

INVESTIGATING SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH PEER INTERACTION: A DISCOURSE ANALYTICAL APPROACH

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Abstract

This study explores the effects of peer interaction on the development of speaking skills among second-year students of the Primary Education Studies Department at the Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka, Lagos, employing a discourse analysis framework. It investigates how learners engage in small-group discussions, with particular attention to their understanding and knowledge of functions of the verb in English. Six peer groups with varying proficiency levels were observed to identify interactional patterns such as scaffolding, error correction, and clarification requests, and their influence on speaking fluency and grammatical accuracy. A qualitative research design guided the study, with data collected through audio-recorded group discussions. Transcripts were subjected to discourse analysis to uncover recurring communicative strategies and their pedagogical implications. The findings reveal that effective peer interaction-especially those involving scaffolding and corrective feedback significantly enhance learners' spoken English. Conversely, groups with low proficiency and inconsistent feedback practices exhibited limited linguistic gains, often reverting to their first language (L1) to aid comprehension. The study underscores the value of intentional group composition and structured peer learning in fostering language development. It also demonstrates how discourse analysis can serve as a powerful tool in second language (L2) pedagogy, offering practical insights for improving communicative competence in classroom settings.

Keywords: Peer Interaction, Speaking Skills, Discourse Analysis, Second Language Acquisition, Language Pedagogy, Nigerian College Students

Introduction

Existing studies such as Lobaton (2023); Chen and Smith (2022), have focused on many aspects of communicative competence. Lee & Choi (2020) similarly investigated on ways to enhance the speaking skills of English as a second language (ESL) learner. However, on the issue of peer interaction in second language learning, very little has been done. Improving speaking skills in second language learning is the focus of this chapter. A summary of communicative competence in second language learning is provided while examining the roles of interaction in language acquisition. It also looks at peer interaction in English as a second language (ESL) learning and its importance. The traditional grammar-focused approaches have gradually been jettisoned to a more interaction-based methods of language teaching in second language learning because of the development of communicative competence. Using language appropriately in different social contexts is now considered an integral part of communicative competence. In the opinion of Gong (2023), peer interaction has become a major field of interest among researchers and educators alike. It is an important part of the language learning process. The exchange of ideas and discussions that take place between students who are learning the target language is a form of peer interaction. Despite the recognition given communicative competence in language learning, the development of efficient speaking skills has not produced much benefit. The traditional pedagogy where the teacher leads and dominates the class has failed to improve language proficiency and confidence in learners. When learners are provided with opportunities and veritable contexts for practice, they improve rapidly in their speaking abilities. But how particular interaction patterns among peers improve or inhibit the development of speaking skills seems not to be well researched. Very little scholarly attention has been given to the nature and impact of peer-to-peer communication. From a discourse analysis perspective, only a few studies have examined the role of student-teacher interactions in language learning. This is a significant gap in the field of language learning. To this end, investigating the discourse styles in peer interactions and how they impact on the promotion of speaking abilities among second language learners is the gap this study seeks to fill. It aims to analyse the specific ways in which peer communication

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Enhances or hinders the learning process using the lens of discourse analysis.

It attempts to:

1. Investigate the type of peer interactions in small group discussions.
2. Establish the specific discourse patterns (e.g., scaffolding, error correction, clarification, requests) that improve or hinder the development of speaking abilities during peer interactions.
3. Analyse the proficiency levels within peer groups that promote the effectiveness of communication and learning outcomes in developing speaking abilities.
4. Explore how peer feedback and error correction improve grammatical accuracy and fluency in peer interactions.
5. Investigate the effectiveness of L1 use on the quality of peer interactions and its effect on speaking skill development.

The following research questions guide the study:

1. What interactional patterns emerge during peer-to-peer communication in ESL classroom activities?
2. What discourse strategies (e.g., clarification requests, error correction, scaffolding) do students use to maintain communication and resolve misunderstandings during peer interactions?
3. To what level does proficiency within the peer groups influence learning outcomes in developing speaking skills?
4. What is the role of peer feedback and error correction in improving grammatical accuracy and fluency?
5. What is the impact of L1 use on the quality of peer interactions and its effect on speaking skill development?

Speaking Skill and SL Learning

Speaking is the most direct method of communication (Ramadhan, Indriyani & Nabila, 2021). Expressing opinions, sharing experiences, conveying thoughts and feelings, signify that speaking ability plays a major role in human existence. Malik, Malik, Mehmood & Makhdoom (2021) noted that speaking is present in all facets of human life, including oral communication. Similarly, Davies & Pearse (2000) postulated that in second language (SL) teaching, the English teacher must be dynamic and intentional in designing a variety of classroom communication activities that motivate and stimulate students to use the language productively and actively to improve speaking skills. A significant aspect of second language learning that involves mental processing is the knowledge of pragmatics. The core requirements of effective speaking skills are practice and constant interaction with others. This leads to regular feedback.

As a result of different reasons, speaking skills, in the opinion of Intang, Latief & Rum (2023), seem to have been jettisoned in schools and other institutions of learning despite its importance. Speaking, regarded as the highest target in English language, is the basis of effective communication. The prominent position of English as a language of global communication, as opined by Garras (2025), has necessitated the importance of speaking it correctly. Learners need to prioritize speaking skills to achieve communication objectives and overall language proficiency.

Peer Interaction and Language Learning

In language learning, peer interaction is crucial. Hassan (2021) suggested that peer interaction is an avenue to acquire different skills in modern education system. It is the heart of communication (Saeid, 2024). To acquire experience in English communication, students need motivation and constant interaction using the medium of the target language. When allowed to practice and engage in communicative activities, students become competent users of the language. Language learners enhance their competencies in 'socially constructed, interactions and meaningful activities' (Erdemir & Butt-Griffler, 2020), when they interact and engage meaningfully with more competent users such as teachers and peers.

Empirical Review

Topping, Buchs, Duran & Keer (2017) have researched into how peer interaction influences students learning capabilities. Yan, Lowell, & Yang (2024) investigated the impact of situated learning on learners' English-speaking abilities. With six participants, data collection was through semi-structured interviews and pre and post assessment of speaking performance. The analysis was done through paired sample t-tests. A significant improvement in learners' speaking performance at ($t(15)=7.41, p<.001, \text{Cohen's } d=1.82$), with steady progress in fluency was found. Qoni'ah, Hasyim, Zuniati, & Irhamudin (2025) investigated the usefulness of the peer interaction style in promoting tenth-grade students' speaking abilities. After two cycles with seven meetings, including six treatment sessions,

followed by planning, observing and reflecting stages, a noticeable improvement was recorded with the average score rising from 67.4 in cycle 1 to 75.8 in cycle 2. A further study by Farmasari (2022) probed pattern of responses to developing peer-learning when making use of students' talk through English teachers' agentive actions. The study involved four purposely selected primary English language teachers teaching Year 5 and Year 6. Data was collected through field notes, audio-simulated verbal recall interviews, and classroom observations. Using nVivo12Pro, thematic analysis was done. Themes were identified through the repetition of a set of keywords. The study found that peer-learning was promoted following the teachers' understanding of their ecological contexts. The four teachers assigned the More-Proficient Students (MPS) to embark on a speaking talk. This enabled the Less-Proficient Students (LPS) to learn, and they were able to utilize the MPS' talks accordingly.

Also, Shaddad and Jember (2024) investigated the impact of peer-work activities and feedback-supported tasks on language learners' engagement, self-esteem, and language growth. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was employed. The experimental and control groups had 45 and 43 participants respectively. Fifteen sessions of treatment were given to each group with traditional instruction provided for the control group. Data was collected through pre-and post-tests and semi-structured interviews. The study found a significant improvement in engagement and self-esteem among the experimental group. The group also demonstrated progress in language growth. This was assessed through a teacher-made test.

Overview of Discourse Analysis

The analysis of written, spoken or sign language is the focus of Discourse Analysis. Being a qualitative method, discourse analysis examines the expression and structure of language within its social and cultural context. The use of language in real-world situations to pass across meaning is the concern of discourse analysis. It studies language use. It is concerned with how meaning is constructed using language, how language defines power relationships and how people employ language to achieve set goals. How language reflects and defines social and cultural practices is the focus of discourse analysis. It helps to illuminate how language users organize their discourse to show clearly their semantic intentions, in relation to how hearers or readers derive meaning from what they hear, read or see (Alba-Juez, 2009).

In researching peer interactions, discourse analysis is quite suitable. Exploring both spoken and written texts, it investigates the dynamic nature of communication among peers in the educational settings.

Theoretical Framework

This work is based on two relevant theories. They are Interaction Hypothesis (IH) and Sociocultural Theory (SCT).

Interaction Hypothesis: Interaction Hypothesis (henceforth, IH) by Long, opines that interaction is very crucial in language learning. As learners interact and engage in meaningful communication, they often negotiate meaning and receive feedback. This facilitates learning. It is believed that language learning is facilitated through purposeful and meaningful interaction. Dwelling on the significance of social interaction in language development, the theory highlights the importance of input and output interaction in second language acquisition. The theory divides communication into two types: one is "*two-way communication*" and the second is "*one-way communication*". The two-way communication emphasizes interaction as being more beneficial. Huang & Lian (2024) note that as learners encounter difficulties in communication, the two sides can adjust their discourse through meaning negotiation and interactive adjustment.

The theory believes that peer interaction provides opportunities and avenues for negotiation of meaning. In the process of improving their speaking skills, learners become aware of their linguistic errors and learn from one another. Some of the key tenets are that: a. learners engage in conversational interaction to clarify unclear messages and ensure adequate comprehension, b. learners receive feedback on their language use, helping them refine and promote their linguistic knowledge.

Sociocultural Theory: Vygotsky in his theory, Sociocultural theory (henceforth, SCT) emphasized the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition. Learning is a social process. The interaction of learners with more knowledgeable others like peers and teachers helps in the development of cognition. Social interaction and cultural context are the foundation upon which language acquisition is anchored. It is concerned with how learners engage with others and their environment to construct meaning and not just about individual cognitive processes. The belief that learning occurs through collaboration with more knowledgeable others like teachers and peers is a strong tenet of the theory. SCT suggests that peer interactions can create a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) where learners can perform tasks they cannot do alone (Mitchell & Myles, 1998) cited in Nkan (2020). With

the help of peers, such tasks can be achieved. Learners develop higher levels of speaking proficiency when they engage in dialogue, negotiate meaning, and co-construct knowledge through scaffolding that peer interaction affords. Suffice to say that the notion of zone of proximal development (ZPD) which is the level of performance that a learner is capable of when there is support from interaction with a more advanced interlocutor is critical to SCT. The theory opines that learners are given the opportunity to interact with other people in their learning through ZPD. According to Hartman, (2002) as cited in Stuyf (2010) scaffolding can be clues, models, prompts, hints and direct instructions. All these enable the L2 learners to develop proficiency in speaking skills.

Methodology

Using discourse analysis to examine peer interactions and how such interactions enhance the development of speaking skills in English, this study employs the qualitative research design.

For an in-depth analysis of natural language use and better understanding of the language learning process, the design is suitable. In addition, qualitative research design focuses on context, and this allows for exploration of social dynamics laying bare how peer interaction enhances or hinders learning. Recorded peer interactions during classroom activities are the primary data for this study. Group discussions and pair work in which learners engage in speaking tasks is the focus. The recorded data is complemented with observation method and field notes to capture non-verbal communication. Ninety-six (96) participants were drawn from the 200 level students in the department of Primary Education Studies, Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka, Yaba, Lagos. They were chosen because they have foundational knowledge of both English language skills and teaching methods and are at the middle stage of their teacher education program.

Each group consisting of 4 students makes up 24 groups. This ensures sufficient interaction among members. The proficiency levels of the students are taken into consideration to allow for mixed-ability and efforts are made to ensure gender balance in each group.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Conversation Analysis (CA) is employed in this study. The form (linguistic structure) and function (communicative purpose) is the focus of analysis, and it examines how the interactions enhance the development of speaking skills. Six groups, representing a sample of the population, are used for the study. Transcribed peer interactions from group discussions in an English as a Second Language classroom is the primary data for the study. The analysis sort to identify how these interactions enhance the development of speaking skills.

The recurrent linguistic and interactional features that contribute to the development of speaking skills are identified and examined. The specific types of interactions to be analysed include:

- a. **Turn-taking:** How turns are negotiated and interruptions are managed.
- b. **Clarification and Feedback:** How students ask for or give clarification on language use.
- c. **Error Correction:** Student correction of peer's wrong use of grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation.
- d. **Linguistic Scaffolding:** More proficient student helping another.
- e. **Use of Target Language:** Students use the target language.

Analysis of Interaction Patterns Across Groups

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Group 6
High Proficiency a. Turn taking: Conversation flowed smoothly with minimal interruptions. b. Clarification and feedback: High level of self-correction and peer feedback. c. Error Correction: Subtle error correction without interrupting flow of conversation. d. Linguistic Scaffolding: Points were expanded with examples. e. Use of Target Language: English was used exclusively. f. Pattern Observed: Strong peer correction	Mixed proficiency a. Turn taking: Students that are proficient dominated and encouraged medium level students. b. Clarification and feedback: Proficient students engaged in questioning others and medium level students asked for clarifications. c. Error Correction: Less proficient students struggled with given examples during error correction. d. Linguistic Scaffolding: Clear scaffolding was carried out by students that are proficient. e. Use of Target Language: L1 was used	Low and medium proficiency a. Turn taking: Turn taking was not even. b. Clarification and feedback: Medium proficiency students asked low proficiency students to explain their thoughts. c. Error Correction: Limited error correction occurred. Most errors went unaddressed. d. Linguistic Scaffolding: Scaffolding was minimal. e. Use of Target Language: The group switched to their L1 when faced with difficult concepts.	Low proficiency a. Turn taking: Conversation was disjointed with long pauses. Students hesitated to speak. b. Clarification and feedback: Most students avoided asking for clarification even without understanding some concepts. c. Error Correction: No peer correction. Errors were frequent. d. Linguistic Scaffolding: Scaffolding was absent. e. Use of Target Language: Heavy reliance on first language. Occasional use of English for basic sentences.	Mixed proficiency (medium and low) a. Turn taking: Turn taking was balanced. Medium proficiency students-initiated discussions. b. Clarification and feedback: Medium proficiency students provided feedback. c. Error Correction: Some error corrections took place but was often incomplete. d. Linguistic Scaffolding: Medium proficiency students tried to scaffold. e. Use of Target Language: The group switched frequently between English and their first language. f. Pattern Observed:	Medium Proficiency a. Turn taking: Very smooth. Some students spoke more than others. b. Clarification and feedback: Clarifications given when questions were asked. c. Error Correction: Present but not consistent. d. Linguistic Scaffolding: Scaffolding was minimal. e. Use of Target Language: When concept appeared difficult, English was switched to native language. f. Pattern Observed: Moderate scaffolding.

and scaffolding.	to explain difficult concepts but was minimal. English was used most times. f. Pattern Observed: High proficiency students scaffolded the learning of medium proficiency students.	f. Pattern Observed: Little scaffolding and error correction. Lack of confidence in English usage.	f. Pattern Observed: Very low level of interaction and support. This hindered development of speaking skills.	Partial scaffolding and few corrections occurred.	
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In analysing peer interactions across the six groups, the dynamics of language learning and the development of speaking skills have yielded several insights. The importance of scaffolding, error correction, and clarification in promoting or hindering learning, especially in relation to students' proficiency levels have been expounded.

1. Peer Scaffolding and Its Impact on Speaking Skills Development

Linguistic scaffolding is consistent among the groups. This was apparent among the high-proficiency and mixed-proficiency groups. The more knowledgeable peers in these groups provided support to less proficient students. How students explained grammatical functions and corrected errors; and how they built on each other's examples in the high proficiency group show proof of scaffolding. Contexts were added to examples to give clarifications. Students not only developed their understanding of concepts but also enhanced their speaking fluency through extended dialogue. This allowed for a robust collaborative and cooperative learning environment. This finding corroborates Saeid (2024) that found a positive correlation between positive peer relationship and academic achievement.

In low-proficiency groups, there was little scaffolding. Learners often encounter difficulties with concepts without adequate guidance from their peers. Students found it difficult to engage in meaningful dialogue and several errors went uncorrected. This is because there were no stronger linguistic models. In peer interaction, scaffolding is essential as it helps when learners come across complex grammatical concepts. This finding supports the opinion of Elias (2006) who argued that scaffolding is integral to academic learning to improve student's self-confidence and facilitate collaboration.

Implication: Teachers need to be more intentional when intervening or pairing students of higher proficiency levels with lower proficiency levels to promote scaffolding. This helps to achieve effective learning outcomes. The finding agrees with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Learners need help to maximize and bridge the gap between what they can do independently and what they can achieve with assistance from peers.

2. Error Correction: Frequency and Depth

The influence of error correction in the effectiveness of peer interactions is another significant element. It was constant, immediate and frequent among high-proficiency groups. It allowed for better understanding and internalization of concepts. This supports the study of Paris, Muliadi, & Lestari (2022) that found that peer correction

sometimes yields significant improvements. It helps with reinforcement and scaffolding. Students can internalize and contextualize concepts.

However, in low and mixed-proficiency groups, error correction was minimal. Bad grammar like "He are playing" went uncorrected. There were no learning opportunities. Thus, less proficient students were left with only a faint knowledge of the target language. Without reinforcement and deeper clarification, long-term language promotion may be inhibited.

Implication: The significance of explicit feedback and clarifications in language learning cannot be over-stated. Minimal error correction leads to setbacks. Learners may find it difficult to apply new knowledge in future conversations if there is no detailed explanation. Efficient and effective strategy backed up with robust feedback are needed in peer interactions. It must involve a combination of correction and explanation.

3. Requests for Clarification and Feedback Loops

Groups where students actively sought clarification and engaged in feedback loops had greater participation and deeper knowledge. Questions were always asked by learners from one another in the medium proficiency group when they find a particular concept difficult. This is clarification and it helps to reinforce and solidify learning. The finding agrees with Oliver (2000), who noted a high rate of repair as peers are at ease and more comfortable with one another when they receive clarifications on concepts. They are not afraid and are willing to take chances when producing or modifying their L2 with peers.

But students were often hesitant to ask for clarification in lower-proficiency groups. Avoidance of clarifications led to superficial discussions. This affects progress in understanding verb functions. Students' reluctance to expose their misunderstandings in front of peers is because of lack of clarification which could indicate possible issues with confidence or engagement.

Implication: Learners should always be encouraged to seek clarification whenever necessary. It is very crucial in peer-based learning. Furthermore, teachers should intentionally facilitate a classroom culture that gives room for questioning and collaboration. This will enhance effective class participation and promote language development. Teachers need to model how to ask for clarification and constantly emphasize that asking questions appropriately is a positive part of the language learning process.

4. Use of Target Language vs. First Language

Different patterns in the use of the target language (English) compared to the L1 was also found. Students engaged each other more in English. The use of English was almost exclusive. It allowed them to practice more effectively. The students immersed themselves in the linguistic structures they were discussing, thus improving in both accuracy and fluency. Because they exclusively made use of the target language, they became more proficient in the language. However, in low and mixed proficiency groups, learners frequently switched to their first language. This was evident when they came across difficult phrases and concepts. The switch to the use of L1 provided temporary relief as it allowed them the opportunity to understand complex grammatical rules because their exposure to English was limited, it reduced the potential for speaking practice. Over-reliance on L1 shows a lack of confidence in using the target language, when grappling with more abstract concepts.

Implication: Occasional switch to L1 by learners can promote comprehension. It may however inhibit the promotion of speaking abilities in English. Teachers can encourage the use of L1 to explain complex concepts or phrases that prove difficult. They should, however, ensure a balanced and more frequent use of the target language. Corrections should be made immediately when the meanings of the conversation are lost. More importantly, peer correction should be promoted and encouraged. Students' overall language acquisition is dependent on this. Teachers could consider strategies like setting specific moments for L1 use. However, the priority should be the target language.

5. Group Dynamics and Participation Levels

Findings reveal group dynamics and how they affected participation levels as important. All students contributed to the conversation in high and medium-proficiency groups, signifying that turn-taking was more evenly distributed. Students were allowed to share ideas and challenge each other's understanding, leading to more meaningful discourse.

However, some learners remained silent in low-proficiency groups and some mixed-proficiency groups, while some few showed confidence and dominated discussions. While control of the discussion was taken by medium-level

students, lower-level students only spoke when directly prompted in low and medium proficiency groups. It stifled the potential for collaborative learning and even participation. as less proficient students did not have enough opportunities to engage with the material.

Implication: The groups' proficiency level, balance and composition can affect the peer interaction quality. In ensuring that participation is encouraged by all members, teachers should be more intentional when forming groups. Roles should be assigned learners to ensure balanced participation. Scaffolding, error correction, and clarification are interaction patterns crucial in language learning, as revealed by the study. More proficient students facilitated learning through these strategies in the successful groups.

Conclusion

Effective scaffolding, frequent error correction, active clarification, and the use of the target language are the necessary components of peer-based language learning. Group dynamics and the composition of proficiency levels also play crucial roles.

Speaking skill development in English as a second language classroom should be enhanced through the creation of a collaborative learning environment that allows for active participation and support for error correction with clear explanation. It must balance the use of L1 with immersion in the target language.

Contributions to Knowledge

Valuable insights into how peer interactions can effectively contribute to second language learning are provided by this work. Specific interaction patterns that enhance or hinder language learning through a discourse analysis approach are identified. It offers a better understanding of the role of peer communication in improving speaking proficiency and will ultimately contribute to improving language teaching methodologies.

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