. In addition, in order to address the children's linguistic, academic needs, Mrs. White incorporated the mainstream curriculum into her ESL class. In an interview, Mrs. White mentioned:

> The first thing I do is to decide what their learning in their classroom is. And then I work with different teachers to find out what their areas of study are. So if, for example, they are learning about the Middle Ages, then I will do activities related to the Middle Ages in here, so that when they go back to their classroom, they have some information.

Here, Mrs. White raised an important issue of the connection of ESL and regular classes. Currently, there has been a growing recognition that LEP children need systematic support to learn appropriately in mainstream classes. As reflected in this quote, linking the ESL class to regular classes helps to increase the familiarity of the content and then facilitates the children's learning in the regular classes. The teacher views her class as an extension of many aspects of the curriculum, not as a completely isolated language-learning laboratory. Mrs. White's class illustrates an example of the integration of language and content learning.

Mrs. White tried to further integrate general educational guidelines established by the school and the district into the ESL class. This effort was embodied in the game invention activity.

> I use a teacher resource book to adapt it for my ESL students. The book is like the Bible to me. I know also that fourth graders are learning about life skills. It's a very difficult concept for ESL students to learn about cooperation, sharing, and patience, and these are very hard things to teach. … And so I thought the best way to teach that was in doing it. So the idea of the game invention activity came to me, because I thought that we can talk about what school rules, everyday life rules are, while students create their own games, their own rules, and then just see how they work.

Interestingly, I found a large bulletin board on the wall of a fourth-grade regular classroom describing the importance of life skills, such as patience and cooperation, which were the focus of the game invention activity.

Furthermore, meaningful contexts for language learning were established by involving

the children in using English for genuine purposes, that is, completion of given tasks. In the class, language was not mechanically drilled or practiced, but group activities generated opportunities for the children to use the language authentically during the interactions. As mentioned earlier, the tasks required the children to produce one tangible product for which they had to interact all the while, i.e., from brainstorming to the creation of the final product. The genuine purpose for the target language use must have contributed to the creation of contexts for language learning.

In the meantime, in a micro level of responsibility (i.e., moment-to-moment interaction), Mrs. White engaged the children in dynamic, scaffolded verbal interaction with her. In a sense, task-oriented cooperative learning offered opportunities for the teacher to actively interact with children. While pairs of children worked on a given task, Mrs. White walked among the pairs to monitor their progress and provide scaffolded assistance. Excerpt 4 illustrates several scaffolding features in the interaction between the teacher and the learners.

In this excerpt, after a girl dyad, Mikyung (from Korea) and Monica (from Mexico), had finished writing an invitation letter to a friend, Mrs. White was revising it with the girls. The letter contained the information that the students would go to Europe by the TGV train.

<Excerpt 4>

1. Teacher: We are going with the TGV train ((reading a sentence in the letter))
2. TGV train. Wow! You should tell me what that is.
3. Mikyung: Uh.
4. Teacher: Tell me what that is, Monica.
5. Monica: Fastest train in the world.
6. Teacher: OK. Let's say that. It…is… ((writing))
7. Say again. the…fastest… ((writing))
8. Mikyung: Fastest
9. Teacher: Uh huh… the fastest train… ((writing))
10. Mikyung: in the world.
11. Teacher: in…the…world ((writing)) How exciting!
12. We are going with TGV train. It is the fastest train in the world ((reading))
13. We will staying? ((reading with a rising intonation))
14. We will staying? How would you say?
15. Monica: We will stay.
16. Teacher: We will stay or we will be…staying.
17. Monica: Oh, we will be staying ((nodding her head))
18. Teacher: You know that when we have the ~ing, you have to put the verb "be."
19. So we will be staying in the Comfort Inn ((reading the new sentence))

In lines 1 to 13, Mrs. White involved the children in describing the characteristics of TGV. She first made a positive response to the use of TGV in the letter through "Wow," and then invited the children to jointly construct the discourse by saying, "you should tell me" and "tell me, Monica." Here, Mrs. White enlisted the children's interest in the task. Upon receiving the invitation, the girl dyad was involved in conversing with the teacher as Monica gave an answer to the teacher's question and Mikyung repeated the sentence to the teacher in the writing process. The teacher acknowledged the children's contributions by repeating and incorporating them into the letter.

In line 13 and 14, Mrs. White read an incorrect sentence, "We will staying," using a rising intonation, and repeated it twice. These two communicative acts served as a cue to bring the learners' attention to the problem in question. She then posed an open-ended question, "How would you say?" Once again, with the question, Mrs. White tried to arouse the learners' interest in the task. She invited them to think about the problem and its solution, rather than directly offering a solution herself. After one of the girls, Monica, gave a correct form, "We will stay," in line 15, Mrs. White confirmed her contribution by repeating the form and provided another correct form in line 16. She then finally gave the girls an explanation of a relevant grammar point.

In this dialogic interaction, Mrs. White was offering scaffolded assistance to the children and ultimately guiding them through appropriate language use. On the part of the students, when given appropriate assistance by the teacher in the ZPD, they noticed the problem in question and solved it by themselves. This excerpt ends with the teacher giving an explicit explanation with grammatical terms in line 18. When given the grammar explanation after their own attempts to solve the problem, the children probably made more sense out of the explanation than if the teacher had corrected the problem herself.

This excerpt illustrates how the teacher's scaffolding enabled the L2 learners to perform at a higher level by drawing their attention to a problem that they would not have realized without assistance and offering assistance while they solved it. The learner-teacher interaction scaffolded learners' attempts to get actively involved in classroom discourse and to produce the target forms, leading to the promotion of L2 learners' language level.

It is true that the teacher often illustrated the same interaction pattern in whole class work, but working with cooperative small groups allowed her more opportunities to interact with individual learners. Such interaction enabled the teacher to easily identify the children's current level of development manifested in the group work process and address their developmental needs immediately. During the interaction, she sought to involve the children in the co-construction of knowledge, eliciting responses from them, acknowledging their responses, and incorporating the responses into classroom discourse. This type of active learner-teacher interaction has been considered crucial to facilitating student learning (Anton, 1999; Verplaetse, 2000).

V. DISCUSSION

Each language classroom is a unique social environment where daily interaction plays a significant role in shaping learners' language use and development. This study investigated how child ESL learners working in cooperative small groups interacted with other learners and the teacher from a sociocultural perspective.

An analysis of the classroom discourse data revealed that cooperative learning involved the children in active social interactions and authentic language use. Interactive group tasks and the teacher required the children to collaboratively interact and negotiate with each other to complete given tasks. This study identified the mechanisms for language learning embedded in the interactions: self-correction, peer correction, repetition, and request for assistance. This finding supports the results of other studies conducted in bilingual, mainstream classes that cooperative interaction facilitated the student learning (e.g., Duran & Szymanski, 1995; Klinger & Vaughn, 2000).

Scaffolding for language development occurred in both learner-learner and learner-teacher interactions. Regarding learner-learner interaction, the child learners provided scaffolded help to their peers and thus helped to extend the peers' linguistic resources. The scaffolded assistance unfolded in several forms, such as directing peer's attention to a problem, giving feedback on his/her language performance, highlighting discrepancies between an incorrect utterance and its correct form, and presenting ideal forms of language use. Interactions generated during cooperative learning allowed the learners to support and be supported by other learners. From a sociocultural perspective, this finding lends support to Well's expanded notion of ZPD (1998) and also to the findings of the studies that learners are able to aid in each other's language learning through scaffolded assistance, as in expert-novice interactions (e.g., Anton & DiCamilla, 1998; Donato, 1994; Swain & Lapkin, 1998).

In learner-teacher interactions, the teacher involved the children in the co-construction of meaning and discourse with scaffolded supports. The teacher enlisted the children's interest in the task by asking questions related to problems identified, articulating exclamatory remarks, stimulating the children to reflect on language, and actively involving them in the co-construction of discourse. She also marked critical language features and presented ideal language forms in a timely manner. While interacting with the children engaged in cooperative small group work, the teacher could diagnose the children's current level of language development and address their learning needs on the spot. And the scaffolded help from the teacher enabled the children to advance to the next level of language use within the ZPD.

The present study also revealed that the ESL teacher played a significant role in the children's learning process through organization and management of context-rich group

activities. The teacher constantly sought to create learning environments in which classroom activities were contextualized and relevant to the children's interests and needs. And the teacher' devotion to the children's language development went along with an interest in their academic development. This study showed that fruitful cooperative learning requires a combination of macro (e.g., lesson planning and organization) and micro level (e.g., moment-to-moment classroom interaction) of teacher's responsibility.

I would argue for the need for more classroom-based research studies of children's interaction during cooperative learning. Studies of interaction among child learners are needed to guide language teachers to make informed decisions on classroom practices. Future studies need to further illuminate aspects of interaction in diverse cooperative learning environments and their relationships to language learning.

VI. IMPLICATIONS FOR EFL SITUATIONS

Finally, this paper considers implications for EFL situation in Korea. Currently, English language teaching field has put an increasing focus on the development of oral communication skills. There is a wide recognition that enhancing communicative competence requires practice of language in interactive context (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Unlike ESL contexts, however, students in EFL learning context have limited opportunities to use English for genuine, communicative purposes and to interact with native speakers of English. Korea is no exception. Given this situation, small group work has been promoted as an effective strategy in that it allows learners to interact with each other using the target language. Still, in spite of its proclaimed benefits, small group work does not guarantee active verbal interaction among learners. In particular, in case learners share the same language background, they are likely to turn to their native language instead of the target language.

Against this backdrop, the present study proposes several considerations to maximize the opportunities for learners to practice the target language during small group work. First of all, structure of group tasks deserves attention. Teachers can assign different roles to individual students so that they can use the language for their role. Furthermore, in case students are required to report their team work to the whole class in the target language, they may be urged to use the language. Second, appropriate tasks for which cooperation is required need to be designed. If learners recognize strong, meaningful needs for cooperation, they will be better motivated to work together. Mutual agreement between the teacher and the children over the value of and the need for group work could involve the children in group work more actively. Third, consideration needs to be paid to grouping strategy as well. Teachers can implement diverse grouping strategies according to learners'

gender or language proficiency level—homogeneous vs. heterogeneous grouping. Such implementation will enable teachers to delve into what grouping strategy works best in their local classroom context and what factors bring about the consequence. Last but not least, teachers' role in the success of small group work should be emphasized again. Teachers must give clear instructions or guidelines for a group task. They need to constantly stress to the students the need for using the target language, not the native language, closely monitoring learners' language use pattern.

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