Collaborative dialogues and L2 learning: Korean junior high school students' pair-work in English composition

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Collaborative Dialogues and L2 Learning: Korean Junior High School Students’ Pair–work in English Composition*

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This classroom–based study investigates the relationship between collaborative dialogues and L2 development working in pairs on a collaborative writing task. Specifically, this study focuses on how the students’ pair talk exerted a positive influence on their L2 development. Over a six–week period, three pairs with differing levels of L2 proficiency engaged in a two–stage task: pair writing and individual writing. After the task completion, the six participants were interviewed individually. In order to identify the patterns of prominent pair interaction, the participants’ pair talks were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively in language–related episodes (LREs). The findings suggested that the patterns of pair interaction significantly influenced the frequency of LREs. Even less proficient peers are able to provide assistance in L2 (English) as well as L1 (Korean) to more proficient peers during the pair interaction. Most students showed positive attitudes toward the collaborative writing. Based on the above findings, it is argued that peer interaction, even in L1, promotes L2 learning by making meaning through creating intersubjectivity between the participating peers. The findings are discussed in terms of the pedagogical implications for the use of collaborative tasks in L2 classrooms.

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Keywords

collaborative dialogue, language-related episode (LRE), sociocultural theory, scaffolding, pair writing / 협동적 대화, 언어관련 일화, 사회문화 이론, 비계(飛階), 짝 작문

I. Introduction

With strong theoretical and pedagogical basis in second language acquisition (SLA), the role of interaction in second language (L2)\(^1\) classrooms has been emphasized for a couple of decades and thus collaborative tasks with small group and pair work have been widely used in the L2 classroom. While grounded in the communicative approach to L2 instruction, interactions in L2 instruction are emphasized as a source for meaning negotiation and inferential modification of interaction facilitating L2 development (e.g., Gass & Lewis, 2007; Long & Porter, 1985; Pica, Kang, & Sauro, 2006). In this theoretical basis, the goal of interaction in the communicative tasks is the successful sending and receiving of linguistic messages and is considered as providing venues for students to use the target language and to negotiate meaning with one another in L2. This conduit model of communication considered the language learning and language use as two distinct phenomena (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Gass, 1998) in that it adopts the conventional binary distinction between social and individual (or cognitive) approaches to language learning and had a limitation to explain linguistic interactions within social contexts (Batstone, 2010). On the contrary, sociocultural theory of mind (hereafter SCT) (e.g., Daniels, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Wertsch, 1985) showed a different perspective: social interaction is an opportunity to learn. That is, during social interaction between individuals acting with mediational tools, especially

\(^{1}\) In this paper, L2 refers to both second language and foreign language, whereas L1 refers to first language.
language, learners have a chance to develop not only their language skills but their cognitive and problem solving abilities as well (Swain & Lapkin, 2002). One of the ways to promote social interaction among learners in the writing class is to present them with collaborative writing activities (e.g., Fung, 2010; Storch, 2001, 2002, 2005; Swain, Brooks, & Tocalli-Beller, 2002). Analyzing interactions among learners during collaborative writing has allowed researchers to access not only the socio-cognitive processes between learners (Atkinson, 2010; Batstone, 2010; Lantolf, 2000) but also the effect of collaborative dialogue on language learning, as reflected in the students’ writing (Swain, 1998).

This SCT perspective has kindled a keen interest in collaborative dialogue, where language use and language learning occur simultaneously (Donato, 1994; Swain, 1998, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 1998, 2001, 2002). As Swain and Lapkin (1998, 2001) have discussed, the concept of collaborative dialogue developed from the output hypothesis, which meant “dialogue in which speakers are engaged in problem-solving and knowledge-building” (Swain, 2000, p. 102). It usually occurs when language learners encounter linguistic problems and try to solve them together, in which case, language is used both as a communicative and cognitive tool; consequently peer-peer collaborative dialogue is assumed to mediate L2 learning.

Adopting SCT, this paper examines the beneficial effect of the peer-peer collaborative dialogues between L2 learners of different proficiency levels engaged in the collaborative writing on L2 learning in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. By analyzing language-related episodes (LREs), this paper extends the application of Vygotskian concepts to the study of dyadic verbal interactions during collaborative writing tasks in the L2 classroom. Pedagogically, this study is designed to provide insights into alternative methods of structuring classroom writing activities.
II. Theoretical Background

1. Peer Interaction and L2 Learning

According to Vygotsky (1978), the higher mental development of human beings appears first on the social level, between individuals, and later on the individual level, inside the child. In addition, he emphasizes language as a mediatinal tool for higher mental development. Thus, language is used as a powerful mediatinal tool between learners (at the interpsychological level) and within individuals (at the intrapsychological level) (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 1997).

In SLA pedagogical perspective, recent studies on the relationship between peer interaction and L2 learning demonstrated that learner collaboration in groups or pairs promotes language learning (e.g., Brooks & Swain, 2009; Donato, 1994; Garcia & Asención, 2001; Kim, 2008; Lapkin, Swain, & Smith, 2002; McDonough, 2004; Ohta, 2001; Storch, 2002; Swain, 2000; Swain, Brooks, & Tocalli-Beller, 2002; Swain & Lapkin, 1998, 2001; Watanabe & Swain, 2007). Interaction activities between peers in L2 classrooms have been used for building their L2 knowledge, and exposure to more LREs through the contribution of partners facilitated negotiating ideas and constructed meaning through interpsychological effort to achieve intersubjectivity. For example, Swain and Lapkin (1998) pointed out that learners are able to support L2 learning through questioning, proposing possible solutions, repeating, and negotiating through peer–peer interaction.

Donato (1994) defined collective scaffolding as a mutual interaction among peers drawing on their resources and helping each other to solve language–related problems. In addition, Ohta (2001) maintained that “no learner is universally more or less capable than a peer, but that each learner presents an array of strengths and weaknesses that may be complementary. When
learners work together... these strengths and weaknesses may be pooled, creating a greater expertise for the group than of any of the individuals involved" (p. 76). Ohta (1995) also analyzed the pair work interaction of two people learning Japanese with differing levels of proficiency in an intermediate language class and those two learners showed a creative interaction and used L2 for a variety of authentic purposes in collaborative interaction where scaffolding creates a positive environment for L2 acquisition. Storch (1999) and Garcia and Asención (2001) showed that collaborative work had a positive effect on learning grammatical items. McDonough (2004) showed that learners who had taken part in pair and group activities showed improved production of the target forms, even though they did not consider the interaction activities as a useful method for learning the language. Kim (2008) mentioned the effectiveness of collaborative work on L2 vocabulary acquisition. In sum, for language learners, this peer interaction can provide scaffolded assistance to each other within their relative zone of proximal development (ZPD) and thus peer interaction promotes language learning.

Several studies have found that the patterns of interaction vary across peer groups, and certain patterns of interaction are claimed to be more conducive to L2 learning than others (e.g., de Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Kowal & Swain, 1994; Leeser, 2004; Storch, 2002; Watanabe, 2008; Watanabe & Swain, 2007; Yule & Macdonald, 1990). These studies have found not only the differences in the patterns of pair behavior but also more conducive patterns of interaction to language learning. For example, Storch (2002) examined that not all peer–peer interaction provided an occasion for learning and collaborative pattern and expert–novice pattern of interaction showed more scaffolded

\footnote{Vygotsky (1978) defines zone of proximal development as “the distance between the actual developmental level 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” (p. 86).}
assistance in each other's performance than other patterns of interaction. In collaborative pattern of interaction, both learners could take the role of experts and more often pooled resources whenever they face language difficulties. With the stimulated recall, Watanabe (2008) searched the three pairs' pattern of interaction and her data showed that the higher- and the lower-proficiency peers could both provide opportunities for learning when they worked collaboratively. In other words, both expert and novice could benefit from the interaction (cf. Ohta, 1995). Although proficiency differences have been debated as one of the significant factors in the nature of peer interaction (e.g., Kowal & Swain, 1994; Leeser, 2004; Watanabe, 2008), little research has documented how learners with different L2 levels interact with each other in their relative ZPD, and what types of grouping are useful for L2 learning, especially, in EFL instruction. Therefore, we need to investigate the nature of interaction pattern between learners with different levels of L2 proficiency and which factor affects the nature of peer assistance and L2 learning in EFL instruction.

2. LREs and Patterns of Collaborative L2 Writing

Through the collaborative dialogues, learners have a chance to attend to matters of linguistic form and meaning in the context of meaningful communication. These occasions have been referred to as language-related episodes, or LREs (e.g., Kowal & Swain, 1994; Lapkin, Swain, & Smith, 2002; Swain & Lapkin, 1998, 2001, 2002; Williams, 1999, 2001). According to Swain and Lapkin (1998), LREs are defined as “any part of a dialogue where the students talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, or correct themselves or other” (p. 326). Namely, LREs are instances of collaborative dialogue in which learners focus on matters of language form and meaning in the context of meaningful communication. Even though some studies
have focused on the occurrence of LREs for analyzing how learners pay attention to linguistic forms during collaborative work, the nature of LREs varies depending on learner proficiency, learning activity (Williams, 1999), the cultural background, learning context, and characteristics of the learners (Loewen, 2004). Few classroom-based studies have explored the relationships between LREs and L2 learning in a classroom context (Adams, 2007; Swain, 1998; Swain & Lapkin, 1998, 2001; Williams, 2001). Swain and Lapkin (1998, 2002) pointed out that LREs provided occasions for L2 learning, and were able to demonstrate, using pre- and post-test data, that some LREs were in fact the site of learning.

Research findings on collaborative writing have been positive. Research has shown that learners enhance not only grammatical accuracy and lexis but also discourse (e.g., DiCamilla & Antón, 1997; Fung, 2010; Storch, 2002, 2005; Swain & Lapkin, 1998, 2001). In collaborative classroom-based writing activities, Storch (2002) classified the dyadic interactive patterns as collaborative, expert/novice, dominant/dominant, or dominant/passive orientation to the writing tasks, and examined the dialogue of one pair from each of the four interactional patterns in order to search for the evidence of learning in subsequent individual performance. Collaborative pattern showed co-construction and extension of knowledge, provision of scaffolded assistance, and language development (grammatical accuracy and new lexical knowledge). This study will show that the opportunity to talk about the task and language during peer interaction in the writing classroom gives learners a chance to corroborate and reorganize their existing L2 knowledge, to provide scaffolded assistance for each other when completing pair writing, and to facilitate their L2 writing skills development.

As a qualitative descriptive study, we designed the present study to provide insight into the link between pair interaction and
L2 learning when they are engaged in collaborative L2 writing tasks. In order to understand it, we posit two research questions in this study:

1) How do EFL learners interact in pairs with different proficiency levels during the collaborative writing? What kind of dyadic interaction is identified in an EFL junior high school class?
2) How do EFL learners perceive and feel about their dyadic interaction in terms of overall attitude toward the pair interaction?

III. Methods

1. Participants and Contexts

The study was conducted in a regular English class at a public junior high school from a major city in Korea. The regular English classes were three-hours a week. The participants in the study were six male students of the 9th grade. Six ninth graders worked on the writing tasks in self-selected pairs and were divided into three pairs in terms of their English proficiency (Dyad A was comprised of low and intermediate; Dyad B of intermediate and high; and Dyad C of low and high learners). Students’ proficiency levels were decided by their mid-term English test scores\(^3\) - high level with upper 80 out of 100, intermediate from 41 to 79 scores, and lower level below 40 scores (See Table 1).

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\(^3\) The test consisted of 30 multiple-choice questions and a couple of short-answer questions. The multiple-choice questions were divided into four sections with a multiple-choice format: reading comprehension (12 questions), grammar (10 questions), vocabulary (4 questions), and common English expressions (4 questions).
Table 1
Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dyad</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Proficiency level (English test score)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Hyun</td>
<td>Low (32.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Min</td>
<td>Intermediate (61.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Jin</td>
<td>Intermediate (55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Woo</td>
<td>High (93.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Jung</td>
<td>Low (9.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ho</td>
<td>High (88)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Procedure and Materials

In the learner’s regular classes, this study was carried out in five different sessions, and each session was comprised of two stages. In the first sub-session, the three pairs were asked to write jointly one in-class journal for 10 minutes, when the participants shared their linguistic knowledge and their ideas through collaborative dialogues in order to complete the writing tasks. In the second sub-session, they individually re-wrote what they had originally written for 10 minutes.

From May 10 to June 18, 2010, as stated above, three pairs with differing levels of L2 proficiency engaged in a two-stage task: pair writing and individual writing. In consultation with the students’ homeroom teacher, the writing topics were selected based on students’ interests, thus their familiarity with the topics would allow the students to focus attention on their writing. For this study, two types of writing tasks were selected: picture description (see Appendix A) and personal narratives. They worked on the pair writing with personal narrative topics for four weeks, and they engaged in the pair writing with the picture description for a week. There is no limit to the lengths of pair writing. While working on the pair writing, the students asked questions to their peers and the homeroom teacher as well.

4 All pseudonyms
Sometimes, they searched through an electronic dictionary. Overall, they were told to write their own passages for five times. The writing prompts of personal narratives were illustrated below. Each dyad chose four out of the six topics below, and in each session, the members were engaged in a different writing prompt.

(1) Why do we study English?
(2) What is the most popular TV program among teenagers? Why?
(3) What kinds of movies do you like to watch? Why do you like them so much?
(4) What’s your favorite computer game? Why do you like it so much?
(5) What is the best thing to do after exams to lessen our stress? Is there anything you want to recommend to others? Why?
(6) Choose one classmate in our classroom and introduce him or her to all of our other classmates.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

1) Pair Talk

Pair talk in the first stage was audio-taped for analyzing the nature of the interactive process and the pattern of interaction. Each pair brought their own voice recorders and recorded their voices by themselves. Each voice recorder was placed on the table where the students were working. The voice files were attached in an email and were sent out to the first author.

Pair talk data concerning lexis and grammatical choices when students talked about the writing they were producing, were examined for salient linguistic features and patterns of interactions which could be used to characterize the ways in which the dyads approached the task. In order to examine this decision-making process, collaborative dialogues were coded for
LREs. In this study, Storch’s (2001, p. 40) analytic framework of LREs was adopted and revised:

(1) the focus of the LRE: grammar (e.g., verb tense choice); lexis (e.g., word choice, word definition); mechanics (spelling, punctuation); or contents (adding or suggesting sentences);
(2) who initiated the LRE;
(3) how the episodes were initiated: whether via some form of request for assistance (requests for explanation, confirmation, or help), suggestion, asking for ideas, overt error correction, or explanation;
(4) response to initiation in terms of interactive (e.g., cooperation, request, repetition, suggestion, or translation), non-interactive (e.g., ignore), or acknowledgement which is difficult to recognize whether it was indeed accepted.

Through the reiterative reading of the transcripts, the first author focused on how the students interacted with each other while completing the writing task, and the level of involvement and contribution of each member of the dyad to the given writing tasks. For analyzing the pair talk, eight recorded transcripts\(^5\) were analyzed in terms of LREs, and pattern of pair interaction.

2) Individual Interviews

In order to address the learners’ overall attitude toward the pair interaction in collaborative writing, the retrospective interviews were conducted from July 7 to July 14, 2010. The interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis for about 10 to 15 minutes and were carried out in Korean. We included detailed questions such as their attitudes toward the pair interaction, the

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\(^5\) In the recoding processes, the three dyads sometimes forgot to bring their mp3 players, so they did not record their interactions. Therefore, there were only eight recorded interactions for the analysis.
degree of their participation and contribution as well as that of their partners, their experiences including difficulties and preferences to work together with their partners, and perceived learning outcomes during the pair interaction (see Appendix B). Same questions were asked to the students. The interview data were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed based on the salient features on the learners’ experiences during dyadic interaction in EFL writing classroom.

3) Coding and Analysis

Data analysis consisted of three stages. In the first stage, the transcribed pair talk data were analyzed in terms of LREs for the pattern of dyadic interaction and the salient features that describe these patterns. In the second stage, the collaborative writing tasks the students completed during pair talk were compared with their individual writings in order to trace the effect of resolutions reached during pair interaction on the subsequent individual performance. In the last stage, individual interview data were analyzed for the overall attitudes toward the pair interaction.

IV. Findings

1. Identified Patterns of Pair Interaction and L2 Learning

In order to examine the link between patterns of pair interaction and L2 learning, the qualitative analysis of the recorded interactions were coded for LREs and were analyzed for communicative features that might reflect scaffolding for L2 development.

Table 2 summarized the findings concerning the LREs for the three dyads. As shown in Table 2 below, Dyad C which was comprised of high- and low-level proficiency especially stands out in regards to the total number of LREs (49) which was more
than the other two dyads (11 and 11 respectively). According to the observed interactions, the participants in Dyad C did the writing alternately, while only the higher level proficiency students wrote the joint text in Dyads A and B. Although Jung in Dyad C was the lowest level of L2 proficiency in the class, he had a chance to participate in the joint writing as an active collaborator and writer by doing the pair writing alternately. Thus it is assumed that the participants in Dyad C actively engaged in expressing their ideas, and sharing and modifying their own thinking compared with the other two dyads.

These three pairs focused on both lexis (deliberating over word meaning, word searches, and word choice) and contents (generating and discussing ideas and topics) rather than mechanics (asking spelling and punctuation) in the EFL classroom. According to the categorization of LREs in Table 2, the Dyad A was focused on content (46%) more than lexical choices (36%), and this similar pattern appeared in the Dyad B. For the Dyad C, interaction concerning lexis (53%) and contents (29%) occurred throughout the phase of pair composition. In general, the three pairs paid more attention to lexis and content than grammar and mechanics when they were doing collaborative writing. Excerpt 1 is an example of the type of interaction focused on inquiring about word meaning in the L1 (Korean).
### Table 2
Comparing LREs across 3 Dyads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dyad of LRE</th>
<th>No. of LRE</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>How LRE was initiated?</th>
<th>Response to initiation&lt;sup&gt;6&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Request for assistance</td>
<td>Ack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Suggest</td>
<td>Ask for idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A (L-M)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4 (36%)</td>
<td>2 (18%)</td>
<td>5 (46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6 (55%)</td>
<td>4 (36%)</td>
<td>1 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5 (45%)</td>
<td>6 (55%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C (L-H)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>26 (53%)</td>
<td>5 (10%)</td>
<td>4 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>25 (51%)</td>
<td>18 (37%)</td>
<td>3 (6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>6</sup> Responses:

- **I** = interactive (i.e., cooperate, request, repeat, suggest, translate)
- **Ack** = simple acknowledgement (e.g., yeah, ok, mm)
- **NI** = non-interactive (ignore)
- **Other** = responded by others such as a teacher and other peers, or private speech

<sup>7</sup> Mech = mechanics (i.e., spelling, punctuation)

<sup>8</sup> Content = asking for idea or opinions, or adding words, sentences, phrases, etc
Excerpt 1 (June 8, 2010 - Dyad A)

7 Min 체육복을 뭐라고 해? [How do I say ‘a gym suit’ in English](?)
8 Hyun 뭐? [What](?)
9 Min 체육복 [a gym suit]
10 Hyun Training
11 Min Training
12 Hyun Training 티-?
13 Min 아니 그린데 training 뭐? [No I mean, training what](?)
14 Hyun Training
15 Min Wear?
16 Hyun Wear라고 해야 하나? [Should I say ‘wear’](?) 복 [clothes] training suit training suit (long pause) pants (just laugh and laugh)
17 Min 아 쉬네 [Ah, it’s so easy] Pants
18 Hyun Training pants

In Line 7, Min directly asked how to say 체육복 [a gym suit] in English. For his question, Hyun answered it as training, as an attempt to elicit his existing L2 knowledge, but, Min who was dissatisfied with his answer, so asked it again in Line 13. At this point, Min understood what training meant and knew Hyun’s answer was not enough to express his idea. Through Lines 15 to 16, Min offered an alternative for wear based on his existing L2 knowledge and Hyun tried to think of another word for gym suit in English as well. Throughout their attempts to share their existing L2 knowledge, they found another word for gym suit - training pants in Line 18. These utterances led the learners to jointly access the L2 forms that were available to them. Excerpt 1 comes from the data of intermediate-low L2 proficiency pair, showing that even low proficiency learner, Hyun in Dyad A could

9 Transcription conventions: a question mark (?) is rising intonation; brackets [ ] are translation of Korean into English; and parenthesis ( ) are explanations of situation or non-verbal gestures.
pool his limited vocabulary knowledge and offer assistance to the proficient co-learner.

Excerpt 2 is the data from high-intermediate L2 proficiency pair which shows an example of focusing on contents.

Excerpt 2 (May 18, 2010 - Dyad B)

11 Jin Baseball is 어 baseballo은 야구를 아는 사람 아니 야구 규칙을 아는 사람한테는 쉽게만 하지만 야 야 야 재미있지만 재미있지만으로 하자

[Baseball is easy to someone who knows it, no no someone who knows the rule but ya ya ya it is fun, let us say fun]

12 Woo Okay (*he tried to translate in English what Jin said*)
13 Jin Fun
14 Woo Oh
15 Jin 재미있지만 하지만 그 모르는 사람 규칙을 모르는 사람에겐 한없이 어려운 스포츠이다 [It is fun but it will be really difficult to understand to someone who does not know the rules] (*long pause*) 재미없는 스포츠이다 [It is an uninteresting sport] 재미없는 스포츠 [Uninteresting sport]

16 Woo 재미없는? [Not fun] (?)
17 Jin 어 [Yeah]
18 Woo ‘재미없는’이 영어로 뭐지? [How do I say ‘not fun’ in English] (?)
19 Jin 신수야 ‘재미없는’이 영어로 뭐야? [Shin-soo, how can I say ‘not fun’ in English] (?)
20 Woo 생각해 보자고 [Let’s think about it]
21 Jin 생각해 봐야지 우리 들이 [Think about it together]
22 Shin-soo 나도 몰라 [I don’t know]
23 Woo 어 이거 맞아? [Uh, is it right] (?) (*Woo wrote ‘not fun’ on the paper*)
24 Jin 음 재미없는 not fun? [Umm, not fun]
25 Woo Not fun
Here we can see the language as a cognitive tool. In this excerpt, Jin used the L1 to externalize and verbalize his thoughts, while Woo translated what Jin said into English. In Line 13, Jin also offered a suggestion of an English word to his partner - *fun*, and his suggestion was accepted by his partner, Woo. While Jin kept verbalizing his ideas in L1, he was questioned about how to explain *not fun* in English. At this time, both of them had no idea how to say it in English, thus they asked for help from another friend, Shin-soo in Line 19. Even though Jin directly asked another student in a different group, they still tried to manage the writing task with each other in L1, as shown in Lines 20 to 25. Finally, Woo offered a suggestion of a new target language item in Line 23, and Jin repeated it and asked about it for confirmation checking. His confirmation check also offered Woo the opportunity to assure it. According to the observed pair interaction, what seemed particularly of interest was that Jin usually paid attention to how his ideas or suggestions were translated into English when Woo did all the writing for the pair. This interaction pattern appeared in the Dyad A as well. Min, as a main writer of Dyad A, did all the pair writing, and Hyun glanced over the writing. In the individual interview, Jin and Hyun also mentioned that just watching what their partner wrote in English would provide them the opportunity to receive timely assistance with word searches and sentences, thus facilitating L2 learning.

As Ohta (1995) mentioned how learners repair grammar forms while working together in collaborative activities, LRE focusing on grammar was also found in the data of the two proficiency groups - Dyads A and C. The Excerpt 3 comes from the data of high-low L2 proficiency pair, showing the collective scaffolding (Donato, 1994) in order to correct the peer’s grammatical error.

Excerpt 3 (May 18, 2010 - Dyad C)
101 Ho Be good at at good g-o-o-d at a-t
From Lines 110 to 112 in Excerpt 3, when Jung generates his ideas in L1, Ho shows his limited ability to express what his partner wants to say in English by saying “No way. It’s hard to express in English.” Here even though Jung is unsure how to make an analytic negation, he tests his hypothesis by offering a suggestion of a revised form of the sentence presented by Ho in Line 112. By testing his hypothesis about the form about which he is unsure, Jung elicits the correct form from Ho, his co-learner.

In this study, the initiator of LREs was another focus in joint writing in terms of their L2 proficiency level and found that initiation of LREs was unevenly distributed, with one student seeming to dominate - Hyun in Dyad A, Jin in Dyad B, and Ho in Dyad C initiated the LREs more than their partners. Even
though Hyun and Jin were less proficient learners than their partners, they tried to initiate LREs more when they worked together with more proficient partners. It meant that they took on a role in completing the pair writing as an active collaborator. Especially, in Dyad A, Hyun actually initiated 9 out of 11 LREs in this pair and also tried to suggest his ideas (4 out of 11 LREs) for completing the joint writing. It represented his efforts to join in the collaborative writing, even though his initiation elicited a non-interactive response (36%), as shown in Table 2.

In addition, we focused on how the initiated LREs were responded by their counterpart. An initiation of an LRE by some form of request is interesting because this initiation form represents a starting point for initiating a focus on language. Here are some examples of how pair interaction appears in the joint text and in the individual writings.

Excerpt 4 (June 8, 2010 - Dyad C)
45 Ho … they head
46 Jung Head가 뭐야? [What does it mean ‘head’ in Korean] (?)
47 Ho 머리 [Head] on sunflower
48 Jung Sunflower가 뭐야? [What does it mean ‘sunflower’] (?) 아 
    꽃? [Ah… flower] (?) 꽃을 얻었다? [They put a flower on 
    their heads] (?)
49 Ho 응 [Yeah]

Collaborative Writing (June 8, 2010)
They head on sun flower.

Individual Writing (June 18, 2010)
Ho’s - They wear sun-flower in hair.
Jung’s - They hair in sun-flower. *10

In Lines 46 and 47 of Excerpt 4, Jung’s requests for assistance

*10 An asterisk denotes an ungrammatical sentence.
elicited Ho’s cooperation with translation and they were likely to incorporate each other for completing the writing task. This pair interaction was reflected on through their individual writings as shown above. That is, a response to an initiation which is interactive and a written text which then appears in the individual writing are the supporting evidence of collaboration. What seemed particularly of interest was that Ho, more proficient learner, noticed the linguistic error in their joint text and then corrected the error in his individual writing, but Jung, less proficient learner, did not.

Excerpt 5 (June 8, 2010 – Dyad A)
3 Hyun (he was reading what Min wrote) Many people pull the (pause) rope
4 Min (Min read aloud while writing) Very hard (after a while)
5 Hyun A face very be be red 얼굴이 빨갛다 [their face looked red] Haha

Collaborative Writing (June 8, 2010)
Many people pull the rope very hard… and they faces are looks very bad.”

Individual Writing (June 18, 2010)
Hyun’s – They were seem to very hard, they play tug of war… specially front of left boy face seem to very hard and fun!”
Min’s – many people in the picture and some people pull the rope very hard… they look so hard…

As we compared the collaborative writing to the individual writings, we can find the evidence to support the link between L2 learning and collaborative work. When Hyun (less proficient learner) and Min (more proficient learner) wrote individually, they remembered and tried to reflect their pair decision elicited from the pair interaction with small changes. Hyun added an
expression of *tug of war* and it is assumed that he searched the word in English in advance, and wrote it in his individual writing. However, his linguistic errors still existed in his individual writing. Min also tried to reflect what they did during the collaborative work, and the grammatical error in the collaborative writing - *they faces are looks very bad* - was corrected to *they look so hard* in Min’s individual writing. With these two cases in Excerpts 4 and 5, less proficient partners showed their inability to correct their linguistic errors when they wrote individually.

These examples have shown the diverse ways in which students engage in pair interaction and work out language forms. Even these pair interactions lead to ungrammatical written texts, EFL learners co-construct, extend their L2 knowledge, and provide mutual scaffolding each other in their pairs throughout the variety of communicative strategies.

2. Overall Attitudes toward Pair Interaction

After the pair interaction and individual writings, post-task interviews were conducted individually by the researchers focusing on the students’ overall attitude toward the pair interaction including difficulties and preferences, and perceived learning outcomes.

In the interviews, all participants in this study expressed positive attitudes toward their pair interaction with their partners. For example, Hyun expressed his attitude toward the pair interaction as follows:

*Excerpt 6 (Interview with Hyun, July 14, 2010)*

*Min helped me out whenever I faced difficulties. And also I learned something simply by watching what my partner wrote… For me, I like to work in pairs because we can discuss whenever we have some questions. In a regular lesson, some shy*
students, like me, have a fear of being ridiculed by asking some questions to the teacher, however, it was different in working collaboratively in pairs. In addition, we know more in pairs than in single work.

Especially, the three lower level participants - Hyun, Jin, and Jung showed a positive attitude toward working in pairs because they felt more comfortable than working alone, and they learned English words or structures simply by looking at what their partners wrote. As Hyun mentioned above, introverted students had a chance to discuss their questions throughout the pair interaction. They also stated that they wanted to write what they thought about in English, but sometimes they did not know how to say it in English because of their lack of L2 proficiency. During the collaborative work, less proficient learners got help from more capable partners to express their ideas in English, and they learned some key words or sentences by working in pairs. In addition, less proficient students believed that they could help the capable learners as well while they worked together in the pair interaction. These positive appreciations were also showed by Min, the more proficient learner. For example, in Excerpt 7, Min mentioned that the pair interaction was helpful when he faced difficulties:

Excerpt 7 (Interview with Min, July 14, 2010)

*Just Hyun knows what I do not know, and I know what Hyun does not know... finally we could write better than working alone.*

Min's comment reflects the claim by Ohta (2001) that all learners have their own strengths and weaknesses that may be complementary.

All participants agreed that they learned something from their pair interactions. As Min and Hyun mentioned above, they
cooperated with each other when they did not know words in English. Jin felt that he learned some expressions from his partner, Woo.

Excerpt 8 (Interview with Jin, July 14, 2010)

Anyway when I write alone, I can remember some expressions or words in English better than before because I have already talked about it with my partner. Well, can't you see any improvement in my writing in English? English writing?

Like Jin, Jung also mentioned that he learned a lot of vocabulary. Woo and Ho felt that they practiced how to write in English while interacting with their partners. Some learners - Jin, Hyun, and Jung mentioned the sociocognitive aspects of the learning outcomes. For example, Jung, who showed active participation during the collaborative work, said that he learned the value of participation, which provided opportunities for learning.

Excerpt 9 (Interview with Jung, July 14)

This time, I did not feel sleepy. I just enjoyed it because I liked the [collaborative] mood when I worked with my partner. So, I could easily remember what we said during the pair talk. Moreover, I liked talking with my partner, Ho. By talking through it, I could learn a lot of meanings of unknown words in L2 and it helped me to easily memorize the English words.

It can be argued that Jung considered collaborative dialogue as a social and cognitive activity, which mediates L2 learning (Swain, 2000). In other words, his comment reflects the claim by Swain (2000, 2006a, 2006b) that speaking and writing as a form of verbalization may be an important part of shaping and reshaping cognition (i.e., thinking) and mediating L2 learning.
V. Discussion

With the microgenetic\textsuperscript{11} analysis of the data, this study has documented how three pairs with different levels of proficiency in L2 interact with each other during pair interaction, and how the patterns of pair interaction are reflected on L2 learning in an EFL junior high school class.

We focused on the sociocognitive role of language during the collaborative dialogues in the EFL classroom. From a sociocultural perspective, language, used as a social tool to communicate with each other as well as a cognitive tool to process and manage meaning making, plays a significant role in mediating L2 learning (Swain, 2000, 2006a, 2006b). As shown in Excerpt 1, when Min and Hyun worked together to search for an English vocabulary word for gym suit, they may first notice a gap of linguistic knowledge between what they want to convey and their ability to convey it. At this time, through collaborative dialogue, they tried various forms of L2 expressions such as training, wear, and training pants for gym suit and tested a hypothesis about the L2 system. Additionally, through the peer-peer interaction, they could reflect on and modify their language use when they write individually in subsequent writing. In the Excerpt 5, through their pair talk, they wrote a sentence — they faces are looks very bad — during the collaborative writing. The above sentence was modified by Min and Hyun when they engaged individually in subsequent writing. For Min, he realized the linguistic error and reflected on his L2 knowledge system to modify the sentence like they look so hard. Even Hyun tried to modify the sentence, but there still remained linguistic errors in his individual writing due to his lack of L2 knowledge. A similar phenomenon appeared in Excerpt 4 as well. The collaborative sentence of they head on sun flower in Dyad C was

\textsuperscript{11} According to Vygotsky (1978), it concerns cognitive development that occurs moment by moment while engaged in social interaction.
not modified in the less proficient students’ individual writing; however, the more proficient learner, Ho, revised it as, *they wear sun-flower in hair*. These findings suggest that although collaborative dialogue generally has beneficial effects on learners’ L2 writing skill development, the effects are dependent on each L2 learner’s current level of L2 proficiency. If the gap between the learners’ current level of L2 proficiency and the target L2 form which is generated by the collaborative dialogue is not too wide, as shown in Ho’s and Min’s cases in Excerpts 4 and 5, the learners could produce correct L2 forms after their collaboration. On the contrary, if the gap is too wide and cannot be overcome by the learners’ conscious efforts, they produced incorrect L2 forms.

From Vygotskian sociocultural viewpoint, this can be explained by using the concept of ZPD in a succinct manner. On one hand, in Ho’s and Min’s cases, the artifact (i.e., L2 writing) after the collaborative dialogue could mediate their current level of L2 proficiency and the desirable L2 forms, which is within their ZPD. On the other hand, as evinced in Jung’s and Hyun’s cases, the artifact could not adequately function as a mediational tool for them since the desirable L2 form is far beyond their ZPD. This invites Ohta’s (2001) argument that feedback in the form of instructional procedures can assist learners in their language development, and in this sense, we need to try to find how to provide and share proper feedback to EFL learners while they work in peer interaction tasks such as pair writing.

In this study, LREs are mainly used for analyzing the dyadic interaction in an EFL junior high school class. Through the qualitative analysis of the recorded interactions, we concluded that all pairs of different proficiency levels could provide occasions for learning and pair work clearly provides an environment which allows learners to participate freely in using L1 in order to make meaning of the written text, retrieving L2 knowledge from memory, externalizing and verbalizing their thoughts, and
maintaining dialogue, as shown in the above excerpts. Especially, Jin in Excerpt 2 used the L1 to externalize his thoughts, and expand and explore the contents in order to complete the writing task. Some researchers (e.g., Hadley, 2001; Kellerman, 1995; Shrum & Glisan, 2005) emphasize the importance of L2 and implicitly suggest that the use of L1 in the L2 classroom may be detrimental to the L2 learning process. Unlike the dominant view toward the exclusive use of L2 in L2 instruction, recent research suggests that the use of L1 is a help in L2 learning (e.g., Antón & DiCamilla, 1998; Scott & de la Fuente, 2008; Storch & Aldosari, 2010). For example, Antón and DiCamilla (1998) point out three socio-cognitive functions of using L1 in the L2 classroom: the construction of scaffolded help, the establishment of intersubjectivity, and the use of private speech. In other words, the use of L1, a prominent feature of their interaction in this study, plays a natural cognitive strategy both in scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) and in establishing intersubjectivity (Rommetveit, 1985), and thus offers learners the opportunities to realize their levels of potential development and to sustain their verbal interaction with each other.

In terms of the patterns of pair interactions, we focused on the role of less-proficient learners when they interacted with more-proficient in pair interactions in EFL learning context. When more-capable and less-capable learners engage in solving linguistic problems, one could assume that their patterns of interaction may represent either the expert/novice or dominant/passive patterns of interaction, due to their proficiency differences. It is assumed that the more proficient learner takes the role of expert or dominant role, while their counterparts take the role of a novice or passive learner. Although some pairs met this general expectation, one unexpected finding in this study was that the less proficient learners took their own role in co-construction of the knowledge and provision of scaffolded assistance in pair interaction. As shown in Table 2, less capable
learners - Hyun and Jin - initiated more LREs than their more capable partners. It meant that they were ready to take part in the pair interaction. Additionally, Hyun in Excerpt 1, showed active engagement through answering and offering an alternative to his partner’s request. Jin in Excerpt 2, mainly suggested his ideas in L1 for completing their collaborative writing. This is both positive and important, as it shows that social mediation comes not only from experts such as teachers but also from peers, and even from less proficient peers, which supports previous research findings (e.g., Kowal & Swain, 1994; Ohta, 2001; Storch, 2001; Watanabe & Swain, 2007). For example, Watanabe and Swain (2007) showed that the participants achieved on average higher post-test scores when working with their lower proficiency partners than their higher proficiency partners. Put differently, the participants learned more when working with lower proficiency peers than higher proficiency peers. It suggests that there is certainly a value for more proficient students to be paired with less proficient peers. Even less proficient peers are able to provide assistance to their more proficient peers. In this study, less-proficient learners from each dyad played their role in pair interaction. They were not merely passive learners who only got help from more capable learners, but interactive and active peers. For example, even though Jung’s proficiency level was the lowest, as shown in Table 1, Ho and Jung tried to do the writing in notation. Through writing alternately, Jung had a chance to practice and learn English words and sentence structure with Ho’s voluntary help. In addition, within pair interaction, less-proficient learners felt free to ask and share their ideas or opinions with their more-proficient partners. Like Hyun in Dyad A, they suggested their ideas on the partner’s questions. Additionally, in Dyads A and B, less-proficient learners - Hyun and Jin - tried to initiate more LREs, as seen in Table 2, and their initiations were appreciated and responded interactively by their partners. These interactive responses encouraged them to
share their ideas with their partners. As Block (1996) emphasized, activities in language classrooms are “essentially social events” (p. 76), and interactions between participants have multiple meanings and may in turn have multiple academic outcomes (cf. Brooks, 1990).

VI. Implications and Limitations

In this study, we focus on how EFL junior high school students engage in pairs with different proficiency levels during the collaborative writing task and how their pair interaction results in L2 learning outcomes. Through the findings in this study, we suggest the possibility that the use of the collaborative writing tasks shows positive aspects on L2 learning. First, pair interaction gives less proficient L2 learners a chance to actively participate in the collaborative writing activity. Second, the learners have a chance to externalize and verbalize their thoughts in L1 as well as L2 throughout the collaborative dialogues as a sociocognitive function, thus their language knowledge may be modified and improved. However, we need to find how to provide the proper feedback to EFL learners while they are engaged in pair interaction in order to produce more accurate language use. Also, EFL teachers need to be aware of the nature of pair interaction in order to enhance learning opportunities in the L2 classroom.

Apart from the small number of participants and transcribed data, two additional limitations of this study need to be considered. First, we did not reflect on the individual differences in learning styles which may affect the learning outcome. Some learners might prefer working individually rather than working collaboratively. Depending on their learning styles, the learning outcomes would be different. A second limitation is that we did not pay close attention on how their personal relationship in pair interaction affected the patterns of interaction and L2 learning.
outcomes. They might experience some emotional conflicts with each other while engaging in pair interaction and it might affect the amount of LREs that occur during pair writing and their responses to their partners, and thus have an influence on their L2 learning outcomes.

An important question to be addressed in future research is how to encourage learners to work collaboratively in the regular EFL classroom. One of the implications drawn from this study is that it may be important for learners to have opportunities to reflect on their own interactions in collaborative writing in order to improve their L2 writing skill and how their interactions affect their L2 writing skill development. Second, teaching learners how and why to collaborate may be important to enhance peer-mediated learning. Lastly, there is the possibility to integrate collaborative writing tasks into the current curriculum by adopting the topics from the current English curriculum.

References

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Appendix A

Picture Description

Grade 9  Class:  Name:  Date:
Topic: Describe this picture in the blank below.

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Appendix B

Individual Interview Questions

1) How do you like/dislike pair writing?
2) Is there any difficulties/preferences when you work with your partner on the pair writing?
3) Whenever you have some difficulties with pair writing, how do you solve the problem?
4) What are the advantages/disadvantages of pair writing?
5) Do you think that you contributed a lot to complete the writing task? How about your partner? Did your partner contribute a lot in order to finish the work?
6) What do you think about pair writing?
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