# The Frequency and Resolution of Language Related Episodes in Collaborative Dialogue of Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Dyads

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## ABSTRACT

Collaborative dialogue proposed by Swain (2000) has been grounded on co-construction of knowledge by L2 learners drawing upon their shared resources. The current study investigated the collaborative dialogue produced by Iranian EFL learners while engaged in problem-solving tasks on L2 pragmatics. The purpose was to identify the effect of collaborative dialogue on acquisition of request and apology speech acts. Moreover, the study explored whether the frequency and resolution of language related episodes (LRE) s during collaborative problem-solving tasks differed across High-High, High-Low and Low-Low dyads. The participants were 89 EFL learners who were assigned to High-High, High-Low and Low-Low dyads following a pretest on L2 pragmatics. The dyads were engaged in collaborative problem-solving tasks for seven sessions during which samples of their collaborative dialogues were audio recorded and analyzed in terms of the frequency and outcome of LREs. Results revealed the effect of collaborative dialogue on development of L2 pragmatics in all dyads. Also, H-H dyads were found to produce LREs more frequently than H-L and L-L dyads. Regarding the outcome of LREs, H-H dyads resolved most of LREs correctly while the number of incorrectly solved episodes was roughly similar in production of H-L and L-L dyads. The findings offer pedagogical implications to EFL teachers and educators on how to best pair learners in collaborative activities.

## 1. Introduction

Recent years have witnessed a shift of paradigm from cognitive orientation to sociocultural framework. While cognitive theory is concerned with the mental processes and intra-psychological mechanisms involved in language acquisition, sociocultural theory (SCT) adopts an inter-personal perspective, considering L2 learning as a social practice.

It rests upon the dialogic nature of interaction regarding language learning as a result of collaborative effort and co-construction of knowledge within the interactional discourse. According to Vygotsky (1978), under interactional conditions, the expert can provide some levels of assistance to the novice in order to help him/her internalize the knowledge. Fundamental to SCT is the notion of *scaffolding* or the preferred term *collaborative dialogue*.

Collaborative dialogue was first proposed by Swain (2000) suggesting that output production mediates language learning. In collaborative dialogue, learners draw upon their shared linguistic and cognitive resources to solve problems and in so doing move forward in their *zone of proximal development* (ZPD). According to Zeng and Takatsuka (2009), the driving force behind the collaborative discourse is not the lack of comprehension, but rather to reach better and more appropriate solutions through joint effort, hence involving both the cognitive and social aspects of learning. Collaborative dialogue is operationalized through *language related episodes* (LREs) (Lapkin, Swain & Smith, 2002). LREs are, according to Swain (2001), "any part of dialogue where students talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, or other- or self-correct their language production" (p. 287).

Different factors may have a bearing upon the quality and quantity of LREs produced during collaborative activities amongst them the proficiency of the interlocutors engaged in the collaborative task. According to Swain (1998), learners talk about the areas of uncertainty that is those aspects of language they are not sure about. If this is the case, LREs center on the gaps in learners' interlanguage. Thus, the proficiency of learners affects the LREs arisen throughout communicative tasks.

Despite a body of evidence in theory and practice on the effectiveness of collaborative work, there is little consensus on the type of proficiency pairing more conducive to L2 learning. Some studies (e.g., Kim, 2009; Kowal & Swain, 1994) argue in favor of homogeneous pairs working together and acknowledge the psychological safety attached to similar proficiency learners working with each other. Some other studies (e.g., Karimi & Jalilvand, 2014; Wu 2008), however, favor the dialogic interaction between pairs of different proficiency levels on the grounds that more collaboration is likely to occur between the pairs of different proficiency levels and the less proficient ones might benefit from the solutions suggested by their more proficient partners.

Drawing upon the SCT of Vygotsky, the current study makes an attempt to contribute to the existing debate on the type of proficiency pairing more conducive to L2 development. Moreover, most of the studies on collaborative dialogue (e.g., Kim & McDonough, 2008; Leeser, 2004; Storch & Aldosari, 2013) explored LREs during reconstruction and reformulation tasks which mainly focused on development of lexical and grammatical aspects of L2. To date, few studies (e.g., Alcon, 2003) have specifically focused on LREs produced during collaborative tasks on L2 pragmatics. The current study fills the gap by examining the collaborative dialogue produced by Iranian EFL learners while engaged in collaborative problem-solving tasks on speech acts of request and apology. The purpose of the study is to explore the effect of collaborative dialogue on acquisition of L2 pragmatics. Further, it examines whether the frequency and

resolution of LREs produced by Iranian EFL learners during collaborative tasks differed across High-High, High-Low and Low-Low (hereafter H-H, H-L and L-L) dyads. The following research questions were specifically addressed:

*Research Questions*

1. Does EFL learners' collaborative dialogue in homogeneous and heterogeneous dyads affect their L2 pragmatic acquisition?

2. Does the frequency of LREs produced by EFL learners during collaborative problem-solving tasks differ across different proficiency pairings (i.e., H-H, H-L and L-L)?

3. Does the resolution of LREs differ across different proficiency pairings when engaged in collaborative problem-solving tasks?

## 2. Review of the Related Literature

Recently, social approaches to language acquisition that go beyond the linguistic and psycholinguistic orientations have got prevalence. As an influential approach to L2 acquisition, sociocultural framework postulates that cognitive development is the result of social activity mediated by language (Vygotsky, 1978). During the dialogic interactional activities, some levels of cognitive and affective support are provided to the novice on the part of the expert which assists the novice to accomplish the functions that cannot be performed independently. Thus, interaction assists the learners to regulate and restructure their already-acquired knowledge.

From this perspective, collaborative dialogue mediates language learning (Swain, 2000). Collaborative dialogue is the dialogue where linguistic knowledge is constructed by the joint effort of two or more individuals (Swain, 2000). According to Lantolf and Poehner (2014), it is through the inter-psychological mechanisms of scaffolding that learners are in the position of internalizing the knowledge they co-constructed through a collaborative activity. Hence, social interactions and collaborative learning (or what sometimes referred to as cooperative learning) are paramount in cognitive development and key notions upon which SCT rests.

To date, the effect of collaborative dialogue as a mediating tool in learner-learner interaction has been investigated. Most of the studies conducted in this filed focused on the effect of peers' collaborative dialogue on oral skills (e.g., Edstrom, 2015; Swain, Brooks & Tocalli-Beller, 2003), reading(e.g., Behjat, 2011; Karimi & Jalilivand, 2014; Murphy, 2007), writing (e.g., Fernández & Blum, 2013; Memari Hanjani &Li, 2014), vocabulary(e.g., Zarei & Keshavarz, 2011) and grammar (e.g., Benghomrani, 2011; Ghorbani & Nezamoshari'e, 2012). Among the extensive body of research, however, the studies touching the role of collaborative dialogue in L2 pragmatic development are far and few between (e.g., Alcon, 2003; Dufon, 2008; Ohta, 1995).

Ohta (1995) investigated the acquisition of polite request forms by two Japanese learners of different proficiency levels collaborating with each other. She argued that the learners' use of the target language during the pair work was extremely different form that in teacher-fronted class and scaffolding provided a positive climate for both learners to progress in their ZPDs. They used language for a variety of purposes including hypothesis-testing about language, humor, role paly, negotiations on here-and-now, lexical experimentation, discourse management and task regulation. Unlike similar studies in which learners tended to

pick up each other's errors, Ohta's study revealed evidence on peer correction.

Alcon (2002) also compared the effect of teacher-student versus student-student interaction on development of speech act of request. Two groups of learners were randomly assigned to learners' collaborative-language-learning condition and teacher-led interaction. Both groups outperformed in the posttest compared with the pretest. The nature of collaborative dialogue was analyzed in both groups and it was found that pragmatic knowledge might emerge from assisted performance.

Working along similar lines, Dufon (2008) explored how the interactions between participants taking different social roles such as teachers, students and classroom guests can provide EFL learners with opportunities to develop their L2 pragmatic competence. The interactions of the teacher, students and the classroom guest were video-recorded and analyzed in terms of the request strategies. Dufon argued that in EFL contexts where learners have very limited opportunities to achieve the target language pragmatic norms, collaborative interactions between the participants of different social roles are an essential component of interlanguage pragmatic development.

Included in the literature on peer-peer interaction are the studies (e.g., Leeser, 2004; Watanabe & Swain, 2007; Williams, 1999) that analyzed the LREs produced during collaborative dialogue and focused on the relationship between proficiency, frequency and the resolution of LREs. Williams (1999) investigated the occurrence and resolution of LREs in the collaboration of eight students of four proficiency levels including beginner, intermediate, high-intermediate and advanced levels. Analysis of LREs revealed that as the proficiency of the pairs increased, the frequency of LREs increased as well. Moreover, high proficient leaners attended to lexical items more than the grammatical ones. High proficient learners were also more likely to reach the correct resolutions as a result of collaborative work.

A similar observation was reported by Leeser (2004) who examined the impact of learner proficiency on LREs of collaborative dialogue by adult L2 learners of Spanish enrolled in a content-based course. He assigned the participants to H-H, H-L and L-L dyads and analyzed the frequency, type (lexical or grammatical) and outcome (success or failure to solve problem) of LREs produced by them during two different dictogloss tasks. Each dyad's recording of talk was transcribed and the analysis of LREs revealed that as the overall proficiency of the pairs increased, the frequency of LREs increased, problems solved correctly and grammatical items appeared to receive more attention. While H-H dyads focused on grammatical aspects and solved most of the problems correctly, L-L dyads were found to focus on lexical aspects and left a great deal of problems unresolved.

While most of the studies on collaborative dialogue adopted a between-group comparison, Watanabe and Swain (2007) analyzed the LREs of four core and eight non-core L2 Japanese learners in a within-group comparison. Each core participant was placed once with a non-core participant of higher proficiency and once again with a non-core participant of lower proficiency level. Each pair went through a number of stages: (a) pretest which required the pairs to jointly write an essay on a specific topic, (b) reformulation, that is making a comparison between the pairs'

essays and the reformulated version of it by a NS,(c) noticing the gap between the original text and the reformulated version of it, and (d) posttest which required the pairs to write the essay again making as many changes as they desired so that it was similar to native-like texts. The pair talk of participants was recorded, transcribed and coded for LREs to find the relationship between proficiency difference, frequency of LREs as well as the patterns of interactions. The analysis revealed that core-high pairs generated LREs more frequently than core-low pairs. Also, core-high pairs outperformed the core-low pairs in posttest. However, the core participants were found to get higher scores when they worked with low proficiency partners. Finally, both core and non-core participants produced more LREs and got higher scores in posttest when they worked in a collaborative pattern suggesting that learners can take advantage of pair interaction with partners of high or low proficiency provided that they act in a collaborative manner.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 89 (N=89) English-major freshmen including 37 males (n=37) and 52 females (n=52) in some branches of Islamic Azad University in East Azarbaijan province, Iran. Their age range was between 19 and 30 with the average of 21.3. All participants represented three language backgrounds, Azari, Kurdish and Persian. They had, on average, 6.5 years of prior formal English learning and none of them had the experience of residence in English-speaking countries. As a pretest, a Pragmatic Listening Test (PLT) and an Oral Discourse Completion Test (ODCT) were administered and based on their scores, the participants were assigned to high-

intermediate (henceforth, H) and low-intermediate (henceforth, L) proficiency levels.

### 3.2. Instrumentation

Since this study focused on the participants' collaborative dialogue, the aural/oral format of the pretest and the posttest was used. Both pretest and the posttest included a PLT and an ODCT to assess the participants' pragmatic knowledge prior to and following the treatment.

*Pragmatic listening test (PLT)*: The PLT was adapted from the ones previously validated and used in the literature including Liu (2007) and Birjandi and Rezaei (2010). It included ten situations, five situations for each of the intended speech acts (See Appendix A for sample PLT items). The listening prompts used for the PLT were in the form of tape-recorded dialogues. Each item included three options, a correct answer and two *distractors*. The internal consistency reliability measures for the pragmatic listening pretest and posttest were measured and found to be acceptable (Cronbach's alpha= 0.81 and 0.79).

*Oral discourse completion test (ODCT):* ODCT items were chosen from some previous studies (Liu, 2006; Taguchi, 2011). Prior to taking ODCT, each participant was given a role card including a description of the situation as well as the participant's role. They had approximately 1-2 minutes to focus on the situations and take notes if necessary. Following this, the teacher read each situation and the participants responded orally while their voices were recorded. To enhance the reliability, the final scores of ODCTs were the mean scores of the researchers as well as an external rater employing the global or holistic approach and drawing upon a four-point rating scale previously validated by

Jernigan (2007). The correlation between all ratings was estimated using Pearson Product-moment Correlation yielding .82 for the pretest and .87 for the posttest representing acceptable inter-rater reliabilities (See Appendix B for sample ODCT items).

*Worksheet:* A number of scenarios representing speech acts of request and apology were presented in the worksheet. Following Brown & Levinson (1987), the scenarios enjoyed variability with respect to sociopragmatic elements of power, social distance and degree of imposition. The items in the worksheet were adapted from among the ones used in several similar studies conducted before including Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) and Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin (2005).Through a collaborative work, the participants were required to decide on acceptability of contextualized utterances and correct the problematic items. While all the items were pragmalinguistically correct, some items included sociopragmatic deviations. According to Kasper and Rose (2002), pragmalinguistics involves resources for conveying communicative acts, such as forms or strategies used to intensify or soften communicative acts. Sociopragmatics, on the other hand, refers to the social perceptions underlying the performance of these forms and strategies in a particular sociocultural context (See Appendix C for sample worksheet items).

*Mp3 recorder:* The participants' performance on ODCT pretest and posttest was recorded for the researchers and an additional rater's scoring. Also, sample LREs produced by the dyads during collaborative work were audio recorded for follow-up analysis.

### 3.3. Procedure

Based on the pretest scores, the participants were assigned to H-H, H-L and L-L dyads and received the treatment over the period of seven sessions, three sessions for each of the request and apology speech acts as well as a review session. In each session, the participants were engaged in collaborative work following metapragmatic instruction.

The explicit metapragmatic instruction was started by some awareness-raising questions posed by the teacher (one of the researchers). She tried to raise the participants' awareness through some questions focusing on pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects of speech acts. The instruction followed by presenting a detailed description of request and apology speech acts, semantic formulas, politeness techniques, types and factors of variability and strategies required for interpretation and realization of request and apologies. The roles of sociopragmatic variables of power, social distance and degree of imposition which lead to realization of various pragmalinguistic forms in different contexts were also discussed.

Following metapragmatic instruction, each pair received a worksheet including the situations with sociopragmatic deviations. In the case of requests, for example, the situation included an over-polite request where a moderate level of politeness was needed (e.g., in supermarket) or a bare request was made while pragmatically more polite request was demanded by situation (e.g., the student requesting his teacher). In the case of apologies, the speaker avoided apologizing where apology was needed. Through collaborative problem-solving work, the dyads were required to draw upon their shared resources so as to assess whether the intended speech act was used appropriately

or not and justify their answers in cases with an appropriate use of speech act. In cases with a pragmatically inappropriate use of speech acts, they needed to underline the unacceptable part and provide the appropriate forms. In the course of action, the performance of the dyads was being monitored by the teacher.

Recordings of the participants' dialogues were made in the second fourth and sixth sessions. While each dyad was engaged in collaborative task, their interactions were audiotaped using an Mp3 player, once for approximately 5-10 minutes. A total of five hours recordings were then transcribed by the researchers for the analysis.

## 4. Data Collection and Analysis

The purpose of this study was to explore the effect of EFL learners' collaborative dialogue on L2 pragmatic acquisition in homogeneous and heterogeneous dyads (research question 1). The study also investigated the frequency and the outcome of LREs produced by homogeneous and heterogeneous dyads during collaborative dialogue (research question 2 & 3). To answer the first question, the development of all dyads from pretest to posttest was measured; that is the difference between the pretest and posttest scores was measured and then was checked for the statistical significance.

With regard to the second and third questions, drawing on similar studies conducted before (Leeser, 2004; Storch & Aldosari, 2013), the researchers identified the LREs in transcriptions. They specifically focused on the LREs where a focus on how to make requests and apologies was observed. To this end, the LREs focusing on aspects other than speech acts including pronunciation, spelling, lexical or grammatical forms were excluded from the analysis.

For the purpose of the current study, an LRE focusing on speech acts was operationally defined as constituting the discourse from the point where the learner started to put his/her attention on how to use the request or apology speech acts to the point where it ended due to resolving the problem (correctly or incorrectly) or leaving it unresolved. Example 1 displays a sample LRE from an H-L dyad. In this situation, the customer is addressing the salesman in an over-polite manner. Both learners engage with each other's ideas to provide an appropriate alternative for the request form given in the worksheet.

Example1. Sample LRE (H-L dyad)

*S1: Would you be so kind as to give me a sandwich?*
*S2: Peter's answer is very….eh….. official and …it isn't appropriate between …eh…..customer and salesperson.*
*S1:…Hm….I think so. I think……could you….*
*S2: Also… would you…*
*S1: Well…..Would you….could you give a sandwich and yogurt please.*

As mentioned earlier, apart from the frequency of LREs, a further focus of analysis was the outcome of LREs, that is whether they were resolved correctly, incorrectly or not resolved at all. According to Swain (1998), LREs are categorized in one of three possible outcomes: outcome (1), when the problem is resolved correctly either by one learner's self-correction or by the learner answering or correcting the other learner (other-correction); outcome (2), when it is left unresolved, and outcome (3), when the problem is resolved incorrectly. The following excerpt comes from the data of an H-H dyad. It depicts a situation in which the student asks his teacher to borrow him a book but his request is not polite. The dyads needed to work out the correct form regarding the social variables.

Example 2. Correctly resolved LRE (H-H dyad)

S1: "Ok, What's your idea"?
S2: I think Peter….here is talking to somebody who is lower than him…..in a lower situation than him….or….
S1: Yes , he thinks that teacher ….is….a kind of…close friend. He have…has a close relationship with him. Peter thinks that he has a close relationship with him and…..eh….asks him like that……that language.
S2: As you said its' too informal, because when you talk to your teacher,….the teacher is in a higher position than you….and you should use more formal sentences.
S1: Yeah……more appropriate and more polite language……well…..would you mind giving me…..?
S2: or…can I have your book if you…….ah……can I have your book if you don't need it this weekend?

Following Swain (1998), LREs left unresolved were categorized as outcome 2. The situation in example 3 includes two classmates (Anna and Maria). Anna borrowed a book from Maria, but forgot to bring it. The situation demanded for Anna's apology; however, she did not apologize. The following example comes from the interaction of an L-L dyad who needed to provide the correct form of apology; however, none of the learners perceived the need for making an apology in this situation. The problem is, therefore, left unresolved.
Example 3. Unresolved LREs (L-L dyad)
S1: What do you think?
S2: Well…..I think…..I think Maria should give an excuse (in Farsi)…like…..
S1: Like…?
S2: I don't know. Lets' go to next situation.

Those LREs not resolved correctly fell into the third category, outcome 3. In example 4, the situation included two friends (George and Peter) who were supposed to meet each other at 4. Peter delayed for half an hour and when he came, he refused apologizing for being late.

Undoubtedly, the situation requires for apology and the learners needed to provide the correct form of it. However, they agreed on the lack of need for making an apology in this situation.
Example 4. Incorrectly resolved LRE (H-L dyad)
S1: Well….. is it correct?
S2:….Hmm…..I think there is no problem with this situation. George and Peter are friends.
S1:….Yes….
S2: May be they're joking with each other…….I have no suggestion….Do you?
S1: No….That's OK.

## 5. Results

RQ#1. Does EFL learners' collaborative dialogue in homogeneous and heterogeneous dyads affect their L2 pragmatic acquisition?

To answer the first question, the homogenous and heterogeneous dyads' pretest scores in PLT and ODCT were compared with their scores in the posttest. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the homogenous and heterogeneous dyads. With regard to the homogenous group, the mean (*M*) increased from 5.18 in the pretest to 6.28 in the posttest of PLT. Similarly, we have a mean increase from 4.87 in the pretest to 5.38 in the posttest of ODCT.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for the Homogenous and Heterogeneous Dyads

| | PLT pretest homogeneo | ODCT pretest homogeneo | PLT posttest homogeneo | ODCT posttest homogeneo | PLT pretest heterogene | ODCT pretest heterogene | PLT posttest heterogene | ODCT posttest heterogeneou |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| N | 39 | 39 | 39 | 39 | 46 | 46 | 46 | 46 |
| M | 5.18 | 4.87 | 6.28 | 5.38 | 5.13 | 5.60 | 6.43 | 6.36 |
| Mdn | 5.00 | 4.00 | 6.00 | 6.00 | 5.00 | 4.00 | 7.00 | 6.00 |
| Mode | 5.00 | 3.00 | 7.00 | 6.00 | 5.00 | 3.00 | 7.00 | 6.00 |
| SD | 2.07 | 1.86 | 2.02 | 1.82 | 1.98 | 2.00 | 1.70 | 1.65 |
| Var | 4.30 | 3.48 | 4.10 | 3.34 | 3.95 | 4.01 | 2.91 | 2.72 |
| Min | 2.00 | 3.00 | 2.00 | 2.00 | 2.00 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 3.00 |

To investigate the significance of the difference between the mean scores in L2 pragmatic pretest and posttest, paired samples t-test was run. Table 2 shows the results of this test.

*Table 2: Paired Samples T-test for the Pretest and Posttest of Homogeneous Dyads*

Table 2. *Paired Samples T-test for the Pretest and Posttest of Homogeneous Dyads*

| | | | | 95% Confidence terval of the Difference | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | M | SD | SEM | Lower | Upper | t | df | Sig. (2-led) |
| Pair 1 | Homogenous pretest-posttest | 1.54 | 69 | 23 | -.77 | 16 | -2.65 | 37 | 005 |

As Table 2 shows, *t* observed in its 37 degree of freedom is 2.65 which exceeds the *t*-critical needed at 0.05 level of significance (*p*<.005). As a result, we can claim that the pragmatic scores of homogeneous dyads increased form pretest to posttest

With regard to the heterogeneous dyads, descriptive statistics reveal an increase from 5.13 and 5.60 to 6.43 and 6.36 in the PLT and ODCT scores respectively. Again, paired samples t-test was run to investigate the significance of the difference between the mean scores in L2 pragmatic pretest and posttest of heterogeneous dyads (Table 3).

*Table 3: Paired Samples T-test for the Pretest and Posttest of Heterogeneous Dyads*

| | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | M | SD | SEM | Lower | Upper | t | df | Sig. (2 tailed) |
| Pair 1 | Heterogenous pretest-posttest | 1.43 | .47 | .26 | -.71 | .17 | -2.33 | 43 | .009 |

The *t*-value is 2.23, exceeding the *t*-critical needed in its 43 degree of freedom (*p*<0.09).Thus, the difference between the pragmatic pretest and posttest scores is statistically significant. We can claim that both the homogeneous and heterogeneous dyads improved from pretest to posttest of L2 pragmatics as a result of engagement in collaborative dialogue.

*RQ#2. Does the frequency of LREs produced by EFL learners during collaborative problem-solving tasks differ across different proficiency pairings (H-H, H-L and L-L)?*

In order to explore whether the frequency of LREs produced differed across the H-H, H-L and L-L dyads, the frequency of LREs produced by each dyad types was measured. The total number of LREs produced by dyads was 93 (N=93). However, there appeared LREs focusing on linguistic problems not targeted by the tasks. Thus, for the purpose of the current study, the researchers identified the LREs (n=38) that specifically focused on speech acts of request and apology. Table 4 displays the sum, mean, range and frequency of LREs generated by three dyad types.

*Table 4: Comparison of Frequency of LREs across Dyads*

| | Sum | Mean | Range | Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| H-L dyads | 12 | .31 | 1-3 | 31.5% |
| H-H dyads | 16 | .42 | 2-4 | 42.1% |
| L-L dyads | 10 | .26 | 1-2 | 26.3% |
| Total | 38 | 99.8 | | 99.8 % |

As Table 4 displays, the largest number of LREs was produced by H-H dyads (n=16) followed by H-L dyads (n=12) and L-L dyads (n=10). In other words, of the total number of LREs, 42.1% were produced by H-H dyads, 31.5% by H-L dyads and 26.3% by L-L dyads. Therefore, it appears that proficiency pairing had an impact on the number of LREs produced by three types of dyads. The higher the proficiency of the dyads, the more they were found to produce LREs. The table also suggests that variations exist between each pair in terms of the number of LREs produced. This is implied by range.

*RQ#3. Does the resolution of LREs differ across different proficiency pairings when*

*engaged in collaborative problem-solving tasks?*

A further focus of the analysis was the outcome or the nature of resolution of LREs, that is whether the LREs were resolved correctly, incorrectly or not resolved at all. Table 5 shows the outcome of LREs across all dyad types.

*Table 5: LREs' Outcomes across All Dyads*

| LREs outcome | H-H | H-L | L-L | M | Frequency | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.Corectly resolved (outcome 1) | 14 | 7 | 4 | .65 | 65.7% | 25 |
| 2. Left unresolved (outcome 2) | 0 | 1 | 2 | .07 | 7.85% | 3 |
| 3.Incorrectly resolved (outcome 3) | 1 | 4 | 5 | .26 | 26.3% | 10 |
| Total | 15 | 12 | 11 | 99.8% | 99.8% | 38 |

As revealed by Table 5, from among three dyadic types, most of LREs were resolved correctly by H-H dyads (n=14) followed by H-L dyads (n=7) and L-L dyads (n=4). The opposite pattern was observable for outcome 3, that is the number of LREs which was solved incorrectly was higher in the case of L-L dyads (n=5) followed by H-L dyads (n=4) and H-H dyads (n=1). Also, the data reveals that a very low number of LREs was left unresolved (outcome 2) which was evident in the case of L-L dyads (n=2) and H-L dyads (n=1). A further point is that more than half of the LREs (65.5%) were resolved correctly; 26.3% episodes were resolved incorrectly and only 7.85% were left unresolved by the dyads.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of the current study was to explore the effect of collaborative dialogue on L2 pragmatic acquisition and to find out whether the frequency and the outcome of LREs produced during collaborative problem-solving tasks on request and apology speech acts were different across dyads of different proficiency pairings (H-H, H-L and L-L). The answer to these questions is "yes". The effect of collaborative dialogue on development of L2 pragmatics was revealed by the dyads' improvement of scores from pretest to posttest. Moreover, as the proficiency of the dyads increased, they tended to produce more LREs with the H-H dyads producing a high proportion of LREs followed by H-L and L-L dyads. Regarding the outcomes, the correct resolutions in H-H dyads outnumbered the other dyads. Rarely, did the dyads leave the episodes unresolved. In the case of incorrect resolutions, L-L dyads performed rather similarly to H-L dyads while H-H dyads had the least number of incorrect resolutions.

The findings of this study generally support Vygotsky's SCT and the notion of collaborative dialogue. Collaborative pair work provides learners with chances for meaningful communication and involves them in cognitive processes which can be a source for L2 learning. Scaffolding grounded in social mediation and dialogic interaction serves as a functional and fruitful platform for language learning and development. According to Swain and Lapkin (1995), during the collaborative pair work, individuals can verbalize their problems and engage in meta-talk. The verbalization represents a cognitive tool for internalizing the meaning

The improvement of all dyads from pretest to posttest, regardless of the type of proficiency pairing, is consistent with van Lier's argument. According to van Lier (2004), peers can also learn by the act of teaching each other. So, peer mediation might be an alternative to teacher mediation. He further argued that the construct of scaffolding "must be expanded to include not only an expert-novice relationship, but also an equal peer one, a peer to lower level peer one, and a self-

access, self-regulated one" (p. 162). Thus, the high proficiency learners can also learn from the act of teaching the weaker ones. Here, mediation comes in the form of assistance to high proficiency learner to reach higher levels of complexity and fluency in producing language.

The finding that the number of LREs as well as the correct resolutions in H-H dyads exceeded the other dyad types substantiates the findings of some previous studies (e.g., Kim & McDonough, 2008; Leeser, 2004; Storch & Aldosari, 2013; Watanabe & Swain, 2007; Williams, 1999). In the current study, a rise in the number of LREs and correct resolutions was observed as the overall proficiency of the dyads increased with the L-L dyads generating the least amount of LREs. This might be attributable to H-H dyads "developmental readiness"(Spada & Lightbown, 1993) to assimilate the information from the instruction on speech acts. They were more equipped with L2 pragmatic knowledge, lexical and oral skills to negotiate their solutions, resulting in their frequent, fluent and more appropriate production of LREs focusing on speech acts.

Accordingly, the limited number of LREs produced by L-L dyads in this study may be explained by their narrow L2 pragmatic knowledge and vocabulary which precluded them from negotiating their ideas. Since L2 linguistic production is contingent upon a threshold level of vocabulary knowledge, limited lexicon might have not allowed the lower proficiency learners to exchange their ideas. This problem was compounded given their poor oral skills due to lack of opportunities to use L2 in their regular classes.

While the number of LREs resolved incorrectly was the least in the case of H-H dyads, it was rather similar in H-L and L-L dyads which may be attributed to a limited proficiency gap between the two groups. Indeed, in the current study, the notations High and Low refer to the high-intermediate and low-intermediate proficiency levels with none of the low proficiency participants representing a true beginner. That is, the knowledge asymmetry was not too large among L-L and H-L dyads.

This study provided some insights into the potentiality of peer-peer collaborative dialogue EFL contexts and the effect that engagement in collaborative discourse might have on acquisition of L2 speech acts. It is suggested that mediation does not necessarily come from the teacher, but peers can mediate the learning process as well. Given the potentiality of peer mediation, it is recommended that the teachers use this possibility to empower the students and bring about a friendly and challenging atmosphere for L2 learning. According to Donato (1994), co-construction of the knowledge is mainly based on the establishment of inter-subjectivity which is the state of shared focus and intention to progress in the ZPD. Due to knowledge asymmetry between the teacher and students, achieving inter-subjectivity might be cumbersome; however, peer collaboration assists the students to arrive at inter-subjectivity and shared understanding through dialogic interaction.

Finally, the results obtained from this study should be treated with caution. The participants were engaged in collaborative task with partners of the same/different proficiency level. The results might have been different if each participant acted as a core participant, accomplishing the task twice, once with a partner of the same level of proficiency and once again with a different proficiency partner. This remains an area of research for future studies.

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## Appendices

### *Appendix A: Sample PLT items*

1. Suppose you have not understood what the teacher has just explained about "simple past tense". How do you ask for explanations about the structure of this tense?

a. Should I ask you a question?

b. How can I ask you a question?

c. Excuse me sir, may I ask you a question?

2. Suppose you have a listening class and you cannot hear what is played on T.V. How would you ask your teacher to turn it up?

a. I'm sorry, but I cannot hear.

b. I'll ask you to turn it up.

c. What? Turn it up please.

### *Appendix B: Sample ODCT items*

1. You completely forget a crucial meeting at the office with your boss. An hour later you call him to apologize. The problem is that this is the second time you've forgotten such a meeting. Your boss gets on the line and asks:

Boss : "What happened to you?"

You :

2. You forget a get-together with a friend. You call him to apologize. This is really the second time you've forgotten such a meeting. Your friend asks over the telephone:

Friend:" What happened? "

You :

### *Appendix C: Sample worksheet items*

Each of the following questions will provide a description of a request situation. Read the following situations and decide whether the speaker has used the language appropriately. If not, provide your own answers in these situations.

1. Peter asks his teacher for a book.

P: Mr. Gordon?

G: Yes?

P: Borrow this book to me for the weekend if you not need it.

1. Peter goes to the snack bar to get something to eat before class.

F: May I help you?

S: Would you be so kind as to give me a sandwich and a yogurt please?

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