

A Study of Learner- Learner Interaction

—What and How Do Learners Learn?—

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Recently, the importance of interaction has gotten more attention based on the theory that learning is realized by interaction with others. To produce more effective learning activities, it is indispensable to clarify how learning actually takes place through interaction.

In previous research (Donato, 1994, Ohta, 1995), interactions which aim to practice language patterns among beginning level learners were given a micro-analysis. In this current research project, interactions between learners at a higher intermediate level and lower advanced level were investigated.

Analyzed data were discussed as a part of the elementary school visitation project. The tasks were primarily to plan exchange activities and secondly to make a report on experiences at the school visited. Each task was conducted in a more authentic situation as compared to conventional language pattern practices. So this point can be stated as one of the characteristics of the particular data obtained. Moreover, the purpose of the elementary school visit was to observe a real school plus classroom activities and to exchange communication with children. It was meant to deepen understanding of the Japanese society and to improve learners' Japanese language skills.

As the result of the analysis, it became clear that learners learned the language by performing interactions and through obtaining help from other learners, teachers and dictionaries as learning resources. In addition, it was pointed out that learners learn about other subjects as well as the language itself, subjectively.

Firstly, from the viewpoint of the learning of language, learners identified unknown words and mistakes in pronunciation and writing. By repeating clarification request and confirmation check, knowledge of both learners was shared. Thus the way of reaching mutual understanding was observed successfully.

Secondly, concerning the learning of other subjects than the language, it is often observed that some of the learners started to talk about subjects such as Japanese social and cultural phenomena which were not clear to them during the school visit. In discussing these problems, it was noticed that other learners had presented information about their own countries. They also discussed their ideas and understanding of these subjects. In this process, the learners became aware of their own understanding and knowledge and recognised the differences between their understanding. Consequently, the possibility of changing ones' own understanding became evident. In addition, the potential to acquire various viewpoints, which can change relationships with others, was also expressed.

Thus, interaction performed by learner-learner to achieve authentic tasks can be the means where various kinds of learning, such as constructing and sharing of knowledge, and changing of concepts and relationships, take place with each participant supporting and helping each other.

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