Working Collaboratively in Second/Foreign Language Learning

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The last two decades have witnessed a noticeable development in collaborative learning research. Informed by both cognitive-interactionist theory (Long 1983, 1996) and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky 1978), a large body of literature (e.g., Loewen & Sato, 2018; Sato & Ballinger, 2016; Swain & Lapkin, 2001) has demonstrated a robust connection between collaborative work and second language acquisition. In particular, peer collaboration is believed to serve as a facilitator of language production, and therefore it creates more opportunities for language learning. Based on this notion, researchers are branching out in new directions to investigate various aspects of collaboration in diverse learning contexts. The volume *Working Collaboratively in Second/Foreign Language Learning* edited by María del Pilar García Mayo, is a collection of studies documenting those explorations into collaborative work in second and foreign language learning.

The book contains ten chapters that can be broadly categorized into three themes. Chapters 1, 3, and 6 are presented under the theme of how EFL learners collaborate to use language and what factors motivate or demotivate learners' participation in various collaborative tasks. The first chapter by Neomy Storch offers a critical review of collaborative writing research over the past two decades and focuses on learners' sense of ownership which has received little attention before. How individual and collective ownership is related to different patterns of

interaction and manifested is discussed in detail during face-to-face (FTF) and web-based collaborative writing activities. Participants involved in Chapter 3 are the under-researched adolescent learners in the mixed-age (MA) classroom. Tomas Kos explores MA pairs' degree of mutuality in collaboration and its relationship with actual learning opportunities measured by language-related episodes (LRE). The study presented in Chapter 6 is the first to investigate the patterns of interaction formed in blended collaborative writing activities (FTF and online— via Google Docs). Five distinct patterns of interaction are identified; in most groups, the patterns are dynamic across modes. What's more, the mode has an influence on the quantity as well as the resolution of LREs.

Besides the influencing factors, Chapters 2, 4, 5, 7, and 8 turn to examine how collaborative work affects language learning. In terms of developing grammatical knowledge, the research synthesis presented in Chapter 2 shows most previous studies have failed to demonstrate the advantage of collaborative form-focused tasks statistically. It is claimed that more studies are needed to verify collaborative tasks' efficacy to assist grammatical forms acquisition. How collaborative work influences young learners' written text quality is investigated in both Chapters 4 and 7. Chapter 4 finds that learners in groups created more LREs than pairs, while pairs successfully resolved outcomes of LREs more often than groups for each type of episode. Additionally, writing in pairs could improve fluency, while writing in groups led to better lexical, grammar, and global scores. Besides, most participants take a positive attitude towards collaborative writing.

Chapter 7 continues to explore these themes by observing how the mode of collaborative writing (on paper vs. in Google docs) affects secondary school students' written text quality. According to the findings, in general, paper-based writing has better quality except for fluency and adequacy. The researchers believe the study could yield some insights for classroom practice; moreover, teachers and students should be trained to improve their awareness of technological affordances. Chapter 8 is about how text-based online interaction facilitates L2 Spanish learners' pragmatic development, specifically the change in the way participants produce their closing sequences. Employing conversation analysis (CA) to analyze six weeks of interaction, the researcher discovers that technology-mediated tasks could promote L2 speakers' telecollaborative engagement, improve their usage of closing sequence, and offer them a chance to exchange with native speakers. This study could provide insights into research on longitudinal interactional practices using CA. A small-scale qualitative study presented in Chapter 5 discovers that collaborative writing experience can lead to learners' reduction of dictionary use and increased preference for intuitive solutions and reasoning during individual writing.

Last but not least, the studies presented in Chapters 9 and 10 are centered around ESL students, drawing on the framework of activity theory to analyze web-based collaborative writing activity. Chapter 9 illustrates how the interconnected components within the activity system constrain or afford students' performance in collaborative wiki writing. Chapter 10 examines the interaction patterns as well as factors mediating peer interaction during collaborative writing activities via Google Docs. In addition to the participant goal, another five mediating factors (modes of communication, matching between self and other-perceived roles, perception about co-ownership, task representation, and task familiarity) are identified and analyzed within the framework of activity theory.

Undoubtedly, this volume contributes to expanding the empirical basis of collaboration research. Specifically speaking, the research projects collected in the volume were conducted in several countries (e.g., Spain, Germany, Indonesia) and target different second or foreign languages (e.g., German, Spanish). Moreover, in some chapters, researchers studied peer interaction among young adolescent learners (e.g., in Chapters 4 & 7) or mixed-age learners (e.g., in Chapter 3) who are generally an under-researched group in collaboration studies. Considering the wide application of technology tools in language learning, this volume has outlined the benefits and drawbacks of different types of computer-mediated peer collaboration in addition to face-to-face collaboration (e.g., computer-mediated synchronous interaction, a combination of F2F interaction and asynchronous online interaction). What's more, in some chapters (such as Chapters 3, 5, 6, and 8), tasks used for data elicitation were adopted from the course design or common classroom lessons, which presents an ideal link between language teaching practice and research.

Despite all these strengths, this volume has shortcomings. First, though the findings are enlightening, several chapters based on quantitative analysis have a small sample size (e.g., in Chapters 3, 4, and 7), which limit the generalizability of findings to wider populations. Second, the technology involved in the collaboration research of this volume, namely Google Docs and Wiki-based platforms, is confined to computer-mediated communication modes. Future investigations could benefit from exploiting new technologies such as artificial intelligence and extended reality in learners' collaboration research. Third, even if the volume advances our understanding of text-based interaction involved in the process of collaborative writing, which is the specific form of collaboration in most chapters, readers could gain more insight into learners' collaborative work if more oral interaction research were included.

To sum up, credit should be given to García Mayo for collecting a wide scope of empirical studies demonstrating how learners work collaboratively to use a second or foreign language in diverse learning environments. As such, this book is recommended to language teachers, early career and experienced researchers, and graduate students who are interested in gaining an in-depth understanding of the role of learners' collaborative work in language learning.

To Cite this Review

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