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PEER SUPPORT AND LEARNING OF LEXICAL CHUNKS IN MIXED-AGE PEER INTERACTIONS OF EFL YOUNG LEARNERS

APOYO ENTRE PARES Y APRENDIZAJE DE FRAGMENTOS LÉXICOS EN INTERACCIONES ENTRE JÓVENES DE EDADES MIXTAS ESTUDIANTES DE INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA

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Abstract

This study investigated the nature and extent of support provided by six primary school English as a foreign language (EFL) learners (10 to 12 years old) during mixed-age (M-A) peer interactions on common classroom tasks targeting lexical chunks. Grounded in sociocultural theory and drawing on audio recordings of pair work, video recordings of the whole class, pre- and posttests and analysis of students' written work, the primary aim of this study was to examine moment-to-moment interaction and identify the types of support that peers provide to one another within M-A peer interactions. The secondary aim was to draw links between peer support and learning outcomes. The findings reveal that peers provided cognitive, linguistic, and social-emotional support to each other. However, the nature and extent of this support differed widely across pairs and appeared to be a major factor in mediating learning outcomes. The implications for further research and pedagogy are discussed. This study contributes to the interactional

research in instructed second language acquisition (ISLA) by showing how young learners (YL) in EFL classrooms support each other during their interactions and how their support promotes language learning.

Keywords: peer support; young learners; mixed-age peer interaction; second language learning; sociocultural theory.

Resumen

Este estudio investigó la naturaleza y el alcance del apoyo proporcionado por seis estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) de primaria (de 10 a 12 años) durante interacciones entre pares de edades mixtas en tareas comunes de clase dirigidas a trozos léxicos. Basado en la teoría sociocultural y a partir de grabaciones de audio del trabajo en parejas, de grabaciones de vídeo de toda la clase, de pruebas previas y posteriores, y del análisis del trabajo escrito de los estudiantes, el objetivo principal de este estudio era examinar la interacción momento a momento e identificar los tipos de apoyo que los compañeros se prestan mutuamente en las interacciones entre compañeros de pares de edades mixtas. El objetivo secundario era establecer vínculos entre el apoyo de los compañeros y los resultados del aprendizaje. Los resultados revelan que los compañeros se proporcionaban apoyo cognitivo, lingüístico y socioemocional. Sin embargo, la naturaleza y el alcance de este apoyo diferían ampliamente entre las parejas y parecían ser un factor importante en la mediación de los resultados del aprendizaje. Se discuten las implicaciones para la investigación y la pedagogía. Este estudio contribuye a la investigación interaccional de la adquisición de segundas lenguas con instrucción, mostrando cómo los jóvenes estudiantes en las aulas de EFL se apoyan mutuamente durante sus interacciones, y cómo su apoyo promueve el aprendizaje de idiomas.

Palabras clave: apoyo entre iguales; jóvenes estudiantes; interacción entre iguales de edades mixtas; aprendizaje de segundas lenguas; teoría sociocultural.

1. Introduction

Research in ISLA has underlined the benefits of peer interaction for the second language (L2) development (Adams & Oliver, 2019; García Mayo, 2021). Research has shown that peer interaction aids L2 development by creating opportunities for comprehensible input, negotiation of meaning, hypothesis testing, output modification, engagement in discussions about language, etc. (Gass 2003; Long 1996; Swain, 2000, 2006). The extent that peers benefit from their interactions depends on various factors such as learner characteristics, tasks employed, social relationships among learners, learners' perceptions, learners' goals, and learning context (Loewen & Sato, 2018; Storch, 2021).

Studies on peer interaction have also explored how peers support one another when they work collaboratively on common classroom tasks (Foster & Ohta, 2005; Gagné & Parks, 2013; Ohta, 2001). For example, Foster and Ohta (2005, p. 413) refer to peer support (assistance in the original) "as a feature of learner talk that is claimed to promote L2 development. This comes about as learners collaborate to create discourse in the target language." A more general definition of peer support refers to a "process through which people who share common experiences or face similar challenges come together as equals to give and receive help based on the knowledge that comes through shared experience" (Penney, 1989). Although this definition seems to underline an equal relationship between the support giver and receiver, peer support also relates to support given in unequal relationships such as among peers of differing abilities. However, regardless of the dichotomy between equal or unequal relationships, important characteristics

of peer support are empathy, encouragement, and compassion for the help receiver (Penney, 2018). Also, to be able to receive support and benefit from it, one needs to be willing to ask for it and open oneself to the experience with the help giver. The help giver benefits as it makes the helper feel valued and needed (Penney, 2018). An exploration of peer support and the links between peer support and learning is particularly important in mixed-age (M-A) (multi-grade) classrooms which are based on the conceptual underpinnings that the younger learners learn through interacting with the older (usually more proficient) peers while the older students learn by teaching the younger (Little, 2001; Wagener, 2014).

To my knowledge, there is very little empirical evidence that shows how and to what extent this assumption applies to M-A English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms of YL (Thurn, 2011). To fill this gap, the primary aim of this study was to explore the nature and extent of support that young EFL learners provide to one another during M-A peer interactions. The secondary aim was to find links between peer support and learning outcomes operationalized as lexical chunks. This study explored peer interactions of six primary school learners aged between 10 and 12 in EFL classrooms in Germany. It attempts to answer the two following research questions:

(1) In what ways do primary school learners, organized in mixed-age pairs support each other on collaborative classroom tasks during regular lessons?

(2) What evidence is there for learning lexical chunks related to this support?

2. Theoretical background and literature review

2.1. Sociocultural theory

This study is grounded in the sociocultural framework (Vygotsky, 1978), which underlines the interconnected nature of thinking, learning, and development which "cannot be understood without taking account of the intrinsically social and communicative nature of human life" (Mercer, 2005, p. 139). Sociocultural theory views language as the most important tool mediating social interaction and learning. Learning occurs in social interaction with a more knowledgeable other within a zone of proximal development (ZPD), which has been defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). The crucial ideas of the ZPD are that learning will occur only when the knowledge to be learned is within the learners' ZPD and that learning is a process under someone's mediation in the ZPD. If applied to the context of peer interaction, it is plausible to say that social interaction between two learners using a language while working together to complete a language task has the potential to mediate learning given that the language to be learned is within both learners' ZPD. Researchers have repeatedly shown that a peer collaborative dialogue mediates learning as learners are engaged in the construction of linguistic knowledge (Swain, 2000, 2010). Studies have analyzed students' pair/group talk for language-related episodes (LREs) (*languaging*; *metatalk*) (Swain, 2006, 2010) and have revealed that while attempting to solve a linguistic problem, learners construct

and analyze the new linguistic forms, which enables them to learn a new language or knowledge about language, thus improving their language use.

2.2. Related research on peer support

Research has shown that peer support promotes language learning as learners collaborate to create discourse in the target language (Foster & Ohta, 2005). For example, support or assistance may be sought, provided, and received with language issues during LREs (Swain & Lapkin, 2001, p. 53). Most studies on peer support (sometimes referred to as peer assistance or peer scaffolding) involved high school or adult learners. This is a limitation because research has shown differences between adult and child interactions. For example, unlike in peer learning situations among adult learners, YL may not feel responsible for supporting one another (Guk & Kellogg, 2007). Although interactions among YL tend to be high on equality, they are low on mutuality because they often lack the ability to engage with each other's contribution. They may even be hesitant to work with others (Azkarai & Kopinska, 2020; Oliver & Azkarai, 2019). YL lack consistency and approach tasks in a rather unpredictable, less organized, and less systematic fashion when compared to adult students (Azpilicueta-Martinez, 2020; Pinter, 2006). They take less time to complete tasks, produce less language, and avoid linguistic items that they do not know (Pinter, 2006). Some studies conducted in mixed-proficiency settings have shown that the higher proficiency learner may not to trust their lower proficiency partners in terms of contribution to their pair work and as a result, the less proficient students' participation becomes diminished. Some may even be silenced due to expert and novice positioning of students during mixed-proficiency group work (Young & Tedick, 2016; see also Kowal

& Swain, 1994). Only very few studies focused on peer support among YL (Davin & Donato, 2013; Gagné & Parks, 2013; Martin-Beltrán, Daniel, Peercy & Silverman, 2017; Pinter, 2007) and even less studies were conducted in FL classrooms (Davin & Donato, 2013; Pinter, 2007).

Studies have examined how YL support during their interactive work and have suggested that YL can support one another when working collaboratively on classroom tasks and use a variety of strategies when doing so (Davin & Donato, 2013; Ibarrola & Hidalgo, 2017; Gagné & Parks, 2013; Pinter, 2007). For example, YL may complete utterances that a partner is having difficulty with, they may offer explanations, suggestions, corrections, or repetitions (Davin & Donato, 2013; Gagné & Parks, 2013; Ibarrola & Hidalgo, 2017). Particularly in FL contexts, peers commonly resort to their first language (L1) when requesting and giving support (Pinter, 2007). Pinter (2007) explored 10-year-old Hungarian children's ability to work together in an EFL classroom on a spot-the-difference task that was repeated two times. Pinter showed that both children supported each other, appreciated their help, and instantly drew on the support provided. Pinter (2007) demonstrated that effective collaboration was made possible by children taking full responsibility for their own utterances and appreciating their partner's needs. It also needs to be noted that children's support was mediated by the task and its repetition as it allowed them to have a go at the same type of problem, produce the same type of language within the same task and use the target language comfortably in a meaningful situation.

Although in a different context and using a different study design, similar to Pinter's study, Martin-Beltrán et al. (2017) have

demonstrated how complex peer support is. More specifically, they explored how emergent bilinguals discursively support one another during literacy activities in a cross-aged peer-tutoring program in their elementary school. Focusing on moment-to-moment interactions, a particular strength of their study is that it showed that the older children used cognitive, linguistic, and social-emotional supports to elicit their kindergarten buddies' ideas during reading, to build their word knowledge by connecting it with prior knowledge, and to make meaning from text together. For example, the older students assisted their kindergarten buddies socially by building relationships during which they showed affection and care. They engaged them in conversational joking and humor, acknowledged personal connections, showed agreement, or recognized shared feelings or opinions. They supported them by redirecting and encouraging persistence (You can do it!) or by offering positive feedback and compliments. They also used body language such as giving high fives, thumbs-ups, smiling, or patting their kindergarten buddies on the back. Importantly, this study has shown that such kind of support enhances language learning as well as self- and peer regulation.

Similar to Martin-Beltrán et al. (2017), research in mainstream education has suggested that peer interactions among children of different ages aid their cognitive development, promote cooperative behavior, sharing, help, and self-directed learning (Hoffman 2002; Kalaoja & Pietarinen 2009; Wagener, 2014). This line of research has proposed that younger students gain from being taught or mentored by their elder peers, while elder students benefit from teaching the younger ones (Wagener, 2014). In contrast, some research has shown that elder children

may act out authority and control over younger children and critically questioned the basic assumption of M-A grouping that age differences make it easier for children to ask for and provide help (Huff & Raggl, 2015; Panagiotopoulou, 2004). This is because, within an M-A peer constellation, the differences in competencies are even greater than in a mixed-proficiency setting, weaker students are even more inhibited and expectations placed on elder students are too high to be met. For example, Panagiotopoulou (2004) observed children's literacy practices in an M-A classroom and found that the older children experience a double burden: they must show their younger classmates how to write a story and simultaneously write a story with a classmate.

2.3. Related research on lexical chunks

Nation (2013, p.479) defined lexical chunks as "groups of words that commonly occur together. The concept, however, also refers to word groups that are "intuitively seen as being formulaic sequences, that is, items stored as single choices". Similarly, Lewis (1997, p. 7) saw lexical chunks as parts of the language that do not fit neatly into the categories of either grammar or single-word vocabulary. They may include collocations (*give way*), fixed expressions (*by the way*), formulaic utterances (*I'm on my way.*), sentence starters (*I like the way…*), verb patterns (*to make/fight/elbow one's way…*) or idioms and catchphrases (*the third way*) (Cambridge University Press, 2019; see also Shin & Nation, 2008). Research among YL has proposed to include lexical chunks already in the early stages of FL learning in pre- and primary classrooms (Bland, 2015; Hestetræet, 2018; Kötter, 2017). The focus of language teaching should not be on single words and one-word phrases, but on chunks, because they can be used not only to name something, but also to achieve communicative goals

(Kötter, 2017; p. 107). For example, lexical chunks can benefit YL when expressing socio-interactional purposes such as 'to get things done' (*Can I play with this?*), to demonstrate group membership (*How are you?*) or to gain control of their language development (*What's that? I don't understand.*) (Wray, 2002). Likewise, using lexical chunks may be helpful during play in English. Mourão (2014) observed that children used not only the language of a topic but also the scripted language from the teacher-led activities such as '*Let's play …*', '*Your turn*!', '*Raise your hand*!', '*What's missing*?'. In addition, they corrected each other, reminded each other of English words and expressions, and actively helped each other to play in English (p.261). Finally, engaging YL with lexical chunks may help YL notice their components which, in turn, "may lead to an abstraction of the underlying construction with all its constraints as well as to the acquisition of its parts" (Kersten, 2015 as cited in Hestetræet, 2018, p.214).

2.4. Summary of peer support and sociocultural theory

Although studies on peer support have shown how YL's support contributes to language learning, the study by Pinter (2007) involved only one pair while the study by Martin-Beltrán et al. (2017) explored interactions between grade four students interacting with their kindergarten "buddies". Consequently, we need more studies that would inform FL pedagogies by showing how the quality of support that YL provide to one another shapes the learning-in-process (see Philp, Walter, & Basturkmen, 2010). Moreover, because sociocultural and contextual factors are central to peer interaction (Swain & Deters, 2007) and provided that peer interaction is not only a linguistic and cognitive but also a social and emotional phenomenon (Swain, 2013), we need to take the role of all four phenomena into account. Indeed,

students' emotions greatly affect L2 learning and the inseparability of cognition and emotion has been underlined (Swain, 2013). Finally, given that an increasing number of schools implement M-A language teaching, we need studies on peer support and its role in learning as peer support is one of the pillars on which M-A classrooms stand.

3. Methods

The data presented in this article comes from a bigger research study that investigated EFL peer interactions among M-A and same-age (S-A) pairs (Kos, 2021). However, this article reports only findings related to M-A peer interactions.

3.1. Context and Participants

This study was conducted during the school day as a part of regular EFL lessons in two M-A EFL primary school classrooms at an alternative school in Germany. Alternative schools are public or private schools, which have a special curriculum, offering a more flexible program of study than traditional schools. The classrooms were simultaneously mixed-proficiency classrooms. Due to wide differences in students' age and language proficiencies, one of the school's main aims is to implement an individualized and learner-centered approach to teaching and learning. Consequently, students are allowed to learn at their speed and level and teachers strive to develop individual learning paths. Students are encouraged to accomplish tasks either individually, with a partner, in small study groups, or with the teacher's help, depending on their needs and abilities. English curriculum at the school involved three lessons a week of which one was taught in the S-A (simultaneously same-grade) class and two lessons in the M-A (grades 4-6) class. In other words, English teaching takes place as a combination of the S-A/similar

proficiency and M-A/mixed-proficiency lessons. This is due to the belief of the school's teaching community that combining S-A and M-A teaching creates opportunities for students to interact with both same- and different-aged classmates which in turn offers linguistic, social, and emotional benefits. A typical S-A lesson focuses on competence training in one of the four language skills (e.g. reading). However, for this study, the common order of lessons had to be changed and during the intervention, three lessons were taught in an S-A class for one week and three lessons were taught in an M-A class the next week (Kos, 2021). This article reports findings from interactions among six (*N*=6) primary school students aged between 10 and 12. They were organized into three M-A pairs based on the results of the proficiency test (Cambridge English A1 Movers) taken four months before this study which assessed students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. The term M-A refers to mixed-age and simultaneously mixed-proficiency pairs. Similarly, in order to avoid repetition, the term *older* is used when referring to older learners who were simultaneously more proficient learners within pairs while the term *younger* refers to younger learners who in this study were also the less proficient learners. The three pairs were selected as case studies to illustrate the diverse nature of peer support among all pairs. These pairs were also fairly representative of the range of ages (grade levels). The students were German EFL students. The language teacher confirmed that all pairs consisted of either friends or acquaintances and confirmed that there were no objections on the students' part concerning the composition of pairs. Moreover, as mentioned by the classroom and language teachers before the data collection, the usual classroom practice involved both, pairs being organized by the teacher and allowing students to select their partner.) and language proficiency.

Table 1: *Participants*

Pair	Name	Gender	Grade	Age	Proficiency	PT score
1	Jana	F	6	12	A2	130
	Willy	M	5	11	Pre-A1	98
2	Luana	F	6	12	A2	121
	Gina	F	5	11	A1	109
3	Jenny	F	5	11	A1	112
	Lisa	F	4	10	Pre-A1	96

3.2. Instruments and procedures

The data was collected during the winter term, over two weeks. Learners interacted with an older or younger (simultaneously different proficiency) classmate on several classroom tasks and exercises during three common classroom lessons. These lessons were spread over the whole week and all lessons were conducted in an M-A composition. The lessons involved a brief teacher introduction to the topic, a short video involving a listening practice of conversations at a shop, and a range of pair work tasks. The final task was to write a similar dialogue with a partner, learn it by heart and present it to the class. The lessons targeted the following lexical phrases:

Table 2: *Lexical phrases targeted by the lessons*

LEXICAL PHRASES
Hi there.
Do you need any help?/ Yes, please./I'd like …
How much are these shoes?/They're £45.
How are they? They're a bit too big.
Do you have them in size 10?/Do you have them in black?
Yeah, sure. /I'll have a look for you.
Thanks./ No, thanks./Thanks anyway./ Thanks a lot.
What colour would you like? Black, please.
Do you want to try them on?
I'll take them.
Bye now.

Most lexical chunks cannot be directly translated into students' L1 and as such could have posed difficulty to the participants. Students were introduced to these lexical chunks for the first time.

3.3. Data sources

Data collection included pre-test/post-test (written tests for all students), classroom observation and notes of six lessons, video recordings of the whole class using two cameras placed at the back and the front of the classroom, audio of pair work interactions using

individual microphones/digital recorders and documentary analysis of student written work. To examine L2 learning outcomes, pre-tests were conducted one day before the first lesson, and post-tests were administered three days after the last lesson. A delayed post-test could not be conducted due to time and curricular constraints. The tests were written and assessed students' use of lexical chunks (see Table 2 above).

Students were given 30 minutes to complete each test. The tests were developed together with the English teacher to preserve common classroom practices. The tests consisted of a picture-word matching task, which required matching a picture with a particular lexical phrase, a multiple-choice task, in which students had to choose the appropriate lexical chunk, a gap-fill task which required to fill in an appropriate lexical phrase to the text and English into German and German into English translation exercises, which required students to translate lexical chunks into both languages. Implementing a speaking post-test could have contributed to a more exact assessment of L2 outcomes, but conducting one was not possible due to time and curricular constraints. Students completed all tests and their results were included in the data set. Pre-test and post-test scores did not count as a grade.

3.4. Classroom tasks

Due to the great heterogeneity of the M-A classrooms at the research site, the choice of activities and exercises to respond to students' abilities was challenging. To avoid repetition, the term *classroom task* is used throughout the study. Their selection and their pedagogical benefits were discussed with the English teacher. To follow a common practice in these classrooms, classroom tasks provided in the textbook

were not used. Instead, those provided on the British Council website (britishcouncil.org) were selected because this site offers English language practice for a wide range of language levels, based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The classroom tasks were then adapted for the lessons at the research site. Pairs carried out ten classroom tasks (see Table 3 below).

Table 3: Examples of classroom tasks

Classroom tasks	Description
Preparation exercise	Who says it, a customer, or a shopkeeper? Put these phrases in the correct group
Picture matching	Check your vocabulary about clothes and accessories. Write the correct word in the box below the picture.
Question and answer matching	Match the question and the answer.
Multiple choices	Circle the correct option.
Gap-fill	Complete the dialogue with phrases from the box.
Ordering	Write a number (1–9) to put these sentences in order.
Reordering	Write the words in the correct order to make questions and sentences.
Discussion	a. What new phrases have you learned from this video? Write them down in the box below. b. Can you describe the shoes you're wearing now? c. What new words and phrases did you learn from this video?
Vocabulary Box	Write any new words you have learned in this lesson.
Dialogue	Write a dialogue with your partner, learn it by heart and present it to your class

3.5. Data Analysis

According to sociocultural theory, learning occurs in social interaction, and therefore, it is through analysis of classroom discourse over time that allows the researcher investigate this process. However, the analysis was concerned with both the learning processes and their outcomes. The sociocultural classroom discourse analysis was chosen because it seeks to understand "how spoken language is used as a tool for thinking collectively…to study how people pursue joint educational activities" (Mercer, 2005, p.138). And because it is *in* and *through* peer interaction that learning opportunities arise, it is through analysis of the moment-by-moment interaction which allows the researcher to investigate how learners support one another and how this support may account for learning opportunities. In addition, in order to preserve the dynamics of the interaction, its context, and the ways how students constructed meaning during their interaction, pre-determined categories were avoided.

3.6. Peer Support

First, the audio recordings were transcribed using f4transcription software. A native speaker of German was consulted during the process of transcription to clarify incomprehensible expressions. The next step was a detailed analysis of the transcripts. This analysis was complemented by the analysis of video recordings and revising each transcript of the audio file and adding comments about non-verbal aspects of the event and other potentially relevant information (Mercer, 2005, p. 152). Video recording allowed to incorporate the learners' paralinguistic expressions such as gestures and facial expressions during their interaction into the analysis. The data was revisited several times in the later stages of the analysis, and some

categories were revised (Dörnyei, 2007). In addition to this, to increase the transparency of the analytical process, peer talk was complemented by the analysis of students' writing produced during the tasks. Drawing upon the work of scholars using micro-genetic analysis such as van Compernolle (2011) or Martin-Beltrán et al. (2017) episodes of peer support (also called *mediational episode* or *mediational sequence*) were first identified in the audio transcripts. Each time, students requested and offered support for peers, such an episode was noted. The analysis followed the suggestion of studies in mainstream education research (Martin-Beltran et al., 2017) to attend to (a) cognitive strategies, (b) linguistic strategies, and c) strategies that involve social-emotional support. Table 4 below shows categories of peer support that emerged from the data, together with examples.

Table 4: *Categories, subcategories, and examples from the data*

Types of support	Description of peer support	Examples from data
Cognitive	Explaining the task procedure	We have to match questions with answers.
	Explaining teacher directions	He said that we should do the task only by speaking.
	Checking partner's understanding of the task	So what shall we do here?
	Suggesting an idea related to the task	Now, I would write the dialog down.

Linguistic	Providing options/examples for responses	How are much these trainers or How much are these trainers?
	Offering correct words or morphosyntax	No, "I don't like".
	Suggesting an idea related to the morphosyntax, lexis, or spelling	I would use "how" first.
	Explaining a linguistic feature, concept, or task content	He doesn't want the trainers because they are too big.
	Checking understanding of language knowledge or task	Does he buy them or not?
	Encouraging to complete an utterance (continuer)	Hm, ok. They are…
	Requesting confirmation	In black size eleven? Yes?
	Repeating to establish an understanding	Yes, size 11.
	Using body language (gestures), visuals or school objects to clarify the meaning of a text or word	Hier, guck mal! Here, look!
Socio-emotional	Offering one's resources or expertise	Shall I write it for you?
	Inviting partner's participation	Would you like to read it?
	Encouraging to complete an utterance (continuer)	Hm, ok. They are…
	Redirecting and encouraging persistence	Let's think together!
	Offering positive feedback	I like your handwriting.
	Showing affection and empathy	I know that it's hard.

The categories were further divided into subcategories (Martin-Beltran et al., 2017). Episodes coded as cognitive support concerned mainly issues related to task procedure. Cognitive support involved explaining the task procedure (*We have to match questions with answers.*), checking the partner's understanding of the task (*So what shall we do here?*), suggesting ideas related to the task procedure, or explaining teacher directions. Linguistic support was related to aspects connected with lexis, morpho-syntax, pronunciation, and the content of the tasks. Linguistic support was given by explaining the language, other-correcting, offering correct words or morphosyntax, suggesting, repeating, or checking the partner's understanding of the language (see Table 4). Nevertheless, this distinction is rather superficial as there were numerous overlaps between the categories and subcategories. This is because of the variety of pragmatic functions of each particular utterance. For example, as exemplified in Excerpt 1, *repetitions* may serve a linguistic function because by repeating with rising intonation an interlocutor may provide space for the speaker to expand or reformulate his or her utterance (Foster & Ohta, 2005):

Excerpt 1

21. W: We've got… a 10 in white.
22. J: We've got a 10 in white?
23. W: We've got a 10 in white, but not in black.

Repetitions can also have a social and cognitive function because a repetition with a rising intonation may prompt learners to distribute help to one another throughout the activity, thus mediating cognitive activity such as thinking, hypothesizing, or evaluating (DiCamilla & Antón, 1997; p.627-628). Likewise,

in the research on learners' negotiation of meaning the term confirmation check is referred to "any expression by a speaker immediately following an utterance by the interlocutor which was designed to elicit confirmation that the utterance had been correctly understood or correctly heard by the speaker" (Foster & Ohta, 2005, p.410). However, as Foster and Ohta (2005) rightly point out, confirmation checks "do not necessarily indicate a communication breakdown, but may perform different discourse functions such as confirmation that the utterance is correct or as an encouragement to continue" (p.410). Therefore, a distinction was made between a continuer (encouragement to complete an utterance) (*Hm, ok. They are…?),* requesting for confirmation as a request seeking confirmation of correct understanding (*And this one too, right?*), (Foster & Ohta, 2005, p.410), and repeating to establish understanding (*Yes, size 11.*) (see Table 4). Another problematic subcategory found in the data was suggesting. According to Wells (1999), a suggestion is a move that draws the other member of the pair into the decision-making process. However, unlike a request or a question, which requires a response, a suggestion may expect it but does not require it (Storch, 2001, p.231). Suggestions found in the data usually took the form of a statement uttered with a rising intonation. Such statements were generally followed by a question tag or a phatic expression with rising intonation. Suggestions were mostly answered by a simple confirmation ("yes"), repetition, or disconfirmation ("no"), sometimes followed by a counter-suggestion (see also Storch, 2001). This is exemplified in excerpt 2 below in which Lisa suggests a solution. This is accepted by Jenny who in turn suggests a solution for the next problem.

Excerpt 2

72. L: How much are they is is number one? (suggesting)
73. J: Yes, and I think that then comes Have you got them? (suggesting)
74. L: Yes.

A distinction was made between suggesting an idea related to the task procedure (cognitive) and suggesting an idea related to the morphosyntax, lexis, or spelling (linguistic). Social-emotional support referred to the social and emotional features of support and involved instances in which peers offered their resources or expertise, invited their partner's participation, encouraged them to complete an utterance, redirected and encouraged persistence, provided positive feedback, or showed affection and empathy (Martin-Beltran et al., 2017).

Importantly, the analysis took into account nonverbal support such as using gestures, nodding, smiling, or pointing to a particular language feature using a finger or a pen. Finally, non-word utterances such as 'mm'/'ooh' were taken into account when they appeared to perform a communicative function (e.g., to showing surprise, agreement, or to extend a speaker's turn in the face of possible interruptions (Mercer, 2005, p.149). Table 3 below provides definitions of the codes and their examples found in the data. It also needs to be mentioned that the utterances made in students' L1 German were translated into English and appear in italics (see Appendix for transcription conventions). Two researchers independently reviewed 25% of the transcripts. An agreement was reached in 82% of categories and subcategories. The majority of disagreements concerned the overlap between linguistic and social-emotional support such as *offering one's resources and expertise* and *encouraging to complete an utterance*

(continuer). Disagreements were discussed and resolved and the inter-rater reliability using Cronbach's alpha was .92.

3.7. Learning Outcomes

The final step of the analysis was to look for evidence for L2 learning that could be linked to the episodes of peer support. To do that, linguistic items (*Do you need any help?, Yes, please./I'd like….*) (see Table 2 above for more) that learners did not answer or answered incorrectly on the pre-test were identified. Subsequently, the researcher found episodes during which peer support was related to these items in the transcripts. Finally, the researcher examined whether the item was taken up by the learners as their interactions followed and on the individual post-test. Based on sociocultural theory, I intend to illustrate how the targeted linguistic item is appropriated from social use for individual use (Lantolf & Aljafreh, 1995).

4. Findings

The first research question investigated in what ways primary school learners, organized in M-A pairs support each other on pair collaborative tasks during common classroom lessons. The second research question explored evidence for learning lexical chunks (e.g., *Thanks anyway.*) that was the targeted structure related to this support. The findings of both research questions are discussed together and are based on an in-depth analysis of interactions of three pairs and their results on pre-and post-tests. These interactions were selected to reveal the complexity of peer support given within M-A pairs and its contribution to learning.

4.1. Example 1: Jana (grade 6, A2, age 12) and Willy (grade 5, pre-A1, age 11)

The first example shows a high degree and quality of support which could not be appropriated due to the linguistic threshold of the support receiver and benefited only to the support giver. This interaction began after the students watched a video that showed a conversation between a customer buying new shoes and a shopkeeper. The task aimed at checking for understanding and required students to complete the dialogue with phrases from the box provided. In this interaction (see Excerpt 3 below), it was the older learner, Jana, who assisted her younger partner, Willy.

Excerpt 3

35. J: Hi there. Do you need any help? *Your question* (reading and inviting W. to continue)
36. W: *The question can be surely seen here. Hm, hm, hm* (thinking but does not understand, yet)
37. J: *Yes, it is here.* (explaining while pointing to the question)
(Willy is not responding)
38. J: How much are these trainers *or what do you think?* (inviting W. to continue)
39. W: Trainers…trainers. *That does not belong here.*
40. J: How much are they? *Shall I write?* (looking into his eyes)
41. W: *Yes…siz or something like that* (mispronouncing size)
42. J: Size eleven...I like them, but they are. (inviting W. to complete the utterance)
43. W: Hm. (thinking)
44. J: I like them, but they're a bit too big. Die sind ein bißchen zu groß (translating the sentence) *Now the person would say we got the shoes in a ten.* (explaining)
45. W: *Ok. Let's do it!* ...silence

46. J: *Or are you going to think something else?* (inviting W. to continue)
47. W: *No, I have no idea*. (smiling)
48. J: *Ok. I will read the remaining part of the dialogue for you. Please listen!*

As the example shows, Jana clearly plays the role of an expert and used cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional supports to enable Willy to understand the task and the language. She frequently draws his attention to the task and prompts him to think about his language use. She begins by reading the incomplete dialogue inviting him to fill in the first gap (turn 35). Using her pen, she draws his attention to the box containing the target phrases (turn 37). Because Willy is not reacting, Jana offers a possible solution while asking his opinion (turn 38). As Willy is still not able to identify the target sentence, Jana provides it and while raising her eyes from the worksheet towards him, she gently offers to write it down for him (turn 40). Willy agrees and goes on reading the next example while mispronouncing the word "size" (turn 41). Jana corrects his pronunciation and provides a sentence starter of the next sentence while inviting him to continue to complete his utterance (turn 42). As Willy struggles to provide what Jana expects him to, she uses L1 to translate the phrase and provides an example (turn 44). As Willy finally seems to understand (turn 45), Jana immediately asks him for his opinion (turn 46). However, by giving Jana a gentle smile, Willy indicates that he does not understand (turn 47). Realizing that Willy is not able to understand this task despite her ongoing support, Jana invites him to at least listen to her and reads the remaining part of the dialogue for him (turn 48).

The example indicates that Jana led Willy throughout the tasks and offered a variety of support, which was sensitive to the difficulties that Willy was experiencing. For example, she repeatedly provided explanations of the task procedure, task content, and language-related issues. She encouraged him to complete his utterances and patiently waited for him. She corrected his pronunciation and checked his understanding of the task and target language. She did not merely rely on L1 but instructed him in English or provided options or examples for responses. She repeated or reread sentences when he signaled non/understanding. When he engaged in off-task talk, she directed his attention to the text using her pen. She praised him and showed understanding for his hardship to understand the task at hand. To maintain his interest in the task, she was even willing to engage in an occasional off-task talk filled with conversational joking and humor. Nevertheless, despite Jana's ongoing support, she did not seem to contribute to Willy's learning of the target language. Willy's gain on the post-test was minimal. Interestingly, the only target sentence that he was able to identify on the posttest is *I like them, but they are a bit too big* which was the sentence that Jana assisted him with (turns 42 and 44). In contrast, Jana's gain on the post-test was significant (50%). In contrast to the pre-test, she was able to identify and write down the following phrases which she extensively used while supporting Willy *Hi there!/Do you need any help/ Do you have them in size 10?/ I like the shoes but they're a bit too big/ Which color do you need?* Besides, on the post-test she was able to write accurately two words (*really, trainers*) which were words that she assisted Willy with by correcting his pronunciation and by writing the words down for him. It must, however, be said that one

of the correctly identified phrases on the posttest *(I'll have a look for you)* cannot be related to the episode of support as it was used by neither of them during their interactions.

4.2. Example 2: Luana (grade 6, A2, age 12) and Gina (grade 5, A1, age 11)

The next interaction exemplifies how inadequate support can have minimal learning benefits to both students. The example comes from the interaction between Luana, a grade 6 student interacting with a grade 5 student Gina on a task that required them to match questions with answers. Although very short, excerpt 4 below genuinely mirrors what occurred during their interactive work across three lessons.

Excerpt 4

8. L: Match the question....and the sentences ...what size are you, what color would you like....? (reading in a low voice)
   G. points her eyes towards Luana as if she wanted to say something
9. L: *Wait, wait!* (interrupting her) What size are you? What color would you like...(reading the sentences and thinking about how to match them)
10. G: *You are doing it nicely!* (sarcastic tone, looking disengaged and unmotivated)
11. L: Easy! Easy! (authoritative tone followed by superficial smile)
12. G: *So, this one is already right!* (sarcastic tone)
13. L: *Finished, we are finished!* (raising her hand and her eyes are looking for the teacher)
14. G: *We are already done!* (sarcastic tone)

Luana has the role of a scribe, and has the worksheet in front of her while Gina is sitting on the edge of the desk.

Luana begins reading the task instructions and the examples provided (turn 8). Gina raises her eyes toward Luana wanting to say something. However, Luana interrupts her because she is occupied with the task (turn 9). It appears that Luana is not willing to engage with Gina's contribution. Perhaps as a result of being silenced, Gina "praises" Luana in a sarcastic tone (turn 10). Right after, she looks away in a disengaged and unmotivated manner. As if offended, Luana reminds her in an authoritative tone which is followed by a superficial smile (turn 11). This prompts Gina to make a sarcastic statement (turn 12). A few moments later, without taking any notice of Gina, Luana raises her hand and announces that she finished, triggering yet another sarcastic Gina's reaction (turn 13).

When looking across tasks, Lina completed most of the tasks with Gina's participation being minimal. Support was neither explicitly requested by Gina, nor explicitly offered by Luana. Luana's support was limited to a few other-corrections or counter-suggestions which were, however, given in the form of a statement, containing no signs of willingness to know the partner's perspective. In addition, Luana's corrections of Gina's utterances were expressed in a disrespectful tone, often ridiculing Gina's limited attempts to contribute. Luana merely engaged Gina as her 'secretary' to find needed vocabulary in a dictionary. As a result, Gina was not interested, she was disengaged and cracking sarcastic jokes. With Luana's support being limited, Gina's participation was only peripheral. It comes as no surprise that Gina's post-test showed no learning gains. Interestingly, despite repeating after Luana on their interactions (see Excerpts 5 and 6 below), Gina's

responses on the post-test were not target-like. Although Luana improved on the post-test, her gains were rather small (17%.) For example, Luana was able to correctly identify the following phrases: *How much are the shoes?/I'll have a look for you* and *I like the shoes but they're too big* which she repeatedly used during the interactions.

Excerpt 5
75. L: How much are these trainers? (reading)
76. G: How much are these trainers? (repeating)

Excerpt 6
87. L: a bit too (solving alone while writing)
88. G: a bit too big. *I know the sentence by heart.* A bit too big. (repeating)
89. L: me too

4.3. Example 3: Jenny (grade 5, A1, age 11) and Lisa (grade 4, pre-A1, age 10)

The interaction between Jenny and Lisa is an example of a high degree of support which has greatly contributed to the learning of these two students. In the third lesson, students were asked to write a dialogue similar to the dialog they previously watched and worked with. Later they were asked to learn it by heart and present it to the class. Before they began writing the dialog, they discussed the kind of shoes that they wanted to buy. As seen in excerpt 7 below, Lisa, the younger learner takes the initiative by suggesting to Jenny which item to buy (turn 250). Surprisingly, she proposes the word *high heels* in English. Moreover, she asks in a very polite way using the phrase *do we want* which suggests a joint pursuit of the task. Signaling non-understanding (turn 251) Jenny requests clarification of the word (turn 252). Lisa provides an explanation (turn

253) but Jenny is not keen on writing a dialogue about high heels and asks whether it is necessary to buy shoes at all (turn 255). Lisa nods (turn 256) and Jenny spontaneously proposes to write about rubber boots (turn 257). Lisa disagrees and insists on her original idea (turn 260). It seems that Lisa's disappointment prompts Jenny to suggest a different idea (turn 263). This is accepted by Lisa who immediately asks how to say the word *Winterstiefel* in English (turn 264). Having looked up the word in the dictionary, Jenny provides the word winter boots while seeking Lisa's confirmation (turn 265). Lisa accepts, but now seeking Jenny's confirmation (turn 266). Finally, Jenny, once again, makes sure that this is really what Lisa wants to write about (turn 257).

Excerpt 7
250. L: *Shall we take high heels?*
251. J: *Take what?*
252. L: high heels
253. J: *What is it?*
254. L: *They are shoes on a high heel.*
255. J: *Do we have to take shoes? Yes, right?*
256. L: *Yes.*
257. J: *Or we take rubber boots.*
258. L: *Shoes made of rubber?* (says in a negative tone)
259. J: *Hey, I think...* (sounding negative) …*Or let's take…*
(Both students are thinking.)
260. L: high heels (insisting on high heels)
261. J: *or something?*
262. L: rain bauts…*I don't care!* (not looking pleased about rubber boots)
263. J: *Or we take winter boots or sandals?* (rising intonation)
264. L: *And what is called in English?*
265. J: *I think that Winterstiefel are winter boots, right?*

266. L: *I see. We want winter boots?*
267. J: *Um. Do we want?*
268. L: ok.

As the excerpt shows, the kind of support provided among Lisa and Jenny differed from the "one-way" support described in previous examples. In other words, despite age and proficiency differences, the support "flowed" in both directions. Their interaction was marked by learners' high willingness to engage with each other's contributions. Support was rich in co-constructions of language meaning and form, which in turn, rested on suggestions, frequent sharing of ideas, and reciprocal feedback.

Both learners greatly improved on the post-test (33%) and the absolute majority of the lexical chunks identified correctly could be linked to the episodes of support provided during their interaction. For example, while writing a dialog, Jenny provided the phrase *How much are the shoes?* and its meaning in L1 (turn 269). This was followed by Lisa's repetition (270) and by a request to spell it (271). Jenny spells the first word and then writes the remaining three words on a separate piece of paper.

Excerpt 8
269. J: *Yes…And then you say here how much are the shoes. How much are they?*
270. L: how much are the shoes?
271. L: *How do you spell it?*
272. J: h-o-w (writing the other words down)

During the dialogue, Lisa was able to produce the phase *What color would you like*? (turn 273) which was offered by Jenny

during their interaction (turn 15). Both Lisa and Jenny produced the same phrase correctly on the post-test.

Excerpt 9

15. J: What color would you like? (giving her time to answer)
16. L: Black. (solving)
17. J: *Yes.*

273. L: Yes, I have. What color would you like, *Or* which color do you like?
274. J: *Or we write yes…or…yes…*Yes, what color would you like?
275. L: What color would you like? (writing)

Nevertheless, not all phrases provided by Jenny during their interaction were taken up correctly by Lisa on the post-test. As the example below shows, although Jenny read the phrase *I'll have a look for you* and provided its translation, Lisa did not identify this phrase correctly on the posttest.

Excerpt 10

55. L: *Well then.*
56. J: I'll have a look for you.
57. L: *What does it mean?*
58. J: Ich schaue mal für Sie. (translating into German)

5. Summary and discussion

Grounded in sociocultural theory, the study approached interaction among M-A peers as a cognitive and social activity that mediates L2 learning. We have seen that the nature and degree of peer support and learning outcomes related to this support varied profoundly across pairs. Although there were some similarities across pairs in terms of support strategies used, the nature and the degree of support widely differed.

The case of Jana and Willy is reminiscent of studies on cross-age peer interactions (Martin-Beltrán et al., 2017) as Jana used cognitive, linguistic, and social-emotional strategies to provide crucial support without which Willy would have been unable to complete the task individually. With regard to cognitive support, Jana provided Willy with explanations of the task procedure, checked his understanding of the task, and drew his attention to the task while prompting him to think about it. Her linguistic support included explaining language-related issues, correcting his pronunciation, providing options or examples for responses, and repeating or rereading sentences when he indicated non-understanding. Strategies of socio-emotional support included praising, showing understanding for Willy's hardship to understand the task, and engaging with conversational joking and humor to maintain his interest in the task.

Despite her ongoing support, it was only Jana who gained on the post-test. It seems that in the process of explaining, correcting, repeating, or checking Willy's understanding, Jana was deeply engaged with the target language. She was able to consolidate the new language as she was thinking about its salient features to make them accessible to Willy. What is more, Jana's benefits seemed to have been beyond the realm of language learning because her interaction with Willy was a valuable experience for her to deepen her social skills such as helping others and being patient, and understanding those who need more time to learn. In fact, she reported that she enjoyed her role in encouraging and supporting her less competent partner (Kos, 2021). However, despite her nearly teacher-like support, Willy did not seem to benefit much because his linguistic abilities were not

sufficient to accommodate Jana's support. In theoretical terms, the language to be learned was not within Willy's ZPD. Nevertheless, it would have been mistaken to say that Willy did not benefit at all. It can be argued that Jana's support contributed to Willy's increased feelings of competence. In fact, on the post-task interview, Willy not only indicated that his interactions with Jana were very positive but also expressed feelings of increased language competence and motivation towards learning English as a result of interacting with her (Kos, 2021). Overall, this case points to the importance of promoting social skills in the M-A language classroom.

Jenny and Lisa's case suggests that age and proficiency differences may not be crucial factors in the extent and quality of support provided among YL. Rather than age and proficiency, the way that both learners relate to each other and the task at hand may be of greater importance for effective support to take place. In line with previous research on adult students as well as YL (Davin & Donato, 2013; Donato, 1994; Ohta, 2000; Pinter, 2007), Jenny and Lisa were able to support each other by pooling their resources and sharing them to complete the tasks at hand. For example, their linguistic support involved co-constructions of language meaning and form, request seeking confirmations of correct understanding (*boots, right?*), frequent sharing of ideas related to morphosyntax, lexis, or spelling, and a high frequency of suggestions (*Let's take...*). Cognitive support was mainly provided by suggesting ideas related to the task procedure. Suggesting seemed to have been particularly advantageous for this pair as it appeared to perform cognitive, linguistic, as well as social-emotional functions. For example, suggesting (e.g., *Shall we take*

high heels?) may invite the partner's participation (social) and simultaneously mediate cognitive activity such as thinking, or hypothesizing (DiCamilla & Antón, 1997). Suggesting may as well mediate linguistic activity as it can prompt a partner's attention to specific language items, trigger feedback or even confirm or disconfirm one's hypothesis about language (Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Storch, 2001). Particularly significant was also Jenny's socio-emotional support given in the form of listening, nodding, smiling, keeping eye contact, and physical closeness. This type of support seemed to have helped create a social space of mutual understanding which allowed both students to share different perspectives and resolve and reconcile conflicting views (Webb & Mastergoerge, 2003; Damon & Phelps, 1984). This social space was necessary for Lisa to explore and try out a new language without having to worry about making mistakes. It allowed her to take the initiative, to suggest possible solutions to linguistic problems encountered, to take feedback from Jenny seriously, and accept corrections from her (Damon & Phelps, 1984). These are all important aspects for a successful collaboration to occur and to benefit from it. Despite differing ages and proficiencies, both learners' undertaking was collaborative (Storch, 2002). Lisa and Jenny's collaborative interaction seems to mirror Lantolf and Poehner's (2008, p.14-16) notion of ZPD being constructed in the process of their collaborative interaction. Such a view of the ZPD seems to reflect Vygotsky's (1978, p.90) notion of the *collective* form of the social process, and not exclusively or even primarily a dyadic relationship.

Luana and Gina's case has shown that some older peers may not be able to provide high-quality support sensitive to their

younger partner's needs. This pair showed a particularly low degree of social-emotional support as their interaction contained frequent instances of reprimanding, impatience or disrespecting peers' linguistic resources which negatively influenced their interaction and learning. In line with previous research conducted in mixed-proficiency settings (Kowal & Swain, 1994; Young & Tedick, 2016), this case suggests that heterogeneous pairs may not necessarily interact well. This is because older students may react negatively toward their younger peers, which may lead to the frustration of both and to the passivity of the younger and the dominance of the older. One possible explanation for Luana's dominant behavior was that she lacked the willingness or perhaps the ability to help her younger partner. Despite working on the same task, this pair completely lacked a shared perspective on the task (Antón & DiCamilla, 1999). This could have been related to Luana's perceptions of Gina's language proficiency being lower than hers which, in turn, could have prompted Luana to do the task for her (Kos, 2021). The lack of support within this pair could also be attributed to the inadequate assigning of roles. The fact that Luana took on the role of a scribe may have contributed to her dominance over Gina and Gina's limited participation. Indeed, research has suggested that the effectiveness of pair/group work may be closely related to the roles assigned (Samuda & Bygate, 2008).

Overall, it is plausible to say that Luana's non-collaborative mindset together with her perceptions' of her partner's proficiency being lower and inadequacy of roles assigned hindered a successful interaction between these two learners. Luana and Gina's case seems to contradict the findings of research conducted in M-A

classrooms (Little 2001; Wagener 2014) which has claimed that M-A classrooms are cooperative classrooms settings, where the rivalry between peers, though existent, is more modest than in the same grade classrooms as the differences among peers are known in advance, and are accepted (Kos, 2021). This case also indicates that unlike in peer learning situations among adult learners, some YL may not feel responsible for supporting one another or helping each other's learning (Guk & Kellogg, 2007).

With regard to evidence for language learning related to peer support, the data suggest that a clear relationship between support and language learning cannot be established. Although in some cases target-like use on the post-test could have been traced to instances of support provided, while in others such connection could not be made. One plausible explanation is that in addition to peer interaction students were exposed to the teacher's explanation and the video which could have triggered their target-like use on the post-test. It also needs to be mentioned that not all language that support was provided with was taken up by the learners. Finally, it cannot be claimed that the linguistic features that were taken up on the post-test have been acquired once and for all, or that these learners are capable of using these lexical chunks independently. They are on their way to mastering it and its mastery will require additional practice in a broader range of contexts (Ohta, 2000).

6. Pedagogical implications

We have seen in Jana and Willy's case that if the language proficiency threshold is not established, not even the supportive behavior of the older learner may be beneficial for the younger. This appears to be in

line Leeser's (2004) concerns that low-proficiency learners may not be able to benefit from being helped by high-proficiency learners due to the lack of developmental readiness of the latter to engage in discussions of linguistic problems. Moreover, teachers must not assume that the older students will in actuality support their younger partners. As Luana and Gina's case indicates, teachers should bear in mind that some older children may resist teaching their younger classmates and/or being used as teachers' assistants (Kos, 2021). To avoid the dominance of the older learner, each student of the pair may be given responsibility for his/her contribution to the completion of the task. For example, each student may be given a set role to perform (Ellis, 2003). Likewise, the younger learners can be assigned the role of a scribe (Storch, 2021). The study also suggests that students may not benefit from the help received if they lack the specific behavior needed for obtained help to enhance learning (Webb & Mastergoerge, 2003). Therefore, teachers should consider training learners to support one another (see Webb & Mastergoerge, 2003 for a discussion of how effective behavior can be promoted in peer-directed groups), to develop a collaborative mindset (Sato 2017), or to become better interlocutors (Kim & McDonough, 2011). For example, teachers could model support strategies or show students a video that displays these strategies before pair or group work. In a similar vein, Davin and Donato (2013) suggest that the quality of support among students greatly depends on how teachers support them.

Finally, teachers in M-A classrooms should consider teaching students lexical chunks that can be used when students work in pairs or groups on tasks and support one another. This can provide them with opportunities to use language meaningfully in a communicative context. L2 research suggests that if the focus of

the task is on lexis, even pairs composed of low-proficiency students are an option because they are more likely to be successful in resolving lexical than grammatical problems provided that the input, complexity, and difficulty of the lexis is not too far beyond the reach of the low proficiency student (Williams, 1999). Moreover, approaches to teaching that focus on lexis can be particularly useful for M-A classrooms in which systematic teaching of grammar can be rather difficult (Thurn, 2011).

7. Conclusion

Grounded in sociocultural theory, the current study underlined the importance of taking cognitive, linguistic, and social-emotional aspects of peer support into account to understand its nature and role in learning. Of particular importance seems to be the ability to provide social-emotional support which allows for mutual understanding and the creation of a social space for sharing aspects of the given situation and addressing linguistic problems that may arise. This social-emotional support appears to play an important role in successful collaboration and learning.

There are several limitations of the study. While the current study aimed to describe peer support in naturally occurring peer interactions, the generalizability and interpretation of the results to other contexts is limited. Because a speaking post-test could not be conducted, there is a certain level of discrepancy between "the treatment" and testing. Likewise, the fact that a clear relationship between support and language learning could not be established might be attributable to the impact of the test used.

The focus of this study was on peer support within M-A peer interactions. Building on this work, future research could compare

the nature of peer support across different ages and contexts. Given the important role of social discourse in learning, future studies could explore the connections between social discourse among M-A learners and language learning. Future research could also investigate to what extent and how teachers' modeling of support strategies transforms into peer interactions among students of different ages and proficiencies.

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Appendix: Transcription Conventions

italics translation of utterance in German
() comments about a support strategy which cannot be deduced from the context, the tone of voice, mood, gesture, facial expression, eye gaze, body, posture
? rising intonation at end of a sentence
! increased volume and excitement
. falling intonation
. . . pause less than 3 seconds

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