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Working Collaboratively in Second/Foreign Language Learning

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This book is dedicated to the loving memory of my mother, María del Pilar Mayo Santos.

Volver para non esquecer.

Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I welcome readers to this collection of scholarly work that views collaboration in second and foreign language (SL/FL) learning through multiple lenses. An advocate for the use of interactive tasks in Spanish EFL classrooms for more than two decades, Dr. García Mayo is exceptionally well-suited to edit this collection. Starting with her early research about the use of form-focused tasks in EFL classrooms, she has continually pushed classroom-based research forward by exploring diverse aspects of collaboration in ecologically-valid instructional settings. Her work has investigated multiple topics related to the design and implementation of collaborative tasks, such as task modality, task repetition, pair formation method, and group size. These empirical studies have addressed key questions that SL/FL instructors confront when deciding how to create and use tasks in their classrooms, especially instructors who work with young learners and adolescents. In addition to task characteristics and implementation factors, she has also examined another key factor in the success of collaborative tasks, namely learners' attitudes toward task-based interaction. As SL/FL instructors can confirm, a perfectly designed and carefully implemented task can fail horribly if learners do not perceive its value and relevance.

The impetus for this edited collection stems in part from the *Oral-Written Connection in Second/Foreign Language Learning* conference (March 2018) organized by Dr. García Mayo in her role as director of the *Language and Speech* research group (www.laslab.org). Funded by grants from the Basque government, the conference explored the various ways that collaboration promotes SL/FL learning. Plenary speakers highlighted how collaboration within and across modalities creates learning opportunities while also acknowledging the importance of learner factors such as motivation. As attested by the diversity of topics across the conference programme, researchers are moving in new directions to refine the construct of collaboration, examine the interface between oral and written language use, and identify areas of convergence and divergence between face-to-face and computer-mediated collaborations.

Reflecting this diversity, this edited collection brings together 10 chapters that collectively explore three main themes about collaboration in SL/FL classrooms. At the forefront of this research is the recognition that asking learners to work in pairs and small groups is no guarantee that they will truly collaborate while carrying out a face-to-face or computer-mediated tasks. Of interest to both instructors and researchers, the quest to understand the factors that either encourage or discourage learners to work together is the focus of several chapters that examine patterns of interaction with different age groups and task

types. A second theme evident throughout the volume is the need to further investigate the effects that collaboration has on SL/FL learners. In addition to examining traditional constructs such as language-related episodes and patterns of interaction, these chapters also explore how collaboration affects written text quality, grammatical knowledge, production of lexico-grammatical features, and pragmatic competence. The volume also examines whether the benefits associated with collaborative performance transfer to individual performance. By casting a broader net, these studies expand our view about what aspects of SL/FL performance and knowledge may be impacted by collaboration.

A final theme that unites the chapters is recognition of the need to broaden the empirical basis of collaboration research. The volume brings together collaboration research carried out in multiple countries (e.g., Canada, Indonesia, Spain, United States) that targets different second languages (e.g., English, German, Spanish). Although much collaboration research has been conducted with university students, this volume includes several chapters that report studies with adolescent participants. In many chapters, the researchers situated their research materials in specific learning contexts by exploiting activities from common lessons, tasks vetted by instructors, and activities adopted from course design. Reflecting the growing role of technological tools in SL/FL learning, the volume features studies in which collaboration occurred while co-constructing a text in person using a Moodle platform, asynchronous interaction via Google docs, and a combination of face-to-face interaction followed by asynchronous collaboration. However, reflecting its continuing importance in SL/FL teaching, collaboration during face-to-face interaction is also examined in several chapters. Reflecting both the age and proficiency level of the participants, the analysis of short written texts (approximately 100 words) is explored in several chapters, which is a welcome addition to collaborative writing research that has largely focused on longer texts produced by more proficient writers. By including a variety of languages, countries, and data elicitation tasks, this edited volume makes an important contribution to expanding the boundaries of collaboration research. This collection is sure to be of interest for readers from a wide range of backgrounds.

Kim McDonough

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María del Pilar García Mayo

Introduction

Collaborative learning has played an important role in the second language (L2) classroom since the times of communicative language teaching (Savignon 1991). Research on collaborative work has been informed by both cognitive (Long 1983, 1996) and sociocultural (Vygotsky 1978) theories. Cognitive theories highlight the facilitative role of learner interaction (i.e. the use of language for communicative purposes with a focus on meaning rather than on formal aspects of the target language) in the language learning process (García Mayo and Alcón Soler 2013; Loewen and Sato 2018). Interaction has been claimed to provide not only positive input but also opportunities for learners' 'pushed output' in order to make their message more comprehensible (Swain 2005). During interaction learners can also receive feedback from their interlocutors (teachers and/or peers), which also plays a crucial role in L2 learning. The negotiation of meaning that takes place during interaction has been claimed to trigger cognitive mechanisms (noticing, for example (Schmidt 1990)) crucial for language learning. Storch (2013:13) points out that "This hypothesis [the interaction hypothesis] provides a rationale for the use of small group and pair work in the language classroom."

Sociocultural theories state that human cognitive development is a socially situated activity mediated by language. Specifically, knowledge is claimed to be socially constructed by interaction with others and then internalized. The gap between current and potential abilities in order to perform a task independently is known as *scaffolding*. Some authors have studied interaction to discover how dialogue is used as a cognitive tool (Donato and Lantolf 1990). As Storch (2016: 389) points out, Swain (2000) reconceptualized her output hypothesis to reflect that "[. . .] production of language, whether speaking or writing, was a communicative and a cognitive activity." More importance was given to the dialogue learners generated while they completed tasks than to output *per se*, Swain (2000) coined this dialogue *collaborative dialogue*, which she claims allows learners to co-construct knowledge and finally internalize it. The unit of analysis used to code learner collaborative dialogue was the language-related episode (LRE), defined as instances in the conversation where learners "talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, or correct themselves or other" (Swain and Lapkin 1998: 326). Collaborative dialogue is seen as language learning

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mediated by language and has been shown to lead to learning in both second and foreign language contexts (Alegría de la Colina and García Mayo, 2007; Basterrechea and García Mayo 2013; Calzada and García Mayo, 2020a, 2020b; García Mayo 2002, 2014; Imaz Agirre and García Mayo; 2020; Kim 2008). Research has shown that the solutions reached by learners working collaboratively during task completion are mainly correct and lasting in time (see review in Storch 2013) so there is a clear pedagogical implication of this type of research. More recently, Swain (2006) introduced the term *linguaging* to capture the process in which learners verbalize their thinking. She maintains that learners benefit from linguaging because first they externalize their thoughts and then these thoughts provide them with objects to reflect on: “Learners are expected to learn through the process and the product of their linguaging.” (Ishikawa 2018: 51). In short, linguaging contributes to L2 learning.

Collaborative work can be carried out with tasks that lead to oral production or with tasks that also incorporate a final written product. Research in L2 acquisition has traditionally favored spoken discourse but is now turning its interest towards writing and the interconnection between the two modalities. The impact of task modality on L2 interaction has been the subject of recent research in the second language acquisition field with most studies showing that tasks that encourage oral interaction tend to focus learners’ attention on meaning, whereas those that incorporate a writing component focus learners’ attention on form (García Mayo and Azkarai 2016). Although there are many differences between the two modalities, one of the most important has to do with time: in oral tasks there is more online processing by the learners, who have little time to react immediately to their partner’s questions/concerns. When a written component is included, learners have more time to process feedback received by peers and to refine the L2 output they produce, focusing on formal aspects of the language they are learning.

A task that combines both modalities is collaborative writing. Storch (2019:40) defines collaborative writing as “an activity that requires the co-authors to be involved in all stages of the writing process, sharing the responsibility for and the ownership of the entire text produced.” There has been a growing interest in collaborative writing among researchers and educators in recent years, which she attributes to the importance of writing in teams in the workplace and to the advent of Web 2.0 applications (blogs, wikis, Google Docs . . . etc), which have transformed what used to be an individual activity in the language classroom into one in which learners co-construct their knowledge while writing. The use of collaborative writing tasks reflects a move from a traditional learning-to-write perspective to one which combines writing-to-learn and learning-to-write (Manchón 2011). Whereas traditionally language learners were taught how

to reproduce a model text in the target language, the process of collaborative writing is an opportunity for learners not only to compose texts in the L2 but also to learn about its lexicon and grammar.

Against this backdrop, the main aim of this volume is to share with the reader ten chapters that illustrate the benefits of collaborative dialogue in second/foreign language classrooms and to contribute to research in the field in several ways. The data featured in the different chapters enlarge the empirical database about collaborative work and written tasks providing information about research carried out in different countries (Australia, Germany, Indonesia, the US, Spain), with learners with different first languages (Arabic, Basque, Chinese, English, German, Japanese, Korean and Spanish) and learning English as a second or a foreign language and other foreign languages. This volume also includes studies in collaborative writing conducted with young learners, an under-researched cohort in research on collaborative writing (Storch 2013). The three chapters by Kos, Villarreal and Munarriz-Ibarrola and Villarreal, Bueno-Alastuey and Sáez-León report on studies conducted with adolescent and young learners collaborating in the completion of oral tasks and oral tasks that incorporate a written component. The empirical data in the chapters are analyzed from Vygotsky's Socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky 1978), Engeström's Activity Theory (Engeström 1990) and Conversation Analysis (Sidnell 2010).

Another contribution of the volume has to do with the analysis of factors that (de)motivate learners to collaborate face-to-face (FTF), online and in blended environments. As McDonough mentions in her foreword, teachers and researchers should not assume that learners will adopt a collaborative mode just because they are performing a collaborative task and, therefore, it is important to assess the variables that play a role. The chapters by Storch, Kos, Villarreal and Munárriz-Ibarrola, Aufa and Storch, Li and Cho consider some of those variables such as agency, attitudes, beliefs, goals, hesitation to provide peer feedback, mutuality, ownership, patterns of interaction, self-perceived and other-perceived roles.

The various chapters provide a wealth of examples showing the reader how learners use language when they collaborate to complete different types of tasks in diverse environments (FTF and online) in second and foreign language settings. They also offer insights about the effects of collaboration on language learning opportunities, operationalized as LREs, patterns of interaction, the nature of the learners' written product, grammatical knowledge, pragmatic competence and even on first language writing skills. Some of the chapters feature small scale studies or case studies (Geist and Hahn, González-Lloret, Li, and Cho) whose findings cannot be generalized but which provide interesting

suggestions for further research on the basis of the results reported. As Storch (2013: 169) observed:

Detailed microgenetic investigations of what transpires during collaborative writing activities can provide researchers with insights into how learning is happening and why learning may or may not happen during collaborative work. Such insights can be used to inform instructors on how to implement collaborative writing activities more effectively and thus improve learning outcomes

In her contribution “Collaborative writing: Promoting languaging among learners”, **Storch** provides a critical review of research on collaborative writing. The review highlights that although collaborative writing may provide learners with opportunities for two forms of languaging (collaborative dialogue and private speech), it is collaborative dialogue that may be more conducive to L2 learning. The main focus of this chapter, however, is on factors that have been shown to impact on learners’ languaging opportunities. These factors include both learner and context related factors. In this chapter, Storch focuses in particular on learners’ sense of textual ownership, a construct that to date has received scant attention in L2 research. She then proposes a range of pedagogical strategies that may enhance learners’ sense of ownership and thus encourage them to contribute to the task and engage with each other’s contributions. These recommendations are important because, as Storch argues “[. . .] as researchers and teachers we need to consider how to implement collaborative writing tasks more effectively in order to maximize the learning opportunities these tasks afford to learners.”

In Chapter 2 “The efficacy of collaboratively completing form-focused tasks: A research synthesis”, **Scotland** examines both the designs and the findings of eleven studies that have explored whether collaborative work is more effective than individual work when employing form-focused tasks to promote the development of specific L2 grammatical features. The learning of grammar is central to language learning (Nassaji 2017) and recent research has pointed out the need for effective grammar pedagogy (Kasprowicz and Marsden 2018). Whether or not collaborative work is appropriate to facilitate the development of L2 grammar is worth investigating. Scotland used the following set of criteria in the selection of the studies analyzed: the study intentionally targeted at least one pre-specified grammatical feature, it had at least one participant group which worked collaboratively in pairs or small groups to complete at least one form-focused task, and potential gains in grammatical accuracy were measured using at least one pretest and at least one posttest. The author reviews those eleven research studies carried out from psychological or sociocultural perspectives, highlights some of their methodological limitations and suggests how those limitations could be addressed in future research. On the basis of his review and considering

the methodological shortcomings found in previous research, we have to conclude that more studies are needed in order to be able to claim that form-focused tasks completed in collaboration lead to sustained gains in grammatical knowledge (Calzada and García Mayo 2020b).

The following six chapters focus on collaborative work in foreign language settings. They include empirical studies which illustrate how learners in this low-input setting, where few opportunities for meaningful language exchanges exist in and outside the school context, interact while completing tasks in collaboration both FTF, online or in a blended environment. In Chapter 3, “What exactly is mutuality? An analysis of mixed-age peer interaction on classroom tasks in German secondary schools”, **Kos** investigates the oral interactions of 20 adolescent learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Germany in a mixed-age (MA) classroom, that is, a classroom composed of two or three different grades. He is interested in analyzing the construct of mutuality, defined by Storch (2002) as the level of engagement learners have with each other’s contributions. The ten dyads were audio-recorded when interacting in regular classroom tasks completed collaboratively and which were part of a unit of work lasting two and a half months. The researcher also conducted interviews with the participants in their first language so that he could triangulate data from the audio-recordings and the interviews. Kos provides very detailed definitions of three levels of mutuality (high, moderate and low) identified in the learners’ interactions and illustrates them with different excerpts. The findings indicate that most pairs engaged in interactions which were moderate or high on mutuality and that mutuality affected the number of LREs generated. This study contributes to refining the construct ‘mutuality’, in which social, cognitive and emotional dimensions intertwine and, suggests that multidimensional measures of engagement should be used to assess it (Philp and Duchesne 2016). Moreover, the interaction of the under-research population of teenagers in an MA classroom is documented in a longitudinal design and the relationship between the dyads’ degree of mutuality and actual learning opportunities created during peer interaction is assessed.

In Chapter 4, ““Together we do better”: The effect of pair and group work on young EFL learners’ written texts and attitudes”, **Villarreal and Munarritz-Ibarrola** consider the effects of type of learner setup (pair and small group) on learners’ engagement (operationalized as LREs), the written output and the attitudes toward writing of 21 groups of 12–13 year old Basque-Spanish EFL learners. Collaboration among young foreign language learners is still an underexplored area in spite of the fact that this population has increased worldwide (Enever 2018). No study to date has examined how learner grouping affects the writing process of young learners, whether they engage in language-focused discussions and, if they do, how successful they are at solving them.

The participants wrote a narrative text individually (pre-test) and a week later a second narrative text in pairs or small groups of three, and their interactions were recorded for the analysis of LREs. They also completed a satisfaction questionnaire about writing, group work, collaborative work and the quality of the collaborative text. The researchers analyzed the written texts for accuracy, fluency, mechanics and lexical range and global scales. The findings showed that groups created more opportunities for discussing grammar and lexical issues but pairs arrived at more target-like solutions. Regarding the nature of the texts produced, pairs and small groups wrote better texts than individuals but learner setup had an impact on different constructs. Thus, writing in pairs led to greater fluency but writing in small groups led to better scores in lexical and grammatical accuracy and global scales. Regarding learners' attitudes to collaborative work, Villarreal and Munarriz-Ibarrola's findings supported those in previous research because these young learners were very positive about the collaborative experience. As the authors state "Writing together is, therefore, an opportunity for the meaningful integration of the four skills that cannot be missed in F(oreign)L(anguage) settings."

Chapter 5, "The effect of collaborative writing on individual writing strategies. A case study of two L2 English writers", presents a case study of two German EFL learners taking a university language course at the language center of a large German university. The participants differed in their proficiency level in English (A2 and B2). **Geist and Hahn** offer a detailed qualitative analysis of the two learners' individual writing and problem-solving strategies at two points in time. The study focuses on how a collaborative writing experience influences the writing process of individuals rather than the co-authored written product. It seeks to answer the question of whether there is a transfer of composing strategies and focus on form from collaborative to individual writing tasks, and which aspects are transferred to individual writing. The research design was comprised of three writing tasks (individual, collaborative, individual) on different topics in the same genre. Document sharing technology with a recording facility was used to record the composing activity in both the individual and the collaborative writing sessions. In addition, the spoken interactions in the collaborative writing session were audio-recorded and stimulated-recall interviews were conducted after the individual writing sessions in order to gain deeper insights into composing strategies, the focus of LREs and the choice and use of problem-solving strategies. The data gathered were analyzed qualitatively with respect to observable effects of the collaborative writing task on the composing strategies of individuals. Areas of interest in the analysis include the individual phases of the writing process and composing strategies, including planning, monitoring, revising, noticing and focus on form (as demonstrated in LREs) and the use of problem-solving strategies. The findings

showed that collaborative writing might not only influence the written product but that it may also influence L2 writing and problem-solving strategies relevant for individual writing. The findings of this small scale study identify areas worth of future investigation and the kind of research tools (e.g. think-aloud protocols) and design (longitudinal) to be used in such future studies.

In chapter 6, “Learner interaction in blended collaborative L2 writing activities”, **Aufa and Storch** examine the patterns of interaction formed during the blended (FTF and online – Google Docs) collaborative prewriting activities of Indonesian EFL learners and the LREs generated during those activities. This study is the first to investigate the nature of collaboration when the collaborative writing activity is implemented in a blended approach. Over the course of a 16-week semester, 27 undergraduate students at a university in Indonesia completed six different text genres in three dyads and seven triads. The researchers collected qualitative data from classroom observation, recorded group talk, computer log files, and the jointly produced texts. Drawing on Storch’s (2002) model and other studies on patterns of interaction in the online mode, the authors identified five typical patterns: collaborative, cooperative, facilitative/cooperative; facilitative/cooperative/cooperative and cooperative/passive/passive; all illustrated in detail in different excerpts in the chapter.

The findings showed that most groups displayed variations with regard to their patterns of interaction in the blended setting across modes. Most groups approached the task in the two modes differently: in the FTF the pairs and triads tended to form a cooperative pattern with one member taking a leading role and facilitating interaction, whereas in the online mode the pattern became cooperative or cooperative/passive/passive, with no member taking a leading role to move the task along. The collaborative pattern in both modes produced the highest number of LREs, that is, the pattern of interaction affected the quantity of LREs generated. Mode also impacted on the quantity and the resolution of LREs, with more frequent and correctly resolved LREs in the FTF mode than online, but not their focus, which was mainly lexical in both modes. The study showed that the mode and the interactional patterns the learners formed seemed to influence whether learners engaged in language.

In chapter 7 “Computer-based collaborative writing with young learners: Effects on text quality”, **Villarreal, Bueno-Alastuey and Sáez-León** explored the effect of different groupings (individual vs. collaborative) and different writing modes (FTF vs. online) on the quality of texts written by 28 young (12–13) first year secondary school students. The researchers analyzed a total of 56 texts, which were assessed quantitatively for accuracy and fluency and qualitatively using holistic scales assessing content and language use. The findings point to a positive role of collaboration for accuracy, fluency and holistic measures and

support the benefits of technology-based collaborative writing. As for mode, most of the results favored paper-based written texts, which were more accurate and had an overall better quality. The authors reflect on the possible lack of learner collaboration skills in the online mode and on how teachers should raise learner awareness of the increased opportunities for interactive and meaningful practices offered by technology-based collaborative writing.

Chapter 8 “Online collaboration through tasks for L2 pragmatic development” presents another study in a foreign language setting, this time with Spanish as a foreign language at a US university, but also considers tasks developed via synchronous text-based computer-mediated communication (CMC). Unlike other studies that have employed LREs as units of analysis, González-Lloret employs Conversational Analysis to analyze the interaction of two pairs of university students, one student from a US university and another from a Spanish university, and a group of three students (two from the US and one from Spain), while they engage in telcollaboration. The US students were learners of L2 Spanish and the Spanish students were learners of L2 English. She presents a detailed analysis of how conversational closings change throughout the six weeks of the study and how they develop to be more similar to those of the expert speakers in the amount of turns, length, and sequential structure within the affordances of the medium. The study demonstrates how technology-mediated tasks can facilitate collaborative engagement that results in the development of the learners’ L2 pragmatics, specifically, the study shows how L2 learners’ closings change when interacting with an expert speaker in a telecollaborative online environment.

The two final chapters in the volume report on work carried out in English as a second language (ESL) contexts and they are both framed within an Activity Theory Perspective. In Chapter 9, “Participation and interaction in wiki-based collaborative writing: An Activity Theory Perspective”, Li analyzes peer interaction and explains interconnected components (tools, rules, community, division of labor, objects and outcome) within a wiki group writing activity. Specifically, the chapter focuses on two small groups (each with three members) in an English for Academic Purposes course at a public university in the US. They jointly worked on two collaborative wiki writing tasks (research proposal and annotated bibliography) and were required to communicate in the L2. Li shows that the two groups demonstrated distinctive patterns of interaction: Expert/novice for Group A (mid-low equality, high mutuality) and cooperating-in-parallel (high equality, low mutuality) for Group B. She then discusses interconnected components that afford and/or constrain these ESL students’ participation and learning, namely, mediating tools (wiki), object (collaboration in the wiki writing task), division of labor, rules (MLA formatting and no L1 allowed) and community, and identifies contradictions

embedded in the system. Li concludes that the wiki proved to be a good tool allowing for L2 learning but that training is essential in computer-mediated collaborative writing so that students can take full advantage of technology.

In the final chapter, “Factors mediating small group interactions during synchronous web-based collaborative summary writings using Google Docs”, **Cho** investigates why small group interactional patterns vary in the context of web-based collaborative writing. In her study she compares two separate synchronous modes of CMC to assess whether and how they foster different types of collaboration. The participants, six ESL learners (all from East Asia) divided into two groups of three members each, were recruited from an English debate club at a Canadian university. They collaboratively wrote debate summaries (about an hour each) three times using web-based tools: Google Docs and voice chat (Skype). All participants completed a one-hour stimulated-recall interview in which they commented on the collaboration process. Cho identifies collaborative and leader/participants patterns, although the former was predominant. She also examines how participant goals prompted different actions and individual goals influenced group interaction patterns. Moreover, she identifies five factors that mediated small group collaboration: voice chat, matching self-perceived and other-perceived roles, hesitation to provide peer-feedback, understanding of task requirements and task familiarity. Cho concludes by providing some insights for teachers who want to use web-based collaborative writing activities, including the concept of co-ownership.

The discussion and investigation of issues related to collaborative work will make this volume a worthy contribution to the current debates on the value of such a pedagogical approach for language learning, and will hence advance the research agenda. All the issues covered in the different chapters will appeal to a wide audience interested in second/foreign language learning and teaching, mainly to researchers, graduate (MA, Ph.D.) students, and stakeholders/educators. It will be of interest to researchers and students because further studies will be fostered by the contributions in the volume. Future investigations may also benefit from deploying different research tools to complement existing ones. These tools may include key stroke logging and eye tracking data (Leijter and Van Waes 2013; Li, Dursun and Hegelheimer 2017). The volume will also be of interest to stakeholders/educators because they will find ideas for pedagogical practice. In fact, a call for research-informed, evidence-based pedagogic recommendations is currently being made in the second language acquisition field (Boers 2017; Marsden and Kaspruwicz 2017).

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Neomy Storch

Collaborative writing: Promoting languaging among language learners

1 Introduction

Interest in collaborative writing tasks has increased over the past two decades, as a growing body of research (see review in Storch 2013, 2019a) has shown the language learning benefits of such tasks. This research has provided ample empirical evidence that collaborative writing tasks encourage second language (L2) learners to engage in deliberations about the target language, deliberations that have been referred to as *languaging*, as well as some evidence that such deliberations lead to language (and writing) development. This research has also identified some of the factors that may influence the quantity, quality and outcome of these deliberations. Therefore, what we need now is a greater understanding of these factors and to consider strategies that could promote languaging in order to maximise the language learning opportunities afforded by these tasks. In this chapter I focus on these factors and strategies, extending on previous discussions (Storch 2013, 2017) by drawing on more recent research in the field of L2 writing and beyond. In particular, I focus on learners' sense of ownership, an aspect of collaborative writing that to date has received scant attention.

The chapter begins with an overview of research on collaborative writing and its theoretical underpinnings. It then proceeds to critically discuss research on factors that have been identified as impacting on the occurrence and nature of languaging, including that of ownership. A discussion of a range of pedagogical strategies follows, including strategies that may promote among learners a sense of collective ownership which is germane to collaboration. In discussing these factors and strategies I also identify areas that need additional investigation. As such, the chapter seeks to address the interests of both L2 writing teachers and researchers.

2 An overview of research on collaborative writing

Collaborative writing is defined as the co-authoring of one text by two or more writers (for a more elaborate definition see Storch 2013). It is important to note

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that the distinguishing traits of this co-authoring activity is a sense of a shared responsibility and ownership of the text and hence substantive involvement of all co-authors in all the stages in the production of the joint text. This means that in creating the joint text, the co-authors need to negotiate and agree about what ideas to include, how to organise these ideas, and how best to express these ideas (see Niu 2009). Thus, collaborative writing by combining writing and communication throughout the text composing process offer second language (L2) learners not only the language learning benefits associated with writing tasks (e.g., slow pace, visible output, see Williams 2012) but also the benefits associated with speaking tasks (e.g., the availability of an audience and immediate feedback). In other words, collaborative writing may provide more opportunities for language learning than speaking or writing tasks alone.

Research interest in collaborative writing tasks has grown substantially in the past two decades (see Storch 2019a). In early research (e.g., Storch 2001, 2002), the collaborative writing activities took place in the physical classroom, with learners communicating with each other orally, face-to-face (FTF). In more recent research (e.g., see review in Li 2018 and studies reported in this volume), collaborative writing activities have been predominantly computer-mediated, using online platforms such as wikis and Google Docs. In computer-mediated collaborative writing, learners can communicate in written form via text chats, in oral form using voice chats, or a combination of both. There are now also emerging studies (see Aufa and Storch this volume) which combine FTF and computer mediated modes of interaction

Most of the research on collaborative writing has been informed by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory (SCT). This theory views development of all higher order human cognitive capacities, including language learning, as socially co-constructed. Development occurs in interaction between experts and novices, where the expert (e.g., parents, teachers, more knowledgeable peers) provides appropriate assistance to the novice. The provision of assistance is mediated by a range of tools. These tools can be material artefacts (e.g., computers, toys) or symbolic (e.g., gestures, language). For assistance to be appropriate and effective it needs to be dynamic and graduated, aligning with the novice's evolving capacities rather than existing capacities. The difference between these two types of capacities is encapsulated in the construct the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and the carefully calibrated assistance has been referred to in the literature as *scaffolding* (Wood, Bruner, and Ross 1976). From a sociocultural perspective, learning is viewed as the internalization of socially co-constructed knowledge.

In L2 classrooms, Vygotsky's SCT and its focus on interaction has resonated with task based approaches to language instruction. Research on the nature of interaction in group and pair work soon revealed that assistance can also be

provided by peers of similar L2 proficiency, whether adults (e.g., Ohta 2001, van Lier 1996) or younger learners (e.g., García Mayo and Lázaro 2015, see also studies in this volume). Furthermore, Donato (1994) found evidence of learners pooling their linguistic resources during small group work, in a process he labelled *collective scaffolding*. This process enables the learners to perform beyond their existing capacity. Thus in collaborative writing tasks, depending on the L2 proficiency of the co-authors, the assistance may be provided by more proficient peers or by peers of similar L2 proficiency but with different areas of relative expertise, with learners pooling their linguistic resources to co-construct new knowledge. Such pooling of expertise rests on the simple yet profound premise put forward by the philosopher Lévy (1997, 13–14) that “No one knows everything, everyone knows something, all knowledge resides in humanity”.

The construct that has been used in research informed by SCT to describe task-based L2 interaction is *languaging* (see Suzuki and Storch 2020). Swain (2000, 2006), a leading sociocultural theorist, defines languaging as the act of using language as a tool to deliberate about and talk through a problem in order to solve the problem, including language related problems. In L2 classes, the language used as a tool can be the learners’ first (L1) or second language. Swain distinguishes between two forms of languaging: *private speech* which is speech directed to oneself and which is therefore usually sub-vocal and *collaborative dialogue* which is vocalised other-directed speech. Swain (2006) argues that both forms of languaging are means of acquiring new knowledge or consolidating existing knowledge. In other words, languaging is where learning occurs.

In collaborative writing tasks both forms of languaging take place. However, because in collaborative writing private speech occurs in the presence of others, it is externalised; that is, it is audible and can thus elicit a peer response. This immediate source of potential assistance is one of the key advantages of collaborative writing compared to individual writing. Another advantage is that deliberations during collaborative writing can provide opportunities for learners to pool their linguistic resources and co-construct new knowledge – a process not available during individual writing. The following excerpts, taken from studies conducted in different L2 learning contexts, illustrate these distinct language learning advantages available during collaborative writing.

Excerpt 1 comes from a large scale study conducted by Fernández Dobao (2012) with intermediate learners of Spanish in the USA. The excerpt comes from the talk of a pair working collaboratively on a jigsaw task. The long pauses and repetitions in Line 1 suggest that Rosie is having difficulties remembering the word for ship in Spanish. Her vocalised deliberations (self-directed talk) culminate in a request for assistance. Tori responds, offering the equivalent L2 word but is uncertain (Line 2). Rosie then confirms that it is the correct L2 word (Line

3) and Tori agrees. The vocalised deliberations in the context of collaborative writing thus provided these students language learning opportunities: for Rosie the opportunity to learn a new word, for Tori the opportunity to consolidate her existing knowledge after receiving Rosie's positive feedback (confirmation).

Excerpt 1: Language triggered by a need for assistance

- 1 Rosie: querían: e:h . . . e:h querían ir en un: ship?
 [they wanted eh . . . eh they wanted
 to go by: ship?]
- 2 Tori: barco?
 [ship?]
- 3 Rosie: barco! heh sí
 [ship! heh yes]
- 4 Tori: sí
 [yes]

Excerpt 2 comes from the study by Rouhshad and Storch (2016), which was based on Rouhshad's PhD study conducted with ESL learners in a pre-university English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course. Here deliberations about language were triggered by an other-correction by Peter for verb choice (Line 2), followed by an other-correction by Shawn for verb form (Line 3). Peter initially seems uncertain about whether to accept the correction (Line 4), and Shawn then sounds out two forms of the verb (Line 5) – another example perhaps of private speech. Hearing the two alternative forms may have helped Peter to decide which is the correct form (Line 6), a decision accepted by Shawn (Line 7). The deliberations in this excerpt represent collective scaffolding (Donato 1994) where the two learners pool their linguistic resources to co-construct a correct resolution. The process leads to the production of a joint text that is perhaps more accurate than the version that either learner could have produced on his own.

Excerpt 2: Language and collective scaffolding

- 1 Shawn: According to the reasons mentioned in the paragraph we
 can decide that
- 2 Peter: Or, we have decide
- 3 Shawn: We have decided
- 4 Peter: Uhm
- 5 Shawn: We have to decide, decided
- 6 Peter: We have decided to release
- 7 Shawn: Yeah

As these excerpts show, the two forms of languaging, self- and other-directed talk, occur in collaborative writing and it may not always be possible to clearly distinguish between the two. Moreover, these excerpts also suggest that other-directed forms of languaging provide learners with more opportunities for language learning than self-directed languaging. Vocalised deliberations by one learner in the pair may trigger peer feedback in the form of suggestions, explanations, confirmations as well as a pooling of resources. The extracts also show that the peer feedback offered during collaborative writing has a number of important characteristics that align with attributes of effective assistance (for a more detailed discussion see Storch 2019b). The feedback is timely and directly responsive to the learners' identified needs. It is also accessible, devoid of complex grammatical terminology and draws on a shared L1 when available. Moreover, the feedback is not only corrective but also positive (reassuring).

Research has shown that the resolutions learners reach during languaging episodes are predominantly correct (e.g., García Mayo and Imaz Agirre 2019, see also review in Storch 2013) and are remembered (Brooks and Swain 2009, Storch 2002). More importantly, a small number of studies have shown that the knowledge co-constructed during collaborative writing results in learning, including learning to write better texts (e.g., Bikowski and Withanage 2016, Shehadeh 2011) and language learning (e.g., Fernández Dobao 2014, Kim 2008, Storch 2002). As the excerpts above suggest, the interaction during collaborative writing can lead to new knowledge (Excerpt 1) and/or a consolidation of existing language knowledge (Excerpts 1 and 2).

However, it is important to note that the productive interactions depicted in these excerpts show all co-authors involved in the deliberations, working together through the problem encountered. This does not mean that simply assigning students to co-author a text will necessarily ensure that the learners will be willing to engage and contribute to the deliberations that arise. When humans interact, they do not merely exchange information, but also bring into the activity their agency; that is, their emotions, their goals, beliefs and desires and these affective factors will determine the kind of relationship they form. In my earlier research (Storch 2001, 2002) I reported on four distinct patterns of dyadic relationships which are distinguishable in terms of the learners' contribution and control over the task (termed equality) and engagement with each other's contribution (termed mutuality). These four patterns are: collaborative, dominant/dominant or cooperative, dominant/passive and expert/novice. What distinguished collaborative and expert/novice patterns from the other patterns is the high level of engagement with each other's contributions and more evidence of deliberations about language (i.e., languaging). Other studies, conducted in different L2 learning contexts, including collaborative writing implemented using

online collaborative writing platforms such as wikis and Google Docs, found similar patterns (e.g., Bradley, Lindström, and Rystedt 2010; Li and Zhu 2017a, 2017b; Tan, Wigglesworth, and Storch 2010), as well as additional distinct patterns such as expert/passive (e.g., Watanabe and Swain 2007), dominant/withdrawn (Li and Zhu 2013), and dominant/defensive (Li and Zhu 2017a, 2017b). Furthermore, the names used to describe these patterns were slightly altered to capture patterns of interaction among small groups rather than pairs, as in the original Storch model (2002). For example, Li and Zhu (2017a, 2017b) distinguished between collaborative triads and collective triads. In the collective triad all three members participated fully in contributing and amending the joint wiki text; in the collaborative triad, only two of the three members collaborated.

Research on learner interaction in computer-mediated collaborative writing tasks suggests that learners are more likely to form cooperative rather than collaborative relationships. For example, studies in which the same learners engaged in collaborative writing tasks in FTF and computer mediated forms (e.g., Rouhshad and Storch 2016; Tan, Wigglesworth, and Storch 2010) reported more instances of cooperation than of collaboration. When learners cooperate, they tend to divide roles (e.g., composer, scribe) or divide the task and the joint text is an aggregate of individual contributions. Excerpt 3 (from Rouhshad and Storch 2016) depicts a cooperative pattern of interaction with a distinct division of labour: Tina dictated the text to Feri who acted as the scribe (e.g., Line 36, 38, 42). As the excerpt shows, and as found in the study, in a cooperative pattern there was little evidence of the two learners engaging with each other's suggestions or deliberating about language choices throughout the co-writing process. I believe that fleeting attention to language choice (e.g., Lines 39–42) does not accord with the definition of languaging (see Storch and Shuraidah 2020)

Excerpt 3: Cooperative relationship

- | | | |
|----|-------|--|
| 36 | Tina: | I think the 3 rd sentence is more clearly
ok keep going
and will continue her job once she is free
delete “so she keep up to date” |
| 37 | Feri: | I start to talk 2 nd reason |
| 38 | Tina | Ok
Stop
2ndly . . . Ahhh wat is the 2 nd reason |
| 39 | Feri: | The personality? |
| 40 | Tina: | Her good behavior |
| 41 | Feri: | Oh |

42 Tina Whatever But briefly
 Ok 2nd the future
 Add ‘the’ . . .
 Spelling “moreOver”
 Full stop after mother

Patterns of interaction learners form when co-authoring a text, whether FTF or online, are important. There is now fairly convincing evidence (see review of studies in Storch 2013) that when learners collaborate or form expert/novice patterns of interaction (i.e., with high to medium levels of mutuality) they are more likely to engage in languaging and collective scaffolding. In other words, this research suggests that mutuality or level of engagement may be a more important trait than equality because of its impact on the nature of languaging (e.g., Li and Zhu 2013, 2017a, 2017b). Groups that collaborate have also been shown to be more likely to persist in trying to resolve their deliberations, drawing on all available resources (e.g., Kim and McDonough 2008; Li and Zhu 2013; Rouhshad and Storch 2016). This research also suggests that collaborative relationships are associated with a greater retention of the knowledge co-constructed during languaging (Storch 2002), with a greater learner satisfaction with the activity (e.g., Li and Zhu 2013; Watanabe 2008) and the production of better quality joint text (Li and Zhu 2017a).

The important question to consider, then, is what can explain why some learners form particular types of relationships and what encourages learners to engage in languaging with their peers. In the next section I review a number of factors, identified by a relatively small number of studies, that have attempted to explain observed learner behaviour when completing collaborative writing tasks, both in FTF and computer mediated modes. I also discuss in greater detail a factor that has hitherto received little L2 research attention, namely the sense of textual ownership that co-authors experience during collaborative writing activities.

3 Factors that may explain patterns of interaction and the nature of languaging

A number of factors have been identified in the literature as possibly explaining why some learners collaborate and others do not when assigned to work on a joint writing task, with a flow-on effect on the frequency and quality of languaging. These factors can be categorised as learner-related and task-related factors. Whereas learner related factors relate to the traits of the learners such as L2