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Research Paper

Language Learning Opportunities in the Online Wild

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Abstract

Recent research has heralded the role of social interaction in learning a second language. While earlier cognitive approaches to language learning attracted attention to individual factors involved in the process, social approaches regard learning as a pluralistic attempt which is materialized through participation. This shift in focus is important because it entails the study of language learning as it occurs in its natural habitat of social interaction rather than limiting it to formal educational settings. Mainstream SLA research has suffered from this limitation, with most studies in the field opting for experimental or quasi-experimental designs. Although informative in many respects, such studies lack the ecological validity to explore how learners approach the task of language learning in the real world. To address this issue, the study of language learning in the wild (outside formal educational settings) has gained momentum. The present study takes a similar approach to explore the affordances online learner-learner interactions may offer for language learning. Rather than tracking and measuring learning, it seeks to understand the potentials such interactions may have for language learning particularly because they happen in the absence of teachers. It builds upon data collected from video calls among Japanese and Taiwanese learners of English, transcribed and analyzed with a conversation analytic lens. The findings indicate that online interactions outside classroom provide learners with opportunities for extended negotiations for meaning, besides being a space for developing awareness for how interactions are structured in conversations taking place in the real world.

Keywords:
Social interaction; Second language learning; Learning in the wild; Conversation analysis

1 Introduction

Social interaction is often regarded as sine qua non of both first and second language learning. SLA research has embraced this understanding either by regarding social interaction as a space for providing learners with rich input and giving them the feedback that facilitates their cognitive learning process, or as "the site where learning as a socio-cognitive endeavor is collectively shaped through socially coordinated courses of activities (Eskildsen et al., 2019, p. 2). Contrary to

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this proposition, however, most empirical SLA studies build upon data collected from experimental or quasi-experimental designs. Although informative in many respects, such an approach raises the question of ecological validity for mainstream SLA research: if social interaction is the primary source of language learning, how come our current understanding of how languages are learned by and large emanates from research taking place in its absence? It can be of course argued that there is a growing interest in research conducted in the language classroom setting, which indeed features more ecological validity than the laboratories where experimental research is carried out. It is important to take into consideration, however, that the interaction that takes place in the language classroom is also often highly structured, if not controlled for the very sake of research. Contrary to the classroom setting, the world of second language speakers defies any top-down structuring as it is, by definition, multilingual, multimodal, and a space where a multitude of semiotic resources coexist. As a response to this drawback, investigating language learning outside the traditional classroom setting and *in the wild* has taken momentum in recent years.

The metaphor of learning *in the wild* foregrounds the belief that cognition is socially situated, and hence its nuanced complexities can only be appreciated in learners' real-world interactions. In other words, as Hutchins (1995) puts it, the idea of cognition in the wild delineates studying it in its "natural habitat," which is the "naturally occurring culturally constituted human activity" (p. xiii). An obvious implication of this perspective for SLA research is the need for drawing on data collected from naturally-occurring language learner interactions outside the conventional language classroom (Firth & Wagner, 1997). Such a socially situated approach to SLA research in turn enables us to apprehend language learning in an ecologically valid manner, and understands, for instance, the affordances that naturally-occurring social interactions can offer and the subtle ways language learners utilize such affordances to transform mundane social encounters into learning environments (Kasper & Burch, 2016).

Exploring learning in its natural habitat of social interaction attracted attention after what Block (2003) calls "the social turn in SLA", which as the term suggests, highlights the social dimensions of learning. Contrary to earlier SLA studies, research after the social turn started to utilize audio and video recordings of learner interactions in the real world, often analyzing them with a conversation analytic (CA) lens among other approaches (Hellermann, 2008; Pekarek-Doehler, 2018; Wagner, 2015). The common principle that underpins most of such studies is that learning is embedded in the activities people jointly conduct in collaboration with others to assign meaning to the social world. In the case of SLA, this very principle shifts the object of learning from mastering the formal aspects of the linguistic system to developing and mobilizing semiotic resources to achieve and maintain intersubjectivity or mutual understanding in their everyday interactions. This latter object of learning also entails a redefinition of the concept of competence. If learning is socially situated and is achieved through carrying out various social actions, then competence cannot be regarded as a cognitive and intra-psychological ability. It is rather a matter of how multiple participants in a social action deploy semiotic resources in a contextually appropriate manner (Hellermann, 2011; Pekarek-Doehler & Pochon-Berger, 2018).

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Against this backdrop, the present paper seeks to understand what affordances the *online wild* can offer language learners and how they may be able to jointly utilize such affordances to realize their language learning goals. While prior research on language learning in the wild has explored language learner interactions outside the classroom in physical environments such as study abroad and homestay programs (Dings, 2014; McMeekin, 2017; White, 2019), the present study draws upon data collected from language learners' online interactions outside classroom setting. This type of data was also used in previous research (Taleghani-Nikazm, 2019) with the goal of tracking the development of interactional competence in L2 speakers, but as there has been a surge in the quantity of online interactions taking place around the globe since the current COVID-19 pandemic broke out early in 2020, there seems to be both the need and the opportunity to further explore this type of interaction among language learners.

2 The Study

This study draws upon data collected from online video interactions of Japanese and Taiwanese learners of English as a foreign language. This online exchange was part of an online collaborative program between a Japanese and a Taiwanese university during which students were given various task to carry out in mixed nationality groups with the goal of improving their English proficiency. While some of these activities were done in the presence of teachers and can be counted as online classroom assignments, other activities were done solely by students and in the absence of the two teachers. In the latter format, the learner-learner interactions which comprise the data analyzed in the present paper, different groups of learners (usually 4-6 learners from both sides in each group) were given topics and a few prompts by their teachers and were required to meet up with their peers within the same group using a video-call application of their choice outside the formal class time. Although the topics of discussions were initially selected by the two teachers, members of each group could freely change the direction of their interactions with their own discretion. They were not instructed on issues such as how long their interactions were supposed to be or when and how they were supposed to complete the task. One student in each group, however, was asked to set up the online meeting, record it, and then share it with the two teachers. Students would not receive any feedback on the formal aspects of their language use during these virtual exchanges from their teachers, as the primary purpose of the task was to provide learners with an opportunity to practice using English in the real world and in the absence of the controlled interactional structure of the classroom.

Once the virtual exchanges were concluded and their video files were shared with the teachers, the researchers, one of whom was teaching the Japanese class, transcribed the data and used a CA framework to analyze them. It is also worth mentioning that these virtual exchanges were not planned for research purposes and would take place with or without the researchers' further analysis of the data resulting from them. This in turn means that the data used in this study would qualify as naturally-occurring, which is a requirement for doing CA research. Throughout the transcribed data, all participants will remain anonymous. Taiwanese learners will be referred to as TLs (TL1, TL2, etc.) and Japanese learners as JLs (JL1, JL2, etc.).

3 Findings

In keeping with the aim of this study, instances of the affordances for language learning existent in the online learner-learner interactions outside the formal classroom setting were identified. In what follows, a number of such instances will be presented and accompanied by extracts from the transcribed interactions.

3.1 Extended Negotiations for Meaning

Negotiation for meaning is often regarded as essential for making interactions in L2 comprehensible. The importance of comprehensible input in language learning has been underlined in the language teaching field particularly in the input hypothesis (Krashen, 1985) and interaction hypothesis (Long, 1996). The process through which incomprehensible input becomes accessible to speakers of an L2 is generally referred to as negotiation for meaning. When L2 learners come across a communicative breakdown as a result of gaps in their L2 system, they need to devise compensatory strategies to overcome that breakdown. What happens meanwhile is in fact a negotiation for meaning. This shows the value of such instances in the learning process since as Walsh (2014) posits in educational settings learning and teaching are materialized through interaction, and some even believe that not only interaction leads to learning but that it is learning. The analysis of the data in this study indicated that several instances of negotiations for meaning took place in the learner-learner interactions. Excerpt 1 illustrates some of such instances.

In the following sequence of interaction JL11 is interacting with five of her Taiwanese peers namely TL3, TL5, TL9, TL11 and TL8. Their discussion revolves around a photo which featured a notice at the entrance of a Japanese restaurant asking foreigners not to enter the place. A communicative breakdown occurs at the beginning of the sequence and it takes the participants quite a few turns to negotiate and find a way to solve that problem.

Excerpt 1. Negotiation for meaning in learner-learner interactions

```
1   JL11: So: I think the
          foreigner want to eat
          Japanese food in
          Japanese restaurant
          (2.0)
2    TL3: huh?
          ((smiling))(1.0)
3   JL11: so the (.) limit
          [like
4    TL3: uhuh]
5    TL5: hum=
6    TL8: =hum
5   JL11: like this is very:
          (.) I think is very
          (.)↑bad ((pronounced
          as /bʌt/ instead of
          /bæd/))
6    TL3: bu-?=
7    TL5: =bat?
8   JL11: ↑bad ((pronounced as
          /bʌt/))(2.0)
9    TL3: ↑bat. ((looks
          uncertain))
10   TL8: BAT=
11   TL5: =bat (.)[oh
12  JL11: bad](1.0)
13   TL3: [()
14  JL11: like] this ↑photo,
15   TL3: huh=
16  JL11: [is
17   TL5: ( )]
18  JL11: is bad.(1.0)
19   TL3: o::h
20  JL11: yes.
21   TL5: e: (1.0)
22   TL9: b:at ((smiling))
```

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23 **TL3:** ((laughs briefly))e::
24 **TL5:** e::(.) uhm (.) have another (.)word abo:ut bat?
25 **TL11:** bat=
26 **JL11:** e::h (.) [so:
27 **TL9:** do you] spell it? (3.0)
28 **TL3:** [can you
29 **JL11:** what?]
30 **TL3:** spell it? (1.0) ↑spell (1.0)
31 **TL8:** can you spell it?
32 **TL3:** [hum
33 **JL11:** B](.) A (.) D? (.) B (.) A (.) [↓D
34 **TL8:** ye-] oh ↑ba:d oh ↑ba::d {o:::h
35 **TL3:** Oh bad
36 **JL11:** >yeah yeah yeah yeah<

At the beginning of the sequence, JL11 states her disapproval of the content of the photo which is the subject of the discussion. After a few interjections by the Taiwanese learners that can be interpreted as their displays of listenership, in turn 5 JL11 says that asking foreigners not to enter a restaurant is bad. This soon turns out to be a source of communication difficulty. One may not expect a word as simple as "bad" to be the cause of a communicative breakdown, but apparently JL11's mispronunciation of the word leads to misunderstandings. This in turns leads to extended negotiations for meaning during which some of the participants test their hypotheses until an agreement is reached.

Towards the beginning of the negotiations TLs tend to hold themselves responsible for not understanding JL11's utterance and this can be seen in the way they keep repeating the word or other similar words or non-words (bu- or bat instead of bad for instance) throughout turns 6 to 12, while JL11 keeps repeating the original word. Since no agreement is achieved, however, JL11 gives up repeating and tries referring back to the photo in the assignment in turn 14. Following this, TL3 signals a change of state in his understanding by uttering the short token "oh" with a prolonged vowel. JL11 takes this as a sign of understanding and responds with a positive assessment in turn 19. Soon, however, in turn 23 and after TL3's brief laughter, she finds out that mutual understanding is not achieved yet. In turn 24, TL5 employs another strategy and utters a clarification request asking JL11 to offer an alternative word. Before JL11 finds a chance to respond to this request, however, TL9 comes up with a different strategy and asks for clarification through spelling out the source of trouble. TL9's question "do you spell it" is then repeated by TL3 which provides further evidence that she had not understood the word earlier in turn 19 despite uttering a state changer "oh." In turn 31, TL8 repairs TL9's question saying "can you spell it?" instead. Finally in turn 33, JL11 spells the word and this seems to resolve the situation since both TL8 and TL3 utter state changer tokens along with correctly pronouncing the trouble source which is confirmed by JL11 at the end of the sequence. Notice how these opportunities for testing different hypotheses and trying different tools for achieving understanding could be wasted if a teacher with higher interactional authority had repaired the source of trouble quickly after its utterance in turn 5.

3.2 Managing Closing Sequences

The beginning turns in an interaction are called opening sequences and the ending turns are referred to as closing sequences. Both of these sequences are important

from different perspectives. However, the latter of the two seems to offer even more complexities. The reason is that while in an opening sequences all participants know that the interaction will any second start and expect its commencement, in a closing sequence there is often no clear hint as when the interaction is coming to a close. Furthermore, closing an interaction in the absence of a shared understanding regarding the appropriate time for a closure can be sanctionable. As a result, the speaker who intends to bring the conversation to an end often does so after a prelude to closure which is here referred to as a pre-expansion sequence. McLaughlin (1984) argued that there are usually three functions in closing a conversation, namely signaling that there is a movement towards a state of decreased access, expressing appreciation for the encounter and a desire for future contact, and summarizing what the encounter has accomplished. In the case of the data analyzed in the present study what seemed to happen after a pre-expansion sequence was mainly an expression of appreciation and the desire for future contact. The following excerpt provides an example for how pre-expansions work to prepare the other speakers for a closure.

In this excerpt, JL11 and a couple of her Taiwanese peers are discussing local specialties in their hometown. After completing the assignment, TL5 asks a question which does not fit into the content of its preceding turns. As the rest of the interaction unfolds, however, this question can be better understood.

Excerpt 2. Pre-expansion in closing sequences

1	**TL5:**	ehm (.) so: (.) is time for you to go to bed?
2	**TLs:**	((loud laughter))
3	**JL11:**	((looks surprised))(3.0) [ehm
4	**TLs:**	((incomprehensible talk in Chinese among TLs))
5	**TL11:**	ehm ((incomprehensible talk in Chinese))
6	**TL3:**	ehm actually e:h we ha:ve som:e time limit (.) ehm in our school dorm
7	**JL11:**	((nods))
8	**TL3:**	ehm we need to take bath an:d wash our clothes=
9	**TLs:**	=((brief laughter)) ((talk in Chinese))=
10	**TL3:**	twelve o'clock so maybe we need to::
11	**TL11:**	we can chat next time
12	**TL3:**	we (.) we can chat next time
13	**JL11:**	oh ok ((laughter))
14	**TL5:**	so:: (2.0) see you next tim::e (.) by::e
15	**JL11:**	[by:e
16	**TLs:**	by::e]

As can be seen in the excerpt, TL5 asks JL11 whether she has to go to bed in turn 1. This is followed by the other TLs' laughter implying that they may know why TL5 is asking this question. JL11 looks surprised and is seemingly not sure whether she has understood the question well. TL3's comments in turns 6, 8 and 10, however, reveal the real purpose of the question asked by TL5 in turn 1. TLs seem to have a time limit in their dormitory and have to end the video call soon. Yet, since they perceive ending the call without prior

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preparations as a dispreferred action, they initiate a pre-expansion sequence before the actual closing sequence. The plan would have worked better if JL11 had given a positive response to the question saying that she had to go to bed, but since she did not say so, TL3 had to explain why the question was asked. The closing sequence is then initiated by TL11 who expresses the TLs' will to continue the chat next time. The combination of the pre-expansion sequence and the closing sequence brings about a smooth closure to the sequence.

3.3 Turn Distribution Bias

Turn taking and turn distribution are two key areas in the study of social interactions. In the SLA context, they may also be an indicator of learners' interactional competence. Taking turns by learners in an educational setting also allows them to have autonomy in the learning process. The opposite can also stand true. That is, a rigid turn distribution pattern by a teacher in a classroom may well limit the learners' chance to exercise autonomy by self selecting for upcoming turns. In the present study, however, teachers were absent in the data and this could potentially mean that learners had the chance to take turns more freely. It was not necessarily so, nevertheless. In fact, the analysis of the data showed that while in some instances self-selection took place and turn taking was done in a more fluid manner, in many others there was a bias in the distribution of turns. As shall be seen in the two following excerpts, one of the learners would take on a teacher role in the interaction thereby disrupting voluntary turn taking by distributing turns among the other participants. The teacher-figure was often the one who was in charge of starting the video call and inviting the other members. What is even more important is the way other participants orient to the position the learner/teacher-figure assumes for him/herself by treating him/her as a participant with teacher responsibilities.

The following sequence of interaction happens in the absence of Japanese participants. Five Taiwanese learners join a video call hosted by TL18 to do an assignment. The topic of the discussion was assigned by one of the teachers and dealt with the issue of foreigner-friendly restaurants in Japan and Taiwan. As in this particular case, Japanese learners are not present, all discussions are about the Taiwanese context.

Excerpt 3. Turn distribution by a teacher figure in L/L interactions

```
1   TL18: so:
          $((coughs))$ $hello
          everyone$ ((laughs))
2    TL7: hello: [((waves at
          the camera))
3   TL14: ((Waves at the
          camera))
4   TL17: hi:] ((Waves at the
          camera))
5   TL18: ((waves back)) I'm
          glad to call the roll
          (.) so::
6   TL17: hum=
7   TL18: =TL17 ((TL17's
          name))
8   TL17: hey yeah ((raises
          his hand))
9   TL18: u:h TL2 ((TL2's
          name))
10   TL2: ((raises her hand
          while smiling))
11  TL18: a:nd u::h ((looks
          away from the camera
          as if trying to
          remember something))
          and who? TL7 ((TL7's
          name))
12   TL7: [((raises her hand
          but revokes the
          action halfway as
```

TL14 takes up the next turn))
13 **TL14:** ↑TL14 ((her own name, notably louder))
14 **TL18:** uh ((laughs))
15 **TL17:** [((laughs))
16 **TL7:** ((laughs))]
17 **TL18:** $hey TL14 ((her name)) yes of course TL14 ((her name))$
18 **TL14:** ((raises her hand)) (yeah)
19 **TL18:** ok so=
20 **TL7:** =(what) about me?=
21 **TL18:** =let's get (cracking)=
22 **TL7:** ↑$what about me?$
23 **TL14:** $yeah$ ((pointing to TL7))
24 **TL18:** yeah I ↑said TL7 ((her name))
25 **TL7:** $oh uh ok$ ((raises her hand and waves at the camera))
26 **TL18:** ok so (.) first question ((brings his head closer to his monitor to read the question from his screen))(2.0) are restaurants oh fu- (.)$are [restaurants$
27 **TL2:** $what?$]
28 **TL18:** $in Japan and Taiwan foreigner friendly$ >give plenty of examples to support your stance< .hhh (3.0)
29 **TL14:** ((raises her hand and waves))
30 **TL18:** ((notices TL14's gesture, raises his hand and waves back while smiling))
31 **TL17:** hey TL14 ((her name))
32 **Tl14:** oh (.) $oh me$ ((looks at her notes briefly and then looks back at the camera)) ↑yes (.) as my sister's experience in Chinese restaurant ((looks at her notes from time to time)) they will provide many kinds of tableware such as knife and fork for the foreigners not only chopsticks (1.0) is is kind of is kind to foreigner ((thumbs up))
33 **TL18:** ((makes a funny gesture putting her fingers around her eyes and rolling her eyes))
34 **TL7:** ((laughs while pointing to her screen))
35 **TL14:** ((laughs))
36 **TL18:** ((shows thumbs up with both hands while laughing))
37 **TL17:** $yeah$
38 **TL7:** ((pointing to herself)) my turn my turn
39 **TL18:** $ok TL7 ((her name)) your turn$ .hhh
40 **TL7:** uh I think [that
41 **TL17:** ((laughs))]
42 **TL7:** there's a restaurant called (Ting Tai Fong) [a:nd is
43 **TL18:** Oh I hate it]
44 **TL7:** foreign friendly is ↑foreign friendly for foreigners because

the menu has some English and Japanese (1.0) [so foreigners

45 **TL18:** and it's expensive]

46 **TL7:** come here to if they want to eat there they could see the menu easily

47 **TL18:** expensive (1.0) expensive

49 **TL7:** good ((thumbs up))

50 **TL18:** expensive [expensive

51 **TL7:** delicious]

52 **TL18:** yes delicious and expensive

53 **TL7:** delicious (shoronpo) ((Taiwanese food))

54 **TL18:** ((laughs))(shoron) best thing dumpling

55 **TL7:** ((laughs))

56 **TL18:** $I think so$ ok so=

57 **TL7:** =ok

58 **TL18:** next question (7.0) ((looking for the question on his screen while bringing his head very close to it and the camera))

59 **TL14:** ((laughs))

60 **Tl18:**((reads from his screen)) what can be done to make restaurants friendlier to foreigner visitors? [And who is going to

61 **TL2:** ((raises her hand)) ↑me

62 **TL18:** ↑$o::h a::nd e:hm$ (1.0)

63 **Tl17:** TL2 ((TL2's name))=

64 **TL18:** =TL2 ((her name)) $ye::s TL2$ ((her name))(1.0)

65 **TL2:** u:h I think we can cha- change the staff (.) u:hm make them (.) learn (.) some (.) foreign (.) language (.)and give some picture on the menu=

66 **TL18:** ↑O:h pictures

67 **TL2:** yeah

68 **TL18:** good advice (2.0) >bravo< ((laughs))

The sequence begins with TL18's greeting the other participants as the host of the video call. Soon in the sequence and in turn 5, TL18 explicitly positions himself as the facilitator of the interaction by announcing that he is "glad to call the roll." In an educational setting, this task is often performed by a teacher and therefore TL18 creates this assumption that he will be playing the role of a teacher though all other participants can acknowledge that he is not really a teacher. TL18's announcement in turn 5 corresponds with what he does in the coming turns as well. He goes on by calling other participants' names and waits for them to react (turns 7 to 10, for instance). It is also interesting that other participants tacitly agree with the way TL18 has positioned himself. TL7, as a case in point, reminds TL18 in turn 20 that he has not called her name similar to what might happen in a real classroom in the presence of a teacher.

After calling everyone's names TL18 moves the interaction to the next phase in turn 26. Similar to what a teacher might do, he starts his turn with the short token "ok" to indicate a change of topic and then reads out the first question of the assignment. The question comes to an end in turn 28 after which a three-second pause emerges. This can be interactionally interpreted as a chance for self selection by the next speakers in the sequence and this is exactly what happens in turn 29. TL14 volunteers to respond to the

question. However, treating her turn as a response to the teacher-figure's turn, she raises her hand waving at the camera and waits until TL18 explicitly allows her to take the turn. In other words, although self selection takes place at this point, it is mediated through permission seeking which can be a sign of perceived power imbalance in turn taking. Once again, this reminds one of the turn allocation patterns that takes place in a classroom and in the presence of a teacher. It is also worth mentioning that it is not TL18's observable outward behavior that positions him as a teacher. Notice, for example, how in turn 33 he makes funny gestures that make other participants laugh. This might be very unlikely for a teacher in an institutional setting. It is rather TL18's interactional moves realized through the way he distributes turns as well as the way other participants orient to his tacitly agreed upon right to do so that makes him look and sound like a teacher. Other examples for turn allocation can also be found in the excerpt. TL7 in turn 38 also nominates herself for the next turn but only starts to speak when TL18 explicitly invites her to do so. Turns 63 and 64 follow a similar pattern too. The sequence comes to an end with TL18's explicit positive feedback which provides even further evidence for the way he has positioned himself. Explicit positive feedbacks are uttered in the feedback of a tripartite IRF sequence by the same speaker who has initiated a given sequence and, in this case, distributed the turn to other participants.

All of the examples given above involve instances of mediated self selection by potential next speakers. That is to say, in all of those cases, the next speaker would self select at a transition-relevance place (TRP), but would not actually start her turn without seeking permission from the teacher figure. The following excerpt illustrates what might happen if the next speaker fails to seek permission before taking a turn while there seems to be a perceived imbalance in turn taking rights by the speakers. The excerpt takes place within the same video call as the previous one with the same participants.

Excerpt 4. Sanctions in undue turn taking in L/L interactions

```
1   TL18: ok (.) move on (.)
          let's move on (.) the
          next question
2    TL7: number four (2.0)
3   TL17: is my [question
4   TL18: the last] [question
5   TL17: is e:h]=
6   TL18: ↑wait
7   TL17: ((laughs)) ok
```

After TL18 shows his intention to move to the next question of the assignment by uttering the transition marker "ok", TL7 briefly states what the next question is by referring to its number in the assignment rubric. After a short pause which introduces a TRP, TL17 self selects and without waiting for TL18's indication of permission starts his utterance in turn 3. TL17's turn overruns with TL18's throughout turns 3 to 5. As TL18's reaction in turn 6 indicates, TL17's undue initiation of his turn is not tolerated by the teacher-figure who explicitly asks TL17 to "wait" with a higher pitch. This is often referred to as a sanction that the speaker who made an undue attempt to take a turn has to endure. TL17's response to this also indicates his tacit agreement with TL18's superiority in allocating turns.

4 Discussion

In what follows, the three issues presented above, namely extended negotiations for meaning, managing closing sequences, and turn distribution bias will be discussed in light of what is

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already known from the relevant literature.

4.1 Extended Negotiations for Meaning

The concept of negotiation for meaning has been around in applied linguistics for quite a few years. It fits well within the cognitive accounts of language learning and was first introduced in Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1996). Its theoretical tenets, however, can be traced back to mid 80s and Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis. For Krashen, the key to the acquisition of a second language was exposure to comprehensible input. Not all input is comprehensible for a language learner. For input to meet the criterion of comprehensibility it had to be just above a learner's current language level. Krashen called this level i+1. He believed that if the incoming information meets this criterion, it will be first comprehended and then acquired. Krashen's proposition was considered as an intuitive suggestion at the time, yet it suffered from a practical issue. Since i+1 would be different for each individual learner and also for one learner from one time to another, how could one make sure whether the input was comprehensible? In other words, how could a teacher identify the "i" level in order to generate the i+1 input? These were the questions Long addressed in his Interaction Hypothesis later on.

Long argued that the best way to achieve comprehensible input is through interactional adjustments. Interactional adjustments mean that language learners can make incomprehensible input comprehensible by negotiating meaning through which clarification and modifications are made in the information until mutual understanding or intersubjectivity is achieved. At this moment, Long argues, the information is brought into the learners' i+1 range. Individual learners with different language levels can modify the incoming information through negotiations until complete comprehension is achieved.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Long's Interaction Hypothesis served as theoretical underpinnings for later research. Although there have been slight differences in the definitions proposed for negotiation for meaning, there seems to be a shared understanding in the field about what generally constructs it. For instance, for Pica (1992, p. 200) negotiation for meaning was "an activity that occurs when a listener signals to the speaker that the speaker's message is not clear and the speaker and the listener work linguistically to resolve this impasse." Gass and Selinker (1994, p. 209) also argued that it comprises "instances in conversation when participants need to interrupt the flow of the conversation in order for both parties to understand what the conversation is about." Smith (2005) on the other hand, stated that negotiation for meaning is an explicit indication of non-understanding and the subsequent attempts to resolve it. From an interactional perspective also van der Zwaard and Bannink (2014) argued that negotiations for meaning are a series of conversational turns that start due to an absence of understanding and continue until comprehension is achieved. Despite differences in their focus and terminology, these definitions have a lot in common: they all agree that negotiation for meaning is a response to a sort of what Long (1996) called a communicative trouble or what Mackey, Gass and McDonough (2000) called a communication breakdown which continues until the problem is resolved.

Research on negotiation for meaning has shown how it can lead to the uptake of new linguistic knowledge by the learners. A considerable number of studies in this area have investigated different task types that are more likely to generate negotiations and lead to linguistic uptake

in the language classroom (Nakahama et al., 2001, for instance). A relatively smaller number of studies have also shed light on the interactional intricacies involved in negotiations for meaning (Zheng et al, 2009) studying turn taking and repair organization during negotiations both in traditional instructional settings and in online learner-learner interactions. Although more research has been conducted in instructional settings highlighting the role of teachers in managing negotiations for meaning, studies focusing on how learners learn from each other have gained popularity in more recent years as well. Among these studies, there are those that are closer in scope to the present paper particularly because they have studied learner-learner negotiations for meaning in technology mediated online settings. This latter group of studies has shown how various modes of online communication create different opportunities for negotiation for meaning (Yuksel & Inan, 2014). Studying online video interactions among L2 learners Sert and Balaman (2018), for instance, found that learners negotiate very often different aspects of the task including both linguistic and managerial aspects of them whenever there are problems of shared understanding generating regulations through repair initiation and accomplishment that assist them maintain understanding.

One of the findings of the present research was that extended negotiations for meaning including multiple lengthy instances of repair. Taking into account the theoretical principles reviewed in the above, it can be argued that deeper and lengthier instances of negotiations create better opportunities for language learners. Similar to what data-driven studies on negotiation for meaning counted out here have found, it was also found in this study that such instances initiate as a result of a gap in understanding or a communication problem. Such problems could take different syntactical, phonological, and lexical forms. As a result of lengthy and extended negotiations learners would generate hypotheses, test them and then either approve or revise them until intersubjectivity was achieved. Such cases often occur less frequently in teacher-led interactions and this can be supported with what is currently known about the interactional structure of language classes. Sert (2015), as a case in point, argues that teacher-initiated teacher repairs are very common in teacher-led interactions. Repairs as such correct learner mistakes on the spot and limit the space for negotiations among learners. In the absence of teachers, however, as was found in this study self-initiated repair may be more dominant resulting in lengthier and deeper negotiations for meaning.

4.2 Managing Closing Sequences

The way the endings of video calls were managed by the learners in learner-learner online interactions was another finding in the present research. In CA studies, conversation is regarded as a system, which is comprised of different parts. Studies on telephone conversations, for example, have found that there are opening and closing sequences in them (Wong & Warring, 2010). These sequences allow participants to start and end conversations as smoothly as possible. There are also normative orientations towards these sequences, meaning that the absence of an appropriate opening or a closing sequence might create communication problems and even sanctions for the speaker who failed to initiate such sequences. This point is closely related to preference organization in interactions as well. Inspired by the pioneering works of Pomerantz (1984) and later on Schegloff (2007), research on

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preference organization has shown how while participants evaluate certain responses to a first pair part (FPP) as preferred, other responses might be considered as dispreferred. As a case in point, accepting an invitation is generally considered as a preferred response, while declining one is dispreferred. That is why acceptance responses are given very quickly and in an unmarked manner while rejection is usually prefaced with justifications or pauses. As far as telephone conversations are concerned, closing the talk without prior indications of the fact that it is going to be closed soon is also considered as a dispreferred action. Avoiding this scenario, therefore, may indicate a speaker's level of contextual awareness and interactional competence.

Compared with research on telephone conversations between L2 learners, fewer studies have investigated video calls among second language speakers. Although there are structural similarities between these two types of telecommunications, there are differences as well. Apart from the obvious fact that in the latter case there are both audio and visual modalities, there may be more than two participants in video calls as well. Similarly, more research has been done on L1 telephone and video conversations in comparison with L2 conversations. What we already know about closing sequences in L1 telephone conversations, however, might guide us in analyzing closings in multiparty video calls, too.

In native speaker interactions, for instance, it is known that closings in telephone conversations come after pre-closing sequences a dominant feature of which is exchanges of short utterances such as okay, alright, good or the like. These utterances often appear after inter-turn pauses and when propositional meanings of the previous turns are already understood. Take this example from Schegloff and Sacks (1973):

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1    A: O.K.
2    B: O.K.
3    A: Bye bye.
4    B: Bye.
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The argument here is that to mitigate the possible dispreferred bearing of an abrupt closing, speaker A provides hint for the upcoming action of closing. Once speaker A receives speaker B's approval in the form of repeating his/her repetition of the short utterance, speaker A initiates the closing sequence. Notice that speaker B could have potentially opted not to allow A to end the conversation by saying "by the way" for instance. The closing here is therefore constructed by both speakers. This may seem very straightforward and native speakers of any language may take it for granted. In a second language, however, no matter how simple it may seem, it can be challenging. As Wong and Waring (2010) posit, second language learners "do not necessarily know how to get out of a conversation or how to extend it in a second language" (p.11). Not knowing how to do so, therefore, they may either end up sounding awkward or impolite or devising their own strategies to end a call smoothly. The latter was the case with the learner-learner interactions in the present research.

The analysis of the closing sequences in learner-learner interactions in this study showed that the participants(s) who wanted to end the call would use two strategies both happening before the actual closing section. First, they would initiate a pre-expansion sequence justifying their upcoming closure of the talk by providing reasons. Doing so, they could actually test the water and learn about the other participants' intentions

regarding either closing or continuing the video call. Second, they would offer to have another video call in the future to pick up where they leave off in the current one. The strategy of offering to do something in the future in pre-closing sequences was also found in the study conducted by Curl (2006). Overall, both these strategies served the purpose of informing the other participants' that a closing sequence would be ahead. This, as explained above, could mitigate the dispreferred bearing of an abrupt closing.

4.3 Turn Distribution Bias

Turn taking plays a pivotal role in social interactions. The amount of interaction taking place in any given conversation is closely correlated with how many turns are taken by the participants in that conversation. In the case of the second language classroom, it becomes important in another way as well. As discussed earlier, a number of language learning theories emphasize that learning is materialized through participation. Without a turn taking, there will not be any participation. Taking turns is not always easy for language learners, however. To take a turn, particularly when one is not selected as a next speaker, requires possessing the linguistic and sociolinguistic knowledge of how an interaction works. For instance, one has to be able to anticipate when a TRP is going to emerge to be able to take a turn without sounding improper or awkward (Pekarek-Doehler & Pochon-Berger, 2015). And to make things worse, all this has to be done in milliseconds. Cognitive demand for taking turns is high for second language learners and that is why learners with lower proficiency levels are often reported to have difficulty managing turns at talk (Carroll, 2004). The literature on classroom interaction, however, has shown that teachers have traditionally played important roles in making it easier for language learners to take turns.

In the language classroom, turn taking follows a particular system in which it is the teacher who often selects the next speaker. The reason for such a tendency is at least twofold. First, given the fact that there is limited time in a classroom, there is a tendency among teachers and learners to be internationally economical (Kääntä, 2010). Classrooms follow syllabi that need to be covered and allowing all learners to take turns at any moment during the class time might not simply be feasible. The language classroom is an "institutional context in which participants come together to achieve the specific goal of teaching and learning" (Garton, 2012, p. 29) and therefore classroom discourse is a form of institutional talk following its own rules and regulations. Second, there are asymmetrical role relationships between teachers and learners. This is especially evident in the turn taking system: most often it is the teacher who has more interactional power and decides who speaks when (Walsh, 2006). This, of course, does not mean that learner self-selection and initiation do not take place.

Taking these two reasons regarding why teachers often select next speakers in the classroom setting, it could be therefore assumed that learner-learner interactions outside the context of the language classroom and in the absence of teachers would feature more self-selection instances. The analysis of the data in this study, however, showed that this is not necessarily the case. Turn taking in learner-learner interactions was not always fluid and voluntary. In other words, instead of making attempts to take turns in their interactions, the participants in this study seemed to tacitly orient to one of their peers in the interaction as a teacher. It was this teacher-figure who distributed the turns among other participants then.

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The decision regarding who had the responsibility to manage the turns was not explicitly made known, but both the teacher-figure and other participants seemed to accept this division of roles and orient to it accordingly.

What the data also showed was that the teacher-figure was often the member who would set up the video call and invite others to join. However, this has to be treated with caution since there may well be other factors not identifiable with the design of the present research. One hypothesis would be that the learners who set up video calls and subsequently took up the teacher-figure role were perceived to have higher English proficiency levels by their peers. As there is no information regarding the perceptions of the participants in this study, such ideas will remain hypotheses, however. What the data actually shows is that constraints of institutional talk on turn taking (Garton, 2012; Walsh, 2006) do not necessarily relax in the absence of teachers and when learner-learner interactions take place outside the physical classroom setting. Learners may co-construct the classroom context and hence follow the regulations of the classroom institutional talk outside the classroom as well. This is for sure in line with the pioneering works of Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) who argued that turn taking is "locally managed, party-administered, and interactionally controlled" (p. 727).

5 Conclusion

Building upon data collected from online learner-learner interactions among Japanese and Taiwanese learners of English as a foreign language, the present study explored the affordances of such out-of-classroom interactions for language learning. The findings indicated that in the absence of teachers, such interactions offer learners the opportunity to negotiate for meaning to resolve their interactional problems. The data also showed how through using language for real-world purposes and in meaning-focused and goal-oriented interactions, learners can become aware of the interactional structure required to produce contextually appropriate utterances. The absence of teachers from these interactions, however, did not lead to the co-construction of a more fluid turn-taking pattern. The fact that one of the participants would take on a teacher's role and distribute turns among other participants meant that there were few opportunities for participants to self-select for upcoming turns and initiate new sequences. This might demonstrate the need for raising awareness in L2 learners about how interactions outside the classroom, or interactions in the wild (online or otherwise) can be different from those taking place within the walls of a language classroom. Learners who have been accustomed to rigid turn-taking patterns of a classroom may find it difficult to venture other patterns even when the restrictions of the institutional settings no longer apply. Online platforms can offer a viable solution to this problem by providing space for L2 learners to be exposed to language use in the wild.

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