

How Useful is Unstructured Learner Interaction in the Acquisition of a Foreign Language?

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Although it is difficult to give a precise number, even the most conservative estimates suggest that many hundreds of hours of study and practice are required to achieve fluency in a foreign language. Providing individual students with this amount of practice is simply not feasible within the confines of the Japanese education system, and very few Japanese learners of English have any contact with native or proficient speakers of the language outside the classroom. “I don't have any opportunities to use English” is a common refrain, especially among university students. Given the facts that most Japanese learners of English do not have sufficient time in the classroom to develop fluency, and also that few have any contact with native or proficient speakers of English outside, the logical conclusion must be that the only way for Japanese students to develop fluency in English is to use it with each other outside the classroom.

For the purposes of the following discussion, the use of a foreign language outside the classroom environment will be referred to as “ULI” (Unstructured Learner Interaction.) Barker (2004) claimed that there are two basic reasons why ULI is not common in Japanese universities, even among those who are studying English as their major. The first reason is that students do not believe it would be beneficial for them to practice speaking English with other Japanese people. The second is that teachers do not actively promote ULI because they do not believe they have any chance of persuading students to use English when no teacher is present.

In spite of the fact that talking with other learners would seem to provide the only realistic prospect of success for millions of language students around the world, surprisingly little research has been done into the efficacy of ULI as a method of improving fluency in another language. In this article, I will attempt to gather evidence from related studies and fields of research that provide insights into the potential role of ULI in the acquisition of a foreign language.

Learner Interaction as a Research Topic

Although interaction between learners (as opposed to interaction generally) was not completely dropped as a research topic after 1990, it appears to have received far less attention than it had done in the previous decade. This should not be taken to mean, however, that the topic had been investigated exhaustively. A paper by Swain et al. (Swain, Brooks, & Tocalli-Beller, 2002) highlighted the need for “more research which provides clear evidence of the connections between peer-peer dialogue and second language learning and more studies which investigate longer term learning” (p. 171). Swain et al.'s review separated

studies according to which of the four traditional language skills they had focused on. Unsurprisingly, their findings were that the receptive skills of listening and reading had received less attention than the productive skills, but their review also showed a heavy bias in studies of productive skills towards writing, with approximately six pages devoted to this skill, and only a page and a half to reviews of studies of speaking. The authors noted this in their conclusions, and suggested that it was because the product can be more easily examined in writing than in speaking tasks.

One of the studies mentioned in Swain et al.'s review was Lynch and Maclean's observations of a "poster carousel" task (Lynch & Maclean, 2001). This study examined the effect on L2 production of repeated performance of a poster presentation. The authors found that "all five learners whose conversations we have analyzed improved in terms of phonology (segmental or stress) and vocabulary (access or selection); all but Alicia increased the semantic precision of what they were saying; and three made improvements in syntax" (p. 155). The findings of the study were that the greatest gains in syntactic accuracy were made by the lower level learners. Although it is difficult to assess how far these findings can be applied to ULI, it is likely that interaction with the same friends in the same environment over an extended period of time would lead to repetition of the same questions, phrases, words, and even sentences. Lynch and Maclean's findings suggest that this will be likely to have a positive impact on the quality of the learners' output, particularly for lower-level learners.

Also discussed in Swain et al.'s review was Ohta's study of seven adult learners of Japanese (Ohta, 2001). In this study, the subjects' interactions were recorded over an academic year to produce a corpus of data, making it one of the very few studies to have examined the effects of peer-peer interaction (among other things) longitudinally. Ohta's findings are intuitively appealing and many of the claims made regarding peer interaction could be argued to apply equally to ULI. For example, Ohta claimed that peer interaction was beneficial because no two learners have the same strengths and weaknesses, meaning that pairs of students are able to coproduce language that would be beyond either of them individually.

Another point raised by Ohta was the effect that increased practice and exposure to language is believed to have on "inner speech," which she described as a partial subset of "private speech," in turn defined as "audible speech not adapted to an addressee" (p. 16). According to Ohta, "private speech in the L2 is evidence of language development in process and occurs as a precursor of inner speech" (p. 18). Ohta further argued that inner speech in an L2 can only be developed through social interaction. Although Ohta's discussion was mainly concerned with the way that learners develop private speech through classroom study, Tomlinson and Avila (2007) suggested that formal instruction does not encourage the development of inner speech. Indeed, they claimed that classroom interactions can actually be harmful to its development, as "teachers monitor (and even correct) it as though it was public speech and thus discourage the learners from using inner speech in case they 'let it out' " (p. 74). If this is correct, a strong argument could be made that ULI may provide a

better environment for the nurturing and development of inner speech as learners engage in real interaction without having to worry about producing “correct” language or having their errors pointed out. Indeed, this appears to be the implication of what Tomlinson and Avila were saying, although they did not specifically mention the concept of ULI: “it is very difficult to use an inner voice when learning an L2 from formal instruction, but not so difficult when learning an L2 naturally or in an immersion environment” (p. 74).

Ohta's study provided possibly the strongest argument yet made for the benefits of peer-peer interaction in language learning. However, as mentioned above, the author focussed mainly on classroom activities, and nowhere in her book did she suggest that the benefits of peer-peer interaction would apply if those interactions were to take place outside. On the contrary, Ohta was careful to stress the importance of the role of the teacher, saying that “peer interactive tasks were not as successful when teachers were not available to intervene” (p. 269). Whether this means that unmonitored tasks were simply less beneficial to learners or that they were not beneficial at all is unclear. However, the strength of Ohta's focus on what goes on in the classroom is made clear by the following passage: “L2 developmental processes are about much more than curriculum and teaching, but are centrally about what learners do in their interface with the affordances of the classroom setting” (p. 270). My own experience of teaching and learning foreign languages is that the L2 development process has far more to do with what takes place outside the classroom than what goes on in it, but I was unable to find any direct references to this facet of the learning process in Ohta's book.

A study by Mackey et al. (Mackey, Oliver, & Leeman, 2003) once again compared interaction in NS/NNS and NNS/NNS dyads. The authors found that more interaction occurred in NS/NNS dyads, which contradicted the findings of previous studies. The authors suggested that this may have been because their study only considered exchanges which began with an ungrammatical utterance. They noted that “much of the negotiation that took place in previous studies may not have been negative feedback, but negotiation of grammatical utterances that occurred as a result of the NNSs attempts to understand each other” (p. 56). This study, therefore cast doubt on the findings of a great deal of previous research into interaction. In their conclusions, however, Mackey and her colleagues cautioned that the variation of results within their study depending on the context of the interaction provided a warning to researchers of the dangers of over-generalizing the findings of any study of interaction to different groups of learners in different contexts.

In spite of the contribution of many researchers to our understanding of the benefits of peer-peer interaction, much work clearly remains to be done. In 2007, a paper was published entitled “Do second language learners benefit from interacting with each other?” (Adams, 2007). The author pointed out as justification for her study that “relatively little research has examined the benefits of interactions between learners for promoting language development” (p. 29). Adams' study suggested that “the benefits of native speaker-learner interactions may also apply to learner-learner interactions” (p. 51), but her point that the

benefits of learner interaction have not been well researched is somewhat shocking given that pair activities and group work have been staples of language teaching for at least twenty years.

2.7 The Role of Negative Evidence in SLA

Barker (2004), noted that one objection often raised by learners of English to the idea of ULI is the problem of error correction. Specifically, learners express concern about the fact that they will (a) not notice when their partner makes mistakes, and (b) be unable to correct them even if they do. In order to examine the potential role of ULI in the learning of a foreign language, it will be necessary to consider whether students' concerns about the correction of errors are justified or not.

Is Negative Feedback Beneficial for L2 Acquisition?

Error correction provides “negative evidence,” or information regarding what is not possible in the target language. According to Oliver (2000), negative evidence can be provided pre-emptively through explanations of the rules of a language, or reactively, through correction of errors. Negative evidence is contrasted with positive evidence, which shows learners what is possible in the target language, and the question of whether or not negative evidence plays a role in language acquisition has been hotly debated. Researchers of L1 acquisition who believe that language development is innate have argued that children receive very little negative evidence as they learn their first language. In a much-cited article, Pinker (1989) proposed a four-part test for those who claim a major role for negative evidence in language learning. Pinker pointed out that in order to justify such a claim, research must prove that (1) negative evidence exists; (2) that it is useful; (3) that it is used by the learners; and (4) that acquisition cannot take place without it.

In a review of research into negative feedback in SLA, Long (1996) addressed each of Pinker's points and concluded that “a facilitative role for negative feedback in L2 acquisition seems probable, and ... its necessity for learning some L2 structures is arguable on logical learnability grounds” (p. 445). This claim was partially supported by a study by Long et al. (1998) which provided some evidence of an effect of implicit negative feedback (INF) on the subjects' acquisition of structures in French and Spanish, but which also highlighted methodological difficulties in researching this phenomenon and the limitations of short-term studies.

Much of the research on negative feedback has focused on “recasts,” defined by Long in a discussion of L1 acquisition as “utterances that rephrase ... by changing one or more sentence components (subject, verb, or object) while still referring to its central meanings” (1996, p. 434). Morris (2002) noted that recasts have four properties: “(1) they reform an ill-formed utterance; (2) they expand the utterance in some way; (3) the central meaning of the utterance is kept, and (4) recasts immediately follow the ill-formed utterance” (p. 396).

One reason for the interest in recasts has been the prevalence of their use in language classrooms. For example, Lyster and Ranta (1997) reported that recasts accounted for 55% of the feedback moves provided by teachers in response to learner errors in their observations of French immersion classrooms. Long (2007) reported that “in both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, recasts have been shown to exist and to exist in relatively high frequencies in all classroom and noninstructional settings observed so far” (p.93).

According to Long (2007), more than 60 studies of the use of recasts in the language classroom had been conducted by 2007, but their findings had been mixed. For example, Lyster and Ranta (1997) noted that although recasts were the most frequent type of feedback observed in their study, almost 70% did not lead to uptake by the learners, and they called for more awareness of other types of corrective feedback. In a further study, Lyster (2004) found that focus-on-form episodes accompanied by recasts were less effective than those accompanied by prompts such as repetition of learner errors by the teacher and explicit comments regarding the correctness of the learner's utterance. It is worth noting, however, that Lyster's studies focused on young learners, and it is quite conceivable that different results would be obtained from a study involving adults.

Indeed, Han (2002) found that in a study of two randomly selected groups of adult learners the ones who received feedback in the form of recasts achieved a higher level of post-test tense consistency in both written and oral language than the group who did not. Han suggested that four conditions were necessary for recasts to be effective. These were individualized attention, consistent focus, developmental readiness, and intensity. Philp (2003) also emphasized the importance of contextual factors, finding that learners in her study noticed 60-70% of recasts, but that uptake varied according to the proficiency of the individual and the length of the recast.

Other researchers have highlighted conceptual problems with studies of recasts. For example, Mackey and Philp (1998) suggested that learner responses are not necessarily good indicators of whether or not the recasts were beneficial to interlanguage development. In a study of the effects of negative feedback on learners of different ages, Oliver (2000) found that learners both received and utilized various types of negative feedback, and claimed that “much previous research may have underestimated the utility of NF for learners because of definitional constraints (i.e. predominately investigating explicit rather than implicit forms of feedback, or NF just in the form of recasts)” (p. 144).

Ellis et al. (2001) examined the degree to which learner uptake occurred following instances of focus-on-form episodes in Communicative language classes. As in the Oliver (2000) study discussed above, the authors found a high level of learner uptake from episodes of focus-on-form. They also noted, however, that successful uptake following episodes of focus-on-form does not in itself prove that acquisition has taken place and called for more research to establish this relationship.

In a study of 74 learners of Spanish, Leeman (2003) pointed out that it is difficult to assess the impact of recasts because at the same time as providing negative feedback, they also provide positive evidence regarding the target language. Leeman found from her own study that recasts were most effective when attention was deliberately drawn to the target form through stress and intonation, and concluded that “the utility of recasts is derived at least in part from enhanced salience of positive evidence, and that the implicit negative evidence they seem to provide may not be a crucial factor” (2003, p. 37).

Lyster (1998) suggested that recasts may have a wider role than simply providing correction for learner errors. In a database of 18 hours of interaction recorded in immersion classrooms, he found that only one quarter of the teachers' recasts actually shortened the learners' utterances in order to highlight the error. The remaining three quarters of recasts given by teachers appeared to function simply as non-corrective repetition, and were more focused on communicative goals such as providing confirmation and eliciting further information than direct linguistic instruction.

The findings of 56 studies into the effectiveness of corrective feedback for the acquisition of L2 grammar were synthesized in a meta-analysis by Russell and Spada (2006). The authors noted the reservations expressed by some researchers concerning the differences between studies carried out in laboratory contexts and those carried out in classroom contexts, pointing out that “it has been argued that the nature and characteristics of the laboratory setting (e.g. dyadic interaction between the learner and the researcher/interviewer create greater learner sensitivity and noticing of [corrective feedback] than do those of the classroom” (p. 153). Russell and Spada felt that the small number of studies in each of these groups did not allow them to draw conclusions about this issue from a meta-analysis, but the point is one that has relevance to the current study, since it could be argued that learners will be more sensitive to feedback in a classroom setting than in social interactions outside and would therefore benefit more from corrective feedback in the classroom than they would in ULI. Russell and Spada concluded from their meta-analysis that research does seem to report a beneficial role in language development for corrective feedback, although they called for more studies to focus consistently on the same variables.

On the basis of the available evidence, it will be assumed for the purposes of this study that corrective feedback from both native speakers and learners is likely to be beneficial for language learners, but it is recognized that more research is needed to identify the most effective way of providing that feedback and the role of other factors in determining its efficacy.

Can Learners Correct Each Other?

Having established that access to negative evidence in the form of corrective feedback is likely to be beneficial for learners, the next stage is to consider whether or not learners can provide each other with this kind of feedback. First, however, I will consider the question of

whether native speakers generally provide learners with corrective feedback. Although any native speaker should be capable of correcting mistakes made by learners, it is not necessarily the case that this is something that they always (or even usually) do. This means that one of the perceived advantages of interacting with native speakers (i.e. that conversing with a native speaker will give learners more access to corrective feedback) may not have a great deal of validity.

Studies of NS/NNS interactions have suggested that in fact, native speakers do not correct learners very often. For example, Porter's 1983 study of NS/NNS and NNS/NNS interactions (cited in Long & Porter, 1985) found that neither learners nor native speakers give very much overt correction to their interlocutors. Porter found that the learners corrected 1.5% of other learners' errors, and the native speakers corrected around 8%. A study by Gaskill (1980) found that in 50 pages of transcript of conversations between an Iranian learner of English and native speakers of the language, there were only seventeen examples of correction. Gaskill's findings were supported by Chun et al.'s (1982) analysis of 15 hours of taped conversations between 20 learners of English and their native-speaking Hawaiian friends conducted in social situations outside the classroom. The researchers found that "in conversations between NSs and NNSs in social settings the NSs corrected the errors made by their NNS friends only infrequently" (p. 545). A second paper by the same authors (Day, Chenoweth, Chun, & Lupescu, 1984), which appeared to be based on an analysis of a subset of the same data, found that the majority of feedback given by NSs was explicit, but that of 1595 errors made by the NNSs, only 117 were singled out by the NSs for corrective feedback.

Even in formal teaching situations, it is not clear how much corrective feedback teachers generally give to learners. Long (1996) expressed his opinion that errors are often overlooked, claiming that "inside classrooms, the fast pace of typical language lessons means that teachers understandably fail to notice many errors, ignore others if they are not the current pedagogic focus, and ... often 'correct' those to which they do respond inconsistently and also ambiguously" (p. 438). My own observations of English classes in Japanese universities have also led me to believe that students' mistakes are rarely corrected by teachers. Of course, this does not mean that no feedback is given at all. For example, teachers may use learners' errors as the basis for developing future activities and even lessons, but it is not necessarily the case that this is done systematically. It appears, then, that there is some evidence on which to base a claim that native speakers do not generally correct learners' errors. This suggests that even if it were true, learners' concern that they are not able to provide each other with corrective feedback would not represent a serious disadvantage for ULI compared to interactions with native speakers.

In fact, however, several studies have suggested that learners are quite capable of correcting each other accurately if they choose to do so. For example, Porter (1983, cited in Long & Porter, 1985) found that although learners did not correct each other very often, only 0.3% of the corrections they offered were inaccurate. This finding was supported by a

study of peer interaction by Lynch (2001) in which four pairs of learners were asked to transcribe a role-play exercise that they had done and correct any mistakes. The result was that out of 112 changes made, only 11 were found to be miscorrections. This study therefore suggested that learners are indeed capable of both noticing and correcting errors in each other's language, at least when the pressure of real-time speech is removed.

In her longitudinal study of learners of Japanese study, Ohta (2001) was convinced from an examination of her data that learners were capable of at least noticing each other's errors, and that this would have a beneficial effect on their own language.

Ohta's corpus contained many examples of learners offering help to their peers with structures that they then demonstrated a lack of ability to produce themselves. Ohta ascribed this phenomenon to the different loads placed on working memory in different roles in an interaction, noting that “even learners who are unable to produce a particular grammatical structure on their own are able to assist a partner with the same task when they are afforded the abundant attentional resources of the listener's role” (p. 85).

In a study of 42 low-level learners of Spanish, Morris (2002) found that 70 percent of the errors made by the learners received corrective feedback from their peers. However, a subsequent study (Morris & Tarone, 2003) found that the degree to which feedback from peers was utilized by speakers varied according to personal relations between the interlocutors. The authors of this study noted that negative feelings about their interlocutors had caused some of the learners to misinterpret corrective feedback as criticism, and argued that researchers need to take into account the social dynamics of the classroom when investigating the impact of pair activities and group work on SLA. Tomlinson (2007) also expressed his conviction that “it is the quality of the learning experience in which recasts are made or not made that really matters” (p. 158). If this is indeed the case, then there are good reasons for suggesting that learners may actually be more likely to benefit from peer correction in ULI with friends in social situations than they would in the classroom where they often have no control over whom they talk to.

Although it appears that learners both can and do correct each other, some studies have, not surprisingly, suggested that they generally receive more corrective feedback in interactions with native speakers. For example, a study by Mackey (2002) found that learners perceived that they were receiving feedback in 81% of the interactions in the classroom context where feedback was provided by both peers and native speakers, but only in 43% of the learner-learner dyads. A subsequent study by Mackey et al. (Mackey, Oliver, & Leeman, Mackey et al., 2003) found that whilst there was no difference in the amount of feedback provided in NS/NNS dyads compared with NNS/NNS dyads when the learners were children, in the case of adults, NSs provided significantly more feedback than NNSs. The authors speculated that this might have been because learners felt that they were not in a position to be correcting other learners. However, although the amount of feedback was found to be greater in NS/NNS dyads, the feedback given in the NNS/NNS dyads provided

much more opportunity for the original speaker to modify their output. Mackey et al. suggested this might have been because NNSs cannot always provide correction even when they notice an error, meaning that the speaker has more time to think about ways of modifying the output. This provides another interesting argument in favour of promoting learner interaction as a way of developing proficiency.

To summarize, it seems that the following points can be made in response to learners' concerns about a lack of corrective feedback in ULI.

- Learners do not generally receive very much corrective feedback in interactions with native speakers.
- Although they do not have the linguistic resources of native speakers, learners are capable of noticing, correcting, and learning from each other's mistakes.
- Learners rarely miscorrect each other.

2.8 Pronunciation in NNS/NNS Interaction

Another concern frequently voiced by learners regarding interactions with peers is that their pronunciation will not improve. In fact, many worry that it will actually get worse, as the heavier the influence of their L1 becomes, the easier it will be for their interlocutor to understand them. My experience of observing Japanese learners for 17 years has been that this concern is a valid one, as students working in pairs or groups do tend to pronounce English with a strong Japanese accent to facilitate comprehension. In their description of Communication Accommodation Theory, Giles et al. (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991) described how speakers adjust their speech either to make it more similar to their interlocutor (convergence) or to make it different (divergence). They defined convergence as “a strategy whereby individuals adapt to each other's communicative behaviors in terms of a wide range of linguistic-prosodic-nonverbal features including speech rate, pausal phenomena and utterance length, phonological variants, smiling, gaze, and so on” (p. 7). The original reason suggested for the phenomenon of convergence in Communication Accommodation Theory was the speaker's wish for approval, but Jenkins (2000) noted that “the wish to be understood has come to be considered an equally salient motivation for convergence as the desire to be liked” (p. 21). When using English with their peers, Japanese learners are therefore under two kinds of pressure to make their pronunciation closer to the L1. One is the wish to avoid accusations of “showing off” or appearing to reject or negate their Japanese identity, and the other is the desire to make their English as easy as possible for their interlocutors to understand.

Writers including Taylor (1991), Leather (1983), and more recently Jenkins (2000, 2002) have stressed that with the growth of English as a global language, it is no longer necessary (or even appropriate) for learners to aspire to native-like pronunciation, particularly given the problems of defining what “native-like” actually means. This could be interpreted to mean that pronunciation is no longer as important for learners as it used to be, and that students

need therefore not be so concerned about it. However, all of the above writers pointed out that learners still need to develop pronunciation that is intelligible to both native speakers and other learners of English. It would be wrong, therefore, to suggest that the issue of pronunciation can be ignored in discussions of ULI, particularly in a monolingual environment. Whilst it could be argued that ULI between learners of different nationalities may help those learners to become more intelligible, for Japanese learners, developing English pronunciation that is comprehensible only to other Japanese people would probably be detrimental in their dealings with both native speakers and learners from other countries.

Whilst accepting that learners' concerns regarding the effect of ULI on pronunciation are not without validity, however, the strength of those concerns is greatly reduced by three arguments. The first of these is that the same point applies equally to pair activities and group work in the classroom, especially in larger classes where teachers are unable to monitor students consistently. If students and teachers accept that there is value in these types of interactions, then the same or similar value should also be attributed to ULI.

Secondly, it has been my experience that Japanese learners are quite capable of drastically improving the quality of their English pronunciation simply by paying attention to it. If a group of learners were sufficiently motivated to be using English with each other outside the classroom, it is likely that they would also be sufficiently motivated to at least make a conscious effort to minimize the influence of their L1 on their pronunciation.

Perhaps the strongest argument, however, is the simple fact that whilst using English with other learners may have some drawbacks compared to interacting with native speakers or learners from other countries in terms of its effect on pronunciation, for the vast majority of learners of English in Japan, ULI represents the only real option for extensive use of the target language. In other words, the appropriate comparison is not one between using English with peers and using it with a native speaker or a learner from another country, but between using English with other learners who share your L1 and not using it at all.

2.9 Summary of Findings from Review of Studies of NNS/NNS Interaction

The collective finding of research into NNS/NNS interaction seems to be that although there is some truth in the idea that interactions with native speakers provide a richer resource in terms of grammatically accurate input, it is clear that NNS/NNS interactions can have beneficial effects for learners of a second or foreign language. There is also evidence to suggest that this type of interaction may be preferable in some respects. However, a number of weaknesses with existing studies can be identified, along with significant gaps in the literature. For example, early studies of interaction relied strongly in their conclusions on counts of features whose effects on language acquisition are even now not clearly understood. Furthermore, early studies based on the simplified notion of “negotiation routines” failed to distinguish between exchanges triggered by mistakes on the part of the speaker and those triggered by a lack of understanding on the part of the learner of

grammatically correct utterances.

A further weakness of even the most recent studies of learner interaction is that little attempt has been made to incorporate qualitative data that could cast some light on how the various styles of interaction are perceived by the participants. The importance of this consideration was highlighted in a discussion by Roebuck (2000) of how learners position themselves in psycholinguistic tasks: “it will be shown that subjects involved in the same task are necessarily involved in different activity, since they bring to the task their unique histories, goals, and capacities” (p. 79). If this is true, it is unlikely that valid conclusions can be drawn from studies of either NS/NNS or NNS/NNS interaction without finding out what the learners are feeling and thinking.

Given the almost universal acceptance in modern-day ELT methodology of learner interaction as a means of developing proficiency in a foreign language, there is an urgent need for more longitudinal studies to measure the effects of this kind of practice. The small number of early studies that attempted to compare “Communicative” methods of teaching with more formal methods of instruction (e.g. Palmer, 1979) found little or no difference between the experimental groups and the control groups. In a discussion of the difficulties of conducting so-called “comparative method studies” that attempt to test the effectiveness of different methods of language teaching, Lightbown (1990) made the point that most types of foreign language lessons usually do not result in very much progress being made by the learners. Many teachers and learners of foreign languages would agree with this point, and I would suggest that the main reason has more to do with the amount of time available for practice and use of the language than the specific methods and materials used in classrooms, a problem that could be addressed in many learning environments through the promotion of ULI.

To conclude, it seems strange that although pair activities and group work have become staples of modern language teaching, virtually no mention has been made in the literature of the potential benefits of ULI for language acquisition. This is even more surprising given that many of the benefits hypothesized to arise from learner interaction have nothing to do with the participation of a native speaker (extended practice time, development of the inner voice, more opportunities to modify output, etc.)

For the purposes of this discussion, the lack of conclusive research findings regarding the effect of extended learner interaction in the acquisition of a second or foreign language is both good and bad news. From a negative point of view, we cannot say simply from a review of the research that there is conclusive evidence to show that ULI will have a beneficial long-term effect on language development, although many persuasive arguments have been put forward to suggest that this may be the case. On the other hand, if the features of pair activities and group work that have been claimed to facilitate language development in classroom settings can be demonstrated to exist in ULI, it would seem justifiable to claim that as there is as much evidence for the benefits of ULI as there is for

the methodology on which most modern-day language teaching is based.

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