Emergent vocabulary in second language socialization among learners

Roseley Santos Esguerra and Phalangchok Wanphet
Santa Cruz Convent School, Bangkok, Thailand / King Mongkut’s University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT), Thailand

In general, second language (L2) learners have limited vocabulary knowledge. In addition, they often have difficulty identifying, recognizing, or recalling the vocabulary necessary for a certain situation. This limitation and those three factors result in problematic talk where repair, improvement, and practice are merited. The purpose of the present study, following a conversation analytic (CA) perspective, explores how vocabulary-related communication problems are resolved when a low proficient learner (LPL) and a high proficient learner (HPL) communicate during their pair-work activities. In particular, this research studies the sequence of turns and repair in the talk. The study revealed that (1) the repair is mostly initiated by the LPL, (2) the HPL can be a crucial language source in the classroom, and (3) problems are caused by insufficient vocabulary knowledge and not comprehending a correctly-pronounced word. This study reveals the importance of students’ pair-work (especially pair-work activities when the students have disparate English proficiency) in the language classroom and suggests communication strategies.

Keywords: vocabulary knowledge, conversational repair, heterogeneous class, speech exchanges, pair-work, communication strategies

1. Literature review

1.1 Importance of vocabulary in second language acquisition

Linguists recognize that vocabulary knowledge and language use are interconnected; one does not exist without the other, while knowledge of the world increases vocabulary and language use (Nation 1993). In first language acquisition, to be fully competent in one’s mother tongue, one has to acquire sufficient vocabulary knowledge to allow one to communicate without difficulty in all social
situations. This may not apply to second language acquisition (SLA) because one may not be able to acquire the second language vocabulary in the same way as with a mother tongue. However, vocabulary in SLA is believed to play an important role in the acquisition of a new language and receives great attention from researchers (Bogaards and Laufer 2004, Carter 1998, Ellis 1994, Nation 1990 2008, Nation and Waring 1997).

In the second language learning process, vocabulary knowledge and use are a major aspect for learning a new language because they allow learners to form a syntactic structure (Hatch 1978), experiment with their linguistic knowledge (Swain 1995), and communicate with others. To communicate, one has to know the syntactic structure and the meanings of words used in a sentence. This emphasizes the relationship between vocabulary and syntactic structure which results ultimately in SLA and use.

In second language classrooms, many verbal and written interactional lesson plans facilitate students practicing English, and learning and using vocabulary in a sentential and conversational context. However, Adolphs and Schmitt (2004) pointed out that spoken discourse through interaction among intimates or friends typically contains a greater range of vocabulary than spoken discourse that is used for more transactional roles. While this belief values high authenticity, this may be unpractical to achieve in language classrooms. Schmitt suggested that teachers teach vocabulary through problem-solving activities and tasks that require students to transact information. The next section will explain the importance of interaction, especially in a heterogeneous classroom.

1.2 Interaction between non-native speakers

Conversation is the fundamental site of language use (Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs 1986). Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs speculated two points: for many people, even for whole societies, it is the only site, and it is the primary site for children acquiring language. This speculation is particularly applicable to interaction between a native speaker (NS) and a non-native speaker (NNS); between an expert and a novice, or between two NNSs. However, this study focuses only on interaction between students whose language proficiency is different.

Varonis and Gass (1985) established that negotiations of meaning occur with greater frequency in NNS-NNS dyads than in dyads that include NSs. This implies that there are more problems found in the interaction between NNSs than those between NSs due to the limited language proficiency the NNS parties have, different levels of language proficiency, unshared world knowledge, and conversational styles (Davies and Tyler 2005, Tannen 2005). In general, miscommunication found in interaction between NNSs is caused chiefly by language. In many cases,
limited vocabulary knowledge prevents verbal communication from taking place and causes unnecessarily long pauses in interaction, disordered strings of words, and incorrect syntactic structure. The limited verbal communication which results is called problematic talk. Whatever the cause of problematic talk, it calls for NNSs to fix vocabulary-related problems once they are detected during their talk. The next section presents the practice of dealing with problematic talk.

1.3 Repair

According to Scheglof, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977), problematic talk is ubiquitous, while repair is the mechanism through which certain ‘troubles’ in interaction are dealt with. Repair refers to efforts to deal with any problems in speaking, hearing, or understanding of the talk (Scheglof, et al.) including correction and word search. According to Markee (2000), all repairs are likely to be signaled by various markers of incipient repair, such as pauses, silences, sound stretches, cut offs, etc. The main indicator of repair is the interrupted talk that allows participants to deal with problems before the talk continues. Research on repair, in general, focuses on (a) the trouble source (TS) and its sequential reference to the practice of repair; (b) who initiates repair and who completes it (either the owner of the TS or ‘self’, or participants other than the owner of the TS or ‘others’); and (c) whether or not the practice of repair is successful.

In a conversation, turn-taking systems allow misunderstandings, and therefore repair, to be detected because when the current speaker takes the turn, she displays to the previous speaker the analysis and understanding of the previous turn (Schegloff 1992). If the previous speaker believes that the analysis of the previous turn is incorrect, normally she will take the next turn to fix what she believes to be the TS. However, there are cases where the current speaker explicitly suggests to the previous speaker that there is a problem in hearing or understanding the previous turn. In turn-at-talk, repair organization always occurs and describes how both parties deal with problems in speaking, hearing, or understanding. In dealing with problems, one may initiate repair, one may resolve the problem, and one may unfold this within a turn or even sequence of turns. This is outlined below.

Diagram 1: Repair Sequence (Schegloff, et al. 1977)
A: Trouble Source
A or B: Repair Initiation (Self-initiation if done by A, otherwise other-initiation)
A or B: Repair Completion (Self-completion if done by A, otherwise other-completion)

Repair has been the focus in SLA research; for example, Jung (2004) examined conversational interactions and L2 vocabulary development through conversations.
between conversation partners and L2 learners. The scope of enquiry was limited to instances in which the L2 learner initiates repair when facing a vocabulary production problem, which is responded to and treated by the other interlocutor as an appeal for the supply of L2 vocabulary. Jung explained that in an on-going talk, L2 learners often face problems in producing a word or phrase and seek help from the other interlocutors.

While this above section explains the importance of vocabulary use and development for NS-NNS interaction and repair, the below section presents the researchers’ methods for collecting and analyzing the data.

2. Research methods

2.1 Research question

This study was conducted to see how a low proficient learner (LPL) and a high proficient learner (HPL) referred to and used vocabulary with each other. This study’s research question is the following: How is a vocabulary–related problem dealt with in talk involving high proficient and low proficient language learners?

2.2 Participants

The participants were Mathayom 6 (the last year of high school in Thailand) students from an international all-girls school. There were 146 Mathayom 6 students, and they were given an examination (Vocabulary and Reading Test) in their English for Development Course. The two students who received the highest scores and another two students who received the lowest scores were the participants in this study. These two mixed-ability pairs of HPLs and LHLs participated in pair-work vocabulary exercises given during their regular English classes.

2.3 Data and data collection

The data in this study was the conversation recorded between the LPL and the HPL in pair-work exercises. The data was collected through a videotape recording that lasts for 20–30 minutes during the learning period of the English for Development subject. The exercises taught vocabulary and phrases related to cooking and were assigned by the teacher, who consciously paired the LPL with the HPL. Their conversational interaction was the data, and the unit of analysis was the sequence of talk in which the repair occurred.
The exercise was a two-page, two-part exercise given after a discussion of words and expressions related to food preparation: (1) the Buyer (HPL) had a written list of grocery items to buy, and (2) the Seller (LPL) had a pictorial list of grocery items to sell. This activity was planned in order to observe how the HPL helped the LPL understand and use words. The LPL identified pictures of grocery items said by the HPL. The LPL was allowed to ask for an explanation or description of the item if she was unaware of or unfamiliar with the vocabulary. The assurance was performed by the HPL who knew all the words and vocabulary of the grocery items. Moreover, the LPL’s pictures of the grocery items were not shown to the HPL to prevent cheating or guiding by the HPL.

2.4 Analytical framework and process

In this study, the specific sequence of the talk in which repair occurred is focused on, not the general conversation. The data analyze the following steps using the script transcription and the Conversation Analysis perspectives:

Step 1. Look for the location of TS

Example 1: London-Lund Corpus (Svartvik and Quirk 1980)

TS  Alan: Now, um, do you and your husband have a j-car?  1
    →  Barbara: -have a car?  2
        Alan: Yeah  3
        Barbara: No-  4

In the above example, Alan asked Barbara whether she and her husband have a car (line 1). Line 2 (Barbara’s question, ‘have a car?’) indicates the problem. Barbara may have misheard or misunderstood what Alan asked. Then, Alan completes the repair (line 3) before Barbara can answer the question. The repair sequence starts from line 1 (TS) and ends on line 3 (self-completion).

Step 2. Classify types of repair

Example 2: London-Lund Corpus (Svartvik and Quirk 1980)

TS  Teacher: Where can I get a hold of you?  1
    →  Student: get a hold of me?  2
        Teacher: Yes… I mean, where do you live?  3

In Example 2, the TS is located in turn 1 where the teacher’s part of the question is not understood by the student. The student did not know the phrase ‘get a hold of you’, so the student repeated the phrase in a form of question (i.e., other-initiation).
To complete the repair, the teacher simplified the phrase by saying, ‘where do you live?’ (line 3, self-completion).

Step 3. Look for the cause of repair

Example 3: London-Lund Corpus (Svartvik and Quirk 1980)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TS</th>
<th>A: My name is Kiel…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B: What?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A: Kiel… K I E L…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B: Ok.. Kiel..</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the third example, there is a sequence of repair. It begins with the TS (line 1). The cause of trouble can be not-hearing, not-hearing well, or hearing confirmation checks; B requested a repetition because she wanted to ensure she understood (line 2, other-initiation). This is followed by other-completion where A spelled out the name (line 4) that is the end of the repair sequence.

3. Data analysis

Following a CA perspective, this study identifies how vocabulary-related problems are dealt with in talk involving an HPL and LPL. The following section presents data collected during their pair-work activities:

3.1 Repair initiated by the LPL

The data show that the first speaker, usually the HPL, produces her turn in which a TS is found and located by the next speaker, usually the LPL. This is exemplified in the following:

Extract 1: November 29, 2013 (15:00–15:30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TS</th>
<th>HPL: Yes, I want to buy three ladles.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LPL: …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(keeps quiet and shows amusement on her face)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HPL: Three ladles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(raising her hand demonstrating she is using a ladle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LPL: What is that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HPL: The one that we used to scoop… I mean scoop soup…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LPL: Ahh ok.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(She notes it on her paper)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the above extract, the TS is ‘ladles’ (line 1) because there is no response from the LPL (line 2, other-initiation). In line 3, the HPL realized that the TS is ‘ladles’; as a result, she used gestures to help explain the word (self-completion). However, this technique was ineffective because, as shown in line 4, the LPL, who did not understand ‘ladles’, asks for the meaning (other-initiation). This was followed by a successful self-completion (line 6, ‘Ahh OK’).

Extract 1 shows that the cause of the problematic talk is not knowing the word, rather than unrecognized or unknown pronunciation; the word is new to the LPL. The practice of self-initiated other-repair is shown in both Extracts 1 and 2. However, Extract 1’s cause of repair is not knowing the word while Extract 2’s cause of repair is mishearing, as shown below:

Extract 2: November 29, 2013 (15:00–15:30)

TS  HPL: Ok, next is I need chef hat.  
→  LPL: hahahha… set? set what?  
    HPL: Chef hat… chef… chef… cooking in the restau…  
→  LPL: Ahh chef… chef hat?… How many?  
    HPL: I need only one. (raising one finger)  
    LPL: ok.. no problem… Next please…

In Extract 2, the problem is pronunciation in line 1 (chef hat), which was unheard, misheard, or unrecognized by the LPL. So in line 2, she initiated a repair; she partially repeated what she heard. In line 3, the HPL corrected the error (changed from set to chef) and gave a definition of chef (cooking in the restau…); this was done in the same turn. The repair resolved the problem, and the LPL continued the conversation (line 4).

3.2 Degree of specificity and other-initiation

Other-initiation is designed either to specify the exact cause of problematic talk or to simply let the owner of the TS know that there is a problem in the previous turn (Drew 1997). This indicates the degree of specificity, either open or specific. Examples of an open other-initiation are ‘pardon’ and ‘what’. Such expressions point out to others that there is a problem with the previous turn, while the cause is not specifically identified. In contrast, a specific other-initiation locates exactly where in the previous turn the problem is. Both can be observed below.

Extract 3: November 29, 2013 (15:00–15:30)

TS  HPL: Yes, I want to buy aubergine?
LPL: o-obejie? (repeating the word said)
HPL: Aubergine.
LPL: Ohhh? for cooking?
HPL: No.. no..
(waving her hand immediately and strongly)
LPL: hahahaha Fruit or vegetable?
HPL: It’s a vegetable… hmmm, hmmm it is long and violet
(raising her two hands)
… and…
(raising her eyebrows, smiling with big eyes and telling in her
eyes the answer)
long and violet…
LPL: (says AUBERGINE in Thai) I’m sorry, speak Thai. What again?
HPL: Aubergine.
LPL: ok. Aubergine, violet and long. How many?
HPL: six

In the above extract, the LPL encountered a problem understanding ‘aubergine’
used by the HPL (line 1). The LPL tried to say the word in line 2, where her dif-
f erent pronunciation implied that the word may be new or unfamiliar, but at least,
it showed the HPL that the LPL had a problem with the word. This repair is con-
sidered specific. As a result, the HPL repeated the same word (line 3). In line 4,
the LPL tried to guess that it is a tool for cooking. Afterwards, as she received the
description in line 7, she was able to identify its Thai name (line 8) but ‘aubergine’
was still new to her. Thus, the LPL asked again how to pronounce it in English (line
8). It is evident in line 10 that the LPL learned the word, its pronunciation, and its
meaning.

The practice of other-initiation above is considered specific while Extract 4
presents what is referred to as open other-initiation.
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→ HPL: you know the dirt on your skin … remove the dirt on the skin… 5
LPL: ahh… ok ok… I have that… hahahahaha.. a vegetable, chai mai? 6
(right?)
HPL: Yes.. 7
LPL: OK..

In the above extract, the LPL seemed to have a problem knowing or recognizing ‘loofah’ or even the entire turn (line 1), so she initiated a repair (line 2). Her line 2 did not specify exactly where the problem was but suggested it was in turn 1. Although the HPL provided help in turn 3, attempting to describe the function of a loofah, it was unsuccessful. In line 4, there was a certain pause while the HPL waited for a response. The pause or silence indicated that the LPL had trouble understanding the word, while it did not really locate the source of the problem. The HPL guessed that the cause of the problem was ‘loofah’; the usage of which she was trying to describe (line 5). The next section presents the type of techniques used by the HPL to deal with problems of vocabulary addressed by the LPL.

3.3 Self-completion technique and sequence

Data indicate the LPL often had difficulties understanding the words and phrases given by the HPL. The HPL consistently assisted the LPL through paraphrasing, describing, defining, or repeating the point of the problem. It is observed that, in every difficulty faced by the LPL (other-initiation), there are self-completion techniques and repair sequences used by the HPL. An example of this pattern is shown in Extract 5 below.

Extract 5: November 29, 2013 (15:00–15:30)

TS HPL: Next, I want to buy star apple? 1
→ LPL: Apple star? hahahaha… 2
→ HPL: Star apple, violet round and sweet… white inside with seeds… 3

The previous extract shows the TS in line 1. The problem could be mishearing or not knowing the word as the LPL mistakenly reversed ‘star apple’ to ‘apple star’ with a rising intonation (line 2). That is, the HPL corrected the word-order first and then gave the further description of what a star apple is (self-completion). The HPL introduced the new word to the LPL and briefly provided her with the description, definition, or meaning. This can be observed also in Extract 2, where the HPL asked for a ‘chef hat’, which caused a problem for the LPL. It is shown in
line 2 that the LPL experienced trouble understanding what the HPL asked. The HPL first dealt briefly with introducing the new word before providing the definition of ‘chef’ (line 3). The sequence is 1) new word introduction and 2) new word description.

It is observed that both the HPL and LPL exhibit a certain sequence during the practice of repair; most repairs are in other-initiation and self-completion. However, there is usually another sequence observed in the negotiation of meaning: pronunciation is first, description is second, and pronunciation is repeated third. This sequence is demonstrated below.

Extract 6: November 29, 2013 (15:00–15:30)

HPL: Yes, I want to buy aubergine?  
LPL: o-obejie?  (repeating the word said)

PRONUNCIATION
HPL: Aubergine.  
LPL: Ohhh? for cooking?  
HPL: No.. no.. (waving her hand immediately and strongly)

DESCRIPTION
LPL: hahahaha Fruit or vegetable?  
HPL: It’s a vegetable… hmm, hmmm it is long and violet (raising her two hands) … and… (raising her eyebrows, smiling with big eyes and telling in her eyes the answer) long and violet…

LPL: (says AUBERGINE in Thai) I’m sorry, speak Thai. What again?  
HPL: Aubergine.  
LPL: ok. Aubergine, violet and long. How many?  
HPL: six

As can be seen in Extract 6, line 1 indicates ‘aubergine’ caused trouble for the LPL. The LPL repeated ‘aubergine’ with different pronunciation and was corrected by the HPL in line 3. Line 2 implies that the LPL was unfamiliar with this word and asked for repair shown in lines 4 and 6. As a response, the HPL gave a description of what an aubergine is in line 7, and this led to the LPL’s association of the word aubergine (which is one of many names for this vegetable) with the vegetable’s corresponding Thai name, which is the first language (L1) for the HPL and LPL. The LPL successfully identified the word and recognized it in her native language but repeatedly asked for its English name and pronunciation. Thus the HPL gave
the pronunciation and the LPL got the correct pronunciation in line 10. Extract 7 is another example of a pronunciation-description-pronunciation pattern.

Extract 7: November 29, 2013 (15:00–15:30)

HPL: Next is four radish…  1
LPL: huh? red list?  2

PRONUNCIATION HPL: hmmm its RADISH.. it is white and a vegetable… (nodding her head)  3
LPL: huh? (still confused.. smiles) I don’t know.. hahahahha..  4

DESCRIPTION HPL: It is underground (demonstrating that she is digging for something) you have to do like this to get it…  5
LPL: (looking at her eyes and smiles…) I don’t know…  6

DESCRIPTION HPL: Look like carrot….  7
LPL: ahh.. ahh… speak the word radish in its Thai name…  8

PRONUNCIATION HPL: Yes… radish…  9
LPL: How many?  10
HPL: Four.  11

The first problem occurred with the pronunciation of ‘radish’ (line 1), which may be misheard or not known to the LPL. So the HPL gave the pronunciation again and continued with its characteristics, which can be seen in line 3. The LPL continuously showed no recognition of the word and requested further description (line 4). As the description helped the LPL finally recognize the word in line 8, she once again asked for the pronunciation of ‘radish’, which was given by the HPL in line 9.

It is observed that the order of the conversation for an unfamiliar word often begins with the clarification of the pronunciation of the word, followed by the initiated repair of the LPL for further description and explanation. And even though the LPL recognized the word and related it to her native language, she came back to the English pronunciation for better retention.

3.4 Quantity of talk

Trouble in conversation and negotiation of meaning often started because the LPL did not know, misunderstood, misheard, or did not recognize the pronunciation of the word or phrase. As a result, the HPL gave more information and longer turns during the pair activity. Extract 1 above demonstrates this problematic talk by looking at the turns made by the LPL in lines 2, 4, and 6 with few words and phrases. The HPL, in lines 3 and 5, used longer and greater numbers of words and phrases. When the HPL asked for ladles (line 1), the LPL gave a pause (line 2),
which indicates a TS. The HPL assumed that the LPL did not hear and did not understand the word, so she repeated it accompanied with gestures. And in line 5, after the LPL initiated repair in line 4, the HPL gave a brief description of the word. They have the same number of turns made in the dialogue, but the HPL’s number of words is greater than the LPL’s number of words.

In addition, in Extract 4, the HPL asked for a loofah and the LPL encountered difficulty understanding the word. The LPL communicated ignorance of the word as she said ‘hmmm I do not know... again again...’ (line 2). Thus the HPL took longer turns for a higher quantity of talk because the HPL needed to input information (lines 3 and 5) for the LPL to know or recognize ‘loofah’.

Another example is Extract 7, which talks about radish. In line 2, it can be seen that the LPL may not know or may have misheard the word. The LPL struggled to communicate, and the HPL responded by giving a longer length of talk (lines 3 and 5) and more turns. It can be observed that the LPL’s turns were composed of fewer words and shorter lengths. In lines 4 and 6, the LPL consistently repeated the phrase ‘I do not know’. As a result, the HPL made longer turns and more talk. In this part of the pair activity, the HPL made more talk and turns to provide more input and information to the LPL. This disparity of talk exhibited between the HPL and LPL regarding turns and words indicates the speaker who owns the TS (most of the time, HPL) makes more turns resolving the TS (repair-completion).

4. Data interpretation and discussion

From the data above, most extracts demonstrate that adjustments made by the HPL facilitate the LPL to learn and understand new words the HPL brought into the conversation. This practice helps the LPL learn and know new words’ pronunciation and descriptions (which may refer to appearance, characteristics, and usage that are more comprehensible for the LPL) and thus makes the LPL learn new language features and input. This increases the LPL’s exposure to and experience with new words in conversational contexts.

4.1 Motherese-talk

The experts (the HPLs in this study) were the source of new lexis. They introduced new words, pronounced new words, corrected the LPL’s mispronounced words (new and old), defined new words, and reinforced word pronunciations by example. A pattern emerges in extracts (Extract 3, line 7, and Extract 4, line 3), wherein the LPL encounters difficulty understanding the grocery items in the pair
activity, and this difficulty is solved by the HPL, who provides further explanation and description.

This pattern is similar to motherese talk (Ferguson 1977). This phenomenon is recognized in research on language acquisition because it has a communicative and learning function. A mother modifies her level of linguistic expressions, which increases the child’s linguistic competence (Kayani 2001). In other words, the child’s language is developed and influenced by the mother’s language. Ferguson demonstrated that motherese talk does the following two adjustments:

1. There are longer intervals between phrases and sentences. An adult using motherese talk always ensures the baby catches up with the word that was used. So a mother, for example, would make a phrase in a slower, modified speed comprehensible for the baby. Motherese is similar to the process demonstrated between HPLs and LPLs. The HPL also made long intervals: ‘Chef hat… chef… chef… cooking in the restau…’ (Extract 2, line 3). Thus, in the example, the HPL made pauses and spoke slowly when talking with the LPL so that the LPL could comprehend what she was saying.

2. In addition there is repetition of words, phrases, and clauses. An adult using motherese talk often repeats the words that might be new or infrequently heard by the baby. So a mother, for example, provides the baby sufficient time to comprehend the mother’s words. The HPL also made long intervals: ‘white inside with seeds… seeds’ (Extract 5, line 3); ‘Chef hat… chef… chef… cooking in the restau…’ (Extract 2, line 3); and ‘hmmm.. hmmm… it is long and violet.. long and violet…’ (Extract 3, line 7).

In the pair-work activity, like in a language interaction between a mother and baby, the HPL continuously repeated words, phrases, and clauses for the LPL to recall and recognize, such as for the grocery items. Thus, in the pair-work, the HPL is analogous to a mother, who makes adjustments, especially to her linguistic level, when talking to the LPL, who is analogous to a baby or small child. In those two previously cited adjustments, a speaker with a higher lexis helps a speaker with a lower lexis learn new words.

4.2 Significance of heterogeneity in the language classroom

Gairns and Redman (1986) pointed out that elementary and weak students recognize limitations in their selection of lexis; while advanced learners have different and fewer limitations. With regards to contemporary heterogeneous classroom environments, problematic talk among students arises because they have disparate language proficiency and lexical needs. An LPL might need more explanation and discussion for every lexical set occurring in the class. On the other hand, an HPL
might find the class dull and unchallenging if every lesson plan accommodates the LPL’s relatively greater lexical needs. A lesson plan targeting average proficient learners (APL) would begin balancing this conflict. But the lesson plan that deliberately pairs the HPLs with the LPLs (and the APLs with other APLs) would maximize classroom efficiency regarding finite time and increasing costs. The LPLs will receive more responses to their greater lexical needs. The HPLs will be challenged to use their lexical prowess in a communicative context.

Heterogeneous classes have advantages which are observed in this study. This study reveals that students with high language proficiency can introduce new language features to students with low language proficiency. First, the HPL helped the LPL increase her vocabulary by introducing a new word (Extract 4, line 4). Thus, the HPL helped the LPL identify the word by giving a simple description with gestures and taking longer turns (line 5).

Second, the HPL became a model of correct pronunciation and syllabication to the LPL. In Extract 3 line 2, the word seemed to be new to the LPL, which was indicated by imperfectly pronouncing the word. The HPL repeated and gave the correct pronunciation (line 3) to serve as a model of pronunciation to the LPL. In this way, the HPL assisted the LPL to learn a new word with correct pronunciation.

Finally, the HPL became a source of information to the LPL. New words were presented by the HPL (information and description of grocery items). Thus, the LPL expanded her vocabulary and became aware and informed of characteristics and uses of the different grocery items. You can observe an instance of this in Extract 1, line 5: ‘the one that we used to scoop… I mean scoop soup’. In this extract, the HPL introduced ‘ladle’ and taught the LPL its use. Another example is in Extract 5, line 3, where the HPL presented ‘star apple’ (a name) and informed the LPL about its characteristics: ‘star apple, violet, round and sweet… white inside with seeds… seeds’.

As shown in the different extracts above, it can be seen that the HPL, as an expert, provided input and information for the LPL, as a novice. The HPL was a language source for the LPL. Through this, the LPL learned new vocabulary with correct pronunciation and became informed of its characteristics and uses. In this way, information comes from the teacher and peers. This is seen in Extract 6 where ‘radish’ is introduced. The LPL encountered difficulties in recognizing what a radish is. Thus, the HPL needed to take longer turns and use her communication skills in describing the word. Heterogeneous language classrooms, as this study shows, are settings where students are able to learn new vocabulary with correct pronunciation, and to assist each other in solving communication breakdowns caused by unknown vocabulary.
5. Pedagogical implications and further studies

The data and analysis of this study may suggest and motivate language teachers to (1) use pair or group work and (2) teach word use and pronunciation in the context of pair-work activity.

This study concludes that pair work creates an environment that facilitates language learning and language use. Generally, in language classrooms, each student has a different level of vocabulary. When students from opposite ends of tested vocabulary ability were paired in a classroom language activity, HPLs made an important contribution, as language experts, and were a source of knowledge for LPLs. The HPL helped the LPL learn, recall, recognize, and understand a new word, or an infrequently-used word. This study shows that through this pair-work, students learn, remember, and strengthen their vocabulary as they communicate the components of their classroom task. Therefore this study confirms Hatch’s (1978) findings that while learning a language may begin with listening and reading, speaking plays a vital role in students’ language fluency and competence. This study also indicates that language teachers should let students explore, familiarize, and recognize different vocabulary in classroom discussions, and oral recitation, such as through pair-work participation.

While this study investigates language learning interactions between HPLs and LPLs during a pair-work activity, it is recommended that further studies quantify results by testing LPL students’ comprehension at the conclusion of the classroom activity. Furthermore, testing and comparing results from a pair of LPLs working together and a pair of HPLs working together on the same pair-work activity would provide control conditions to test the effectiveness of the LPL-HPL pairs in this study. This will shed light on the pair-specific communicative strategies used for repair in a heterogeneous language classroom setting.

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References

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Authors’ addresses

Roseley Santos Esguerra  
Department of Foreign Languages  
Santa Cruz Convent School, Thonburi  
Bangkok, 10600 Thailand  
roseley_e@yahoo.com

Phalangchok Wanphet  
Department of Language Studies  
KMUTT, Bangmod, Tungkru  
Bangkok, 10140 Thailand  
phalangchok.wan@kmutt.ac.th

About the authors

Roseley Esguerra completed her MA in Applied Linguistics at King Mongkut’s University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT) in Bangkok, Thailand. Currently, she works for an international school in Thailand.

Dr. Wanphet teaches Applied Linguistics and Language Education at KMUTT. His academic interests cover interlanguage pragmatics, sociolinguistics, the application of conversation analysis to second language acquisition, and internet discourse.