Finding a Voice in EFL Classroom Discussions: A Bakhtinian Interpretation of Formative Assessment

Daniel Parsons, Kwansei Gakuin University, Japan

Abstract

Formative assessment occurs when teachers and learners gather evidence about the current state of learners' understanding for the purposes of adapting teaching and learning and moving learning forward (Wiliam, 2011). Task based peer discussion classes are fertile ground for eliciting evidence of learners' productive language skills. In fact, much of the research into task based learning has tried to isolate best practice by focusing on learners' production in terms of fluency, accuracy and complexity of their language (Skehan, 2014). However, the research has not adequately taken into account the complexities of peer interaction, such as how learners identify themselves as learners within a task, and how learners invest in their own learning (Zhou, 2013). This paper takes an emic perspective and uses Bakhtin's concept of the utterance to analyse two Japanese learners' productive improvements as they progress through six English discussion classes. Evidence that formative assessment techniques can affect learner investment and identity construction is provided through the analysis. The paper concludes by suggesting that mobilising formative assessment opens routes to acquisition not traditionally considered in much classroom based research and practice, and calls for more research in this area.

Keywords: formative assessment, peer interaction, discussion tasks, investment, identity

Introduction

Formative assessment has been described by Wiliam (2011) as the bridge between teaching and learning. It potentially offers resources for teachers to engineer language learning tasks to provide learners with the opportunity to recycle and proceduralise language. Cizek (2010) conceptualises formative assessment as the collaboration between practitioners and learners for the purpose of identifying the needs of learners and adapting teaching and learning to suit those needs. Wiliam (2011) and Black and Wiliam (2009) also underline the importance of feedback and including learners in the processes of teaching and learning. To understand how formative assessment can be integrated as part of classroom discussion tasks, it is necessary to review a number of factors which impact on discussion activities. First, an overview of research and insights into peer interaction tasks can help set the agenda for designing formative assessment. Second, understanding complications arising from the local context can provide insight into the constraints and affordances impacting on the implementation of formative assessment. Finally, as a practical tool which bridges teaching and learning, what counts as moving learning forward needs to be clearly defined. These three factors will be discussed in turn.

Since Long's interaction hypothesis made the case for second language acquisition through interaction (1981), researchers have examined evidence of language learning through peer interaction in classroom settings, and have noted the features of interaction which provide opportunities for proceduralising internal models of morphology, lexis, and pronunciation (Philp, Adams & Iwashita, 2014). In particular, peer interaction tasks provide learners with the opportunity to experiment with language forms (Mackey, 2007), and negotiate for meaning and language form through reformulations, clarification checks and recasts (Pica, 2013). Furthermore, the collaborative process gives rise to corrective feedback and modified output, allowing learners to bring about changes in their interlanguage (Adams, Nuevo & Egi, 2011). There is also evidence that focusing learners on communication strategies, such as turn taking and referential communication, can promote discourse competence during peer interaction (Tarone, 2005; Naughton, 2006).

However, a number of other factors can impact on the effectiveness of interaction to provide language learning opportunities. These include the language proficiency of the learner (Iwashita, 2001) task design (Samuda & Bygate, 2008), learners' attitudes (Fujii & Mackey, 2009) and learning preferences (Platt, 2005), and the investment (Norton, 2011) in language learning that learners bring to the interaction. Particular issues of social-loafing, free-riding and diffusion of responsibility (Littlewood, 2014; Topping, 2010) could inhibit opportunities for learning. In fact, Ellis (2012, pp. 152-193) has suggested that these factors may impact to such an extent in real classrooms as to lead to a dearth of opportunities for the kinds of interactional features that promote language acquisition. It would therefore seem to require great skill on the part of teachers to bridge teaching and learning through formative assessment in discussion tasks.

Discussion tasks have been described as promoting interest and interaction when staged appropriately (Willis & Willis, 2007, pp.8-11). However, three factors within the local context can impact on the efficacy of discussion tasks. First, many learners within a Japanese university have passed through secondary education by rote

learning English grammar and phrases in preparation for university entrance tests (Brown & Yamashita, 1995), with little or no development of production skills. Secondly, this focus on grammar means the learners are not familiar with a fundamentally learner centred approach promoted by task based learning. Nunan and Lamb (2001) note that learners need to be systematically taught the skills required to implement a learner centred approach to pedagogy. Finally, Platt (2005) is conscious that certain types of tasks, such as gap fill tasks, are ways of talking that the learners may have no experience with, and is open to creative interpretation. These three issues suggest that simply offering a formalised procedure for discussion tasks would not necessarily promote the kind of interaction that leads to acquisition. It therefore seems appropriate that formative assessment plays a facilitative role in this context – to encourage productive output, to facilitate learners in a learner centred pedagogy and to encourage the creation of new ways of speaking.

The successful integration of formative assessment into discussion tasks does not necessarily lead to an understanding of how to judge progress in discussion tasks. In fact, much of the task research referenced above makes judgements about progress in terms of structuralist notions of grammatical and lexical acquisition (Hall, Vitanova & Marchenkova, 2005), and the value of a task feature or task design is often construed in terms of learners' fluency, accuracy or complexity achievements (Foster & Skehan, 1996; Skehan, 2014). Furthermore, task design is sometimes evaluated in terms of learners' focus on the task's linguistic goals (Willis & Willis, pp.113-134). Iwashita (2001) showed that learners often missed opportunities for modified output, choosing instead to focus on confirmation checks to achieve task goals, and miss the linguistic goals completely. While Iwashita did not speculate as to why learners manifested this behaviour during tasks, she rationalised it in terms of varying dyad proficiencies and learners' preferences for being in a particular dyad. A criticism of these perspectives on assessment is that they are subjective only to the researcher or the teacher, and not necessarily salient to the learner.

Platt (2005) provided an alternative assessment of her learners' progress in a pair language task. Through conversation analysis of task interaction and discourse analysis of a reflective interview, she was able to show how one learner came to see herself as a good language learner in the face of a more dominant and confident interlocutor. The learner in the study grew in confidence and took control of the interaction with her partner. The assessment employed Bakhtin's concept of the utterance (Bakhtin, 1986) in the analysis of the interaction between the two learners to show how they negotiated not just linguistic features, but also their identities in the task.

Bakhtin's ideas are coming to have more and more impact on educational practice and policy making around the world, (White & Peters, 2011; Hall, Vitanova & Marchenkova, 2005; Ball & Freedman, 2004). In particular, his concept of the utterance is useful in language learning contexts. Utterances have a number of properties, including addressivity and heteroglossia. Bakhtin wrote about addressivity: "An essential marker of the utterance is its quality of being directed to someone, its addressivity. An utterance has both an author and an addressee" (Bakhtin, 1986, p.95). Given that classroom talk is considered to be a form of institutional talk restricted by the goals of the teacher and the students (Heritage, 2005), it could be argued that learners address their utterances not just to each other in discussion

(Chappell, 2014), but to what they imagine the teacher and the curriculum expects of them.

The utterance is also said to be filled with the voices of others, and this is the property of heteroglossia. Bakhtin wrote: "Our speech, that is, all our utterances …, is filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of 'our-own-ness', varying degrees of awareness and detachment. These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework and re-accentuate" (Bakhtin, 1986, p.89). Norton (2011) relates this idea to the process of moment-by-moment identity construction and investment in language learning. Investment in language learning is a sociological construct that parallels motivation in psycholinguistics. Learners invest in their learning when they use or manipulate learning resources in their context to alter or reinforce their identities during moments of learning. It is this investment in language learning in a discussion classroom context that can be seen as taking control of one's own learning from a formative assessment standpoint (Wiliam, 2011).

The three factors which impact on discussion tasks and addressed above were: i) how current peer interaction research can inform an agenda for formative assessment; ii) understanding the local context in order to design formative assessment with constraints and affordances in mind, and iii) considering what counts as language learning improvement. Given this overview, formative assessment in discussion tasks can be defined with the following parameters:

i) it is a set of resources used by the teacher and students to elicit evidence of learning that learners can understand relative to a curriculum agenda;
ii) the resources encourage productive output that addresses a clearly defined curriculum agenda;
iii) the resources play a facilitative role in the appropriation of utterances for identity construction and investment in collaborative and creative language output.

Three resources were designed for formative assessment, and are described below. This research examined evidence in two students' classroom interactions for some impact of the assessment resources on language learning behaviours over six weeks.

Methodology

Discussion tasks took place over six weeks with one second year undergraduate non-English major class of 24 mixed-proficiency students. The students' TOEIC scores ranged from 350 to 650. Listing and ranking tasks were employed for the discussions, and students, working in groups of three or four, discussed how best to rank concrete items or actions. During the second and final lessons, for example, the students ranked anti-social behaviour with respect to the level of fine imposed for carrying out the behaviour. In the second lesson, students discussed anti-social behaviour in a dorm room, such as listening to music loudly, and in the sixth lesson they discussed anti-social behaviour on the beach, such as riding motorbikes around children.

In the pre-task, the students were exposed to the task's vocabulary through pictures and short readings, and basic phrases were provided on a check-list. The ranking task was modelled by the teacher and a language assistant, and learners spent about twenty

minutes discussing. The discussion tasks were recorded in the language laboratories and students transcribed parts of their discussions in the post-task for analysis of language form.

Three formative assessment resources were designed. The first was called the "Pit Stop". This is the idea of students consciously taking time out of the discussion (Ellis, 2006, p.34) to focus on finding an appropriate form for what they want to say. The students can switch into their native language and discuss the language problem, thereby focusing on form explicitly. Furthermore, the Pit Stop was designed in such a way that the students had to decide first whether they were focusing on mechanical features of language, lexical problems or grammatical problems (Philp et al., 2014, p.26). This facilitates an awareness of meta-language and its role in learning, and construes one of the defining features of formative assessment that learners take control of their own learning (Wiliam, 2011, pp.145-158). Its deployment by students potentially construes a willingness to invest in collaborative focus on form.

The second resource was "Leadership Skills". These were embedded into the curriculum, and were described to students as sequences of interaction. One example was "Listen-Summarise-Suggest", where students might listen to their partners discuss some suggestions for ranking, then summarise some of the suggestions before making a suggestion of their own. In this sense, Leadership Skills are simply communication strategies designed to improve communicative competence (Tarone, 2010). A similar focus on communication strategies (Naughton, 2006) has been seen to improve participation in terms of the number of turns taken. The provision of sample sequences for leadership skills construes another feature of formative assessment that the criteria of assessment are made clear to the learners (Wiliam, 2011, pp.51-69).

The final resource was a language reflection journal. For homework each week, the students were asked to reflect on the successes and difficulties of the discussion tasks. The teacher also used the journals to respond to the students' concerns and offer advice. The use of reflective language journals in the context of EFL discussion classes has not been well researched. However, in the context of writing classes, they have been shown to improve motivation, reduce anxiety and improve confidence in learners (Holmes & Moulton, 1997; Peyton, Staton, Richardson & Wolfram, 1990; Alexander, 2001). Reflection on classroom performance was shown by Ewald (2004) to positively affect future performance. Ewald had learners watch skits that showed some of the problems of group work. The learners went on to make more effort to collaborate during tasks. This implies that reflection on performance through a language journal has the potential to facilitate the improvement of future language performance.

The project described here is an ongoing project looking at all of the volunteer students in the classroom. One low proficiency student, referred to as David, and one high proficiency student, referred to as Mary, were selected from this project for analysis here to illustrate some of the issues on language investment and identity construction referred to above, and to demonstrate how an analysis of utterances in Bakhtinian terms can yield insights into behavioural changes in learners that potentially reflect investment and identity construction.

Analysis: David

David had one of the lowest TOEIC scores in his group. During lessons, he sometimes appeared to rely on ridicule as part of social bonding with his group. One strategy he used at times was to flaunt his low English proficiency in order to elicit laughter from his classmates. For the first entry in his language journal, he wrote: "I was noticed in the difficulty of making a conversation. And I thought that it was hard to tell that my feelings in English." This issue with participation is seen in Extracts 1 and 2.

Extract 1 (Lesson 2: Dorm Room)

```
1     Partner 1:    one a::: ten milli a:: ten thousand
2     Partner 2:                      [te:n thousand
3     Partner 1:                              [ten thousand hai ten thousand
4     Partner 2:    ten thousand yen
5     Partner 3     yen
6     Partner 2:      [ten thousand ten
7     David:               [pet pet
8     Partner 1:    (2.4) mazu bakkin wo kimeru dake
                            we'll just decide the fines first
9     David:        yes
```

In Extract 1, the group is discussing the different levels of fines to use for anti-social behaviour in a dorm room, and they reach consensus that the highest fine should be ten thousand yen by turn 6. In turn 7, David topicalises one of the anti-social behaviours - keeping pets in the dorm room - to suggest that this behaviour should be punished with the highest fine. However, his partner, after a pause, code-switches into Japanese to explain that the group is not ready to move into that stage of the discussion. David, in turn 9, immediately complies.

Extract 2 (Lesson 2: Dorm Room)

```
1     Partner 1:    one- e:↑ (0.4) listening music↓ (.) curtai:n (.) petto (.) smoking (.) gas
2     David:        pet is expensive
3     Partner 1:    bu- but ano:: (0.4) keeping the gas i:s very dangerous
4     Partner 2:                              [a- me too
5     David:                                  [a::::↓
6     Partner 1:    it's too expensive
7     Partner 2:    (1) I see
8     David:              [>okay okay okay okay< ˙hh a gas number one
```

Similarly, in Extract 2, David shows compliance with the group's prevailing wishes. His partner lists a number of behaviours that could be discussed, followed in turn 2 by David's suggestion that keeping a pet should have the highest fine. His partner counters the suggestion, and another partner concurs in turns 4 and 7. In turn 8, David concedes his argument without justifying his original suggestion.

David's low proficiency, combined with the real-time pressures of conversation is probably contributing to his compliant stance. In fact, in his journal, he refers many times to "words and grammar" with respect to his performance. When prompted: "What do you think you can improve?" he wrote: "I should learn grammar and

words." When prompted: "What did you do well in this class?" he wrote: "'Look at the picture in the left side'. I think I could say well this sentence. I say without the wrong word and grammar". On another occasion he wrote: "I can learn many words and grammar". However, his attitude towards time-out was less optimistic. He wrote: "But I still cannot get used to pit stop", and "I depend excessively on Pit Stop. So, I think that I should limit the number of times." It is possible that he feels a struggle between participating in order to get language knowledge, and having language knowledge in order to participate effectively.

Extract 3 (Lesson 6: The beach)

```
1      David:       I think number one dangerous action is motorbike
2      Partner 1:   Yes I agree with you
3      Partner 2:   a:↓ I don't agree hh huh (slight laughter)
               (Turns omitted; justification that the bike can avoid children)
4      Partner 2:   (0.4) so↓ hh it is (0.7) I think it is not dangerous
5      David:       Pit sto::p
6                   baiku wo bousou suru kamoshirenai
                    he might lose control of the bike
7      Partner 1:   h↓e::::↑ bousou
                           lose control
8      Partner 2:   a: I think break down
9      Partner 1:   a:: break down koshou suru tekina
                              like to break down
10     David:       yes yes pit stop over
```

In the language journal, I targeted his use of online planning, and encouraged him to remind his friends that using the pit stop will result in a higher score for the group's discussions. I encouraged him to not worry about grammar, but that words were important. Extract 3 is taken from the final discussion task, in which students are discussing whether riding a motorcycle on the beach is acceptable or should be prohibited. David makes the suggestion first that riding a motorbike should be prohibited. One of his partners disagrees, and provides some justification that the rider can avoid the children. David uses the pit stop in order to justify his original suggestion. When compared with the earlier extracts, it can be seen that David has now used a resource to invest in his own learning instead of complying with the previous speaker. (The mis-translation in turn 8 was actually corrected a few turns later). The decision to alter his own behaviour could have been facilitated by the support one of his partner's provided in turn 2. The unconvincing nature of the counter argument to his suggestion might also have given him the confidence to add a justification for his own reason.

Extract 4 (Lesson 6: The beach)

```
1      David:       (3) I don't see.
2      Partner 2:   Pit stop
3      David:       o↑ka:y↓
4      Partner 3:   okay `hh
```

In addition, Extract 4 shows an earlier stage of the discussion when another of his partners took the initiative to open the pit stop use. He warmly welcomed its use and

supported his partner with his intonation in turn 3, and thus helped to imbue the pit stop with value. This utterance speaks to his history with the pit stop. The utterance acts to counter the negative connotations that came with that history, and sets up the context for Extract 3 which came just a few turns later. There are potentially a number of factors which have contributed to David's decision to invest in his language learning, but one of those key factors is David's greater awareness of the pit stop's potential value, possibly mediated through the language journal, as well as his agency in setting up its value in Extract 4, leading to its eventual deployment in Extract 3.

Analysis: Mary

Mary is a highly motivated, outgoing student. She is one of the higher proficiency students, and she has always actively participated in communication activities. Controlling the sequencing of tasks was very important for her, and on one occasion she exhibited frustration at her group members for changing the direction of a task in a way that did not suit her. This sequencing seemed to hold value for her for successful participation in class. She wrote in response to the prompt, "What did you learn in this lesson?" by describing one of the tasks she had done in class: "First, I suggested it to decide whether it was a good day or a bad day. Second we thought about why we thought that it was a good day and a bad day. Third I started to think about a situation." The task in question was to decide, based on pictures, whether characters had had a good day or bad day and rank the experiences in terms of how good and bad those days were. In fact, the importance of appropriate sequencing for her is seen in Extract 5. After exchanging some information about the picture, Mary's partner tried to move into describing the scene in turn 1. However, Mary countered this move by reminding her partner in turns 3 and 4 that they should first decide whether the day is a good day or not.

Extract 5 (Lesson 1: Good days and bad days)

```
1      Partner:      hhh what happened?
2      Mary:           [so::        [yeah eh:: (1)
3                    he he is g- good day or bad day
4                    so I we decide good day or bad day
5      Partner:                       [oh:: mm::
```

Mary's attempt to control the sequencing of a discussion was a regular feature of her extracts. In extract 6, she tries to control the sequence implicitly by starting to list some of the anti-social behaviours in turns 1 and 2 that should be evaluated in advance of deciding the respective fines.

In turn 6, one partner suggests moving forward with giving reasons, which Mary supports in turn 7, but her other partner starts the ranking stage of the discussion in turn 9. In turn 11, Mary attempts to rescue her original intention of evaluating the anti-social behaviours. However, in turn 12, her partners continue with deciding the level of fine. Mary, being one of the higher proficiency students, is probably able to see the value in sequencing the discussion in the way she attempted since it is more likely to lead to a deeper, extensive discussion. As it stands, Extract 6 shows her

partners moving spontaneously and impulsively towards the task's goal and missing

Extract 6 (Lesson 2: Dorm room)

```
1    Mary:         M:aybe (.) I think (2) ˙hh mm:: leaving a fire should be: prohibi::
2                  >^leaving the fi:re< (2) listening a nn music
3    Partner 1:                         [oh            [mm mmm
4    Mary:         e:::m
5    Partner 1:    mm↓
6    Partner 2:    (3) one reason
7    Mary:         yah
8    Partner 2:    ˙h one reason
9    Partner 1:    a:: which is higher=
10   Partner 2:    =reading a book is higher
11   Mary:         (2) a:: leaving a:: mm
12   Partner 1:                   [Top
13   Partner 2:    one
14   Partner 1:    five thousand
```

opportunities for the depth of talk that Mary's preferred sequence would allow for. Unfortunately for Mary, the impulsive talk of her partners is quite fast, and Mary does not have time to mobilise the linguistic resources to successfully persuade her partners to follow her sequence. Extract 7 illustrates this problem in more detail. The students had just discussed that leaving the gas on in the dorm room is dangerous, and Mary had attempted to compare it with listening to music loudly in turn 1. She outlines her reason in turn 5 by code switching into Japanese, and by turn 7 she is trying to figure out how to say it in English. However, her partner counters the argument in turn 9 and Mary, in turn 11, gives up her attempt at making a comparison. It is possible that she realised her argument would not stand up against the original suggestion that leaving the gas on is the most dangerous, but the futility of her approach may have been augmented by her failure earlier in the task to set up an appropriate sequence for comparing items. The talk in this lesson continued in much the same way, with impulsive decisions about levels of fines and only brief diversions into explaining reasons.

Extract 7 (Lesson 2: Dorm room)

```
1    Mary:         a:: listening a music is (.) ˙so::˙ (2) mm ˙hh (2)
2    Partner 1:    (laughter)
3    Partner 2:    mawari no hito
                   people who live around here
4    Partner 1:    un un
5    Mary:         ni meiwaku wo kakeruka
                   won't it cause trouble for them
6    Partner 1:    mm
7    Mary:         >but< (.) so (1) many- wait wait wait
8    Partner 1:                    [(laughter)
9    Partner 2:    eto (.) are mo (focus) mawari ga hi ga
                        but the fire also causes trouble
10   Mary:                                     [m
11:                >okay< people will be fire
```

These extracts show Mary's struggle to operate within a loosely defined speech genre. The goals of the task were clear to the students, but the route to achieving them was still being negotiated. This became a source of frustration for Mary. Having observed her frustration I decided to use the language journal to focus on encouraging Mary to explicitly organise her group, writing "Please be the leader of your group." I also encouraged her to use the "listen-summarise-suggest" leadership skill, feeling that this would give her the opportunity to discuss items in depth. When asked about what she thinks a leader should do in a discussion, she wrote "The leader of the discussion have to say how to form all opinion". Later, when asked if she could use the leadership skill, she wrote "I can use leadership advice. I can hear other student's opinion. But every other student worked hard like I did."

Extract 8 (Lesson 6: The beach)

```
1       Partner 1:   let's::: discussio::n
2       Mary:        >okay ^first< (2) decide (.) five actions w(hh)ich
                     are proha (.) pro::hi ha
3       Partner 3:                        [prohibit action actions
```

Extract 8 shows how Mary explicitly clarifies the task structure in the final lesson in turn 2. There are no attempts by her partners to shift the talk towards deciding levels of fines in an impulsive way. However, more interestingly, in Extract 9, turns 2 and 5, Mary is seen to offer verbal cues of support for her partner's suggestions. These kinds of utterances are not as prominent in earlier extracts, and here they act to facilitate more extended turns for her partners. Her partners had the opportunity to modify their English output on a number of occasions.

Extract 9 (Lesson 6: The beach)

```
1       Partner 1:   m:: (clear throat) hh the ball a- ball (0.7) hit (.) around people
2       Mary:                                                   [mm::↓
3       Partner 1:   maybe maybe maybe (2)
4                    and (3) big pla- uh↑
5       Mary:                    [okay okay okay↑
```

Extract 10 shows Mary taking extended turns after listening to her partners' suggestions. She summarises her partner's suggestions in turn 1, coinciding with both the leadership advice and her own belief that the leader should say all opinions. When making her own suggestion in turn 2 she takes another extended turn. Both these turns show pushed and modified output. However, Extracts 8, 9 and 10 all show that Mary has successfully negotiated her role within the task. She has found a way to sequence the tasks appropriately, give support to her partners as is characteristic of her outgoing nature, and find opportunities for extended output that coincide with her values towards English language learning. Her values towards participation in discussion classes can be seen when she writes about giving good reasons: "I have to think about the reason of general not the reason of mine. I have to give clear and detailed explanations by using concrete example. I have to use plain English." It could be argued that in these three extracts, Mary has found a way to bring to life her identity as a successful English language learner.

Extract 10 (Lesson 6: The beach)

```
1    Mary:      e::m the man and dogs (.) playingu:: (1) the ball (.) b(hh)all game
                so (2) you said (.) so (.) they need large (.) place and u::
                dog (.) had (.) lead↑
                so dog ru ru::n free place
                (turns omitted)

2    Mary:      so (.) children and old people (.) >maybe< maybe:: dogs (2)
                un hh ˙hh d(hh)ogs hh injure (2) nn baby and children older people↑
                so::: this action hn is bad thing ˙maybe˙
                d(hhh)o you th(hhh)ink↑ ˙hh
```

Discussion

In both cases, formative assessment was seen to have had an impact on the ways the students carried out their interaction in class. In David's case, the time out tool and the language journal were combined and provided David with resources for his own agency. He altered his interaction styles and invested in the pit stop, which in turn created opportunities for learning. Facing difficulties of interaction during group work in order to deploy a resource demonstrates language investment.

Formative assessment worked for Mary by providing her with a meta-cognitive tool to reflect on the processes of interaction in the language journal, and also allow her to plan communication strategies. This allowed her to better control the sequences of discussion, in line with her ideology towards language learning, and in turn provided moments for extended pushed output. Over time, and with the assistance of the formative assessment tools, Mary was able to alter her own behaviour to create a learning environment that was more suited to her identity as a learner.

Formative assessment, then, can be seen as the deployment of resources both in the curriculum (leadership skills) and through practical tools (pit stop, language journal). The teacher, through mediating the use of these tools, can help learners to take control of their own learning. However, there are limitations which can be seen in the data. Mary's group, for example, preferred to use the pit stop to code switch into Japanese, continue the discussion in Japanese briefly, and then revert back to English. In spite of advice to use the pit stop to modify their output, they never changed their behaviour in that respect. Similarly, David was given leadership advice, but admitted in his journal that he was unable to use it because he had reached his limit just by giving his opinion. Both of these examples show that students ultimately decide how best to use the resources available to them. This also highlights the importance of providing a set of resources that are easily accessible and relevant for learners.

Conclusion

In a review of communication research in EFL, Zhou (2013, p.19) recommended further research into identity negotiation and investment in learning. Bakhtin's concept of the utterance offers an analytical tool for this, and was used here to demonstrate how formative assessment resources affected changes in the interaction styles of two learners over a six week period of discussion task performances. Addressivity was the first feature of the utterance discussed. This acknowledges that

the utterances are a part of the classroom institution, and investment and identity construction are therefore taking place within this context. The second feature was voice appropriation. Changes in utterances, such as coming to use supportive utterances (uh huh, mm) more extensively, and changes in intonation, can be interpreted as strategic attempts to invest in the interaction and create opportunities for extended output, in response to the history of a particular group's interaction. Bakhtin's concept of the utterance highlights how the design of formative assessment resources needs to account for the development of interaction within specific groups. Continued research into the interactional development within groups should be encouraged on a larger scale so that various interactional features can be drawn out, and formative assessment resources which enhance language learning investment and identity construction can be designed and deployed more effectively.

Bakhtin's concept of the utterance, when mobilised as an analytical tool, has direct practical consequences for three main issues in second language education: i) it demonstrates the processes by which opportunities for language acquisition in peer interaction can change or can be changed over time; ii) it provides an alternative assessment of learners' discussion task improvements; iii) it impacts on the design of formative assessment resources that are sensitive to the learners' willingness to invest in language learning and their ever shifting language learning identities. From a theoretical standpoint, the utterance shows how formative assessment bridges the gap not just between teaching and learning, but also between post-structuralist notions of investment and identity and structuralist notions of language recycling and proceduralisation.

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Contact email: daniel1124@kwansei.ac.jp