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Collaboration before Writing: Exploring How Student Talk Contributes to English L2 Written Narratives

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Abstract

Previous studies of prewriting discussions have focused narrowly on classifying the type of student talk (e.g., content, organization, language) that occurred during a short planning period. However, less is known about how students' interactions unfold across multiple prewriting discussions in an entire lesson. To gain further insight into the relationship between collaborative talk and individual writing, this case study explores how two ESL students, Lendina and Mateo, interact during three prewriting activities in one lesson. Data sources include transcripts of the students' discussions, their narrative texts, and perceptions from the students, their teacher, and an observer. Findings revealed that their discussions were characterized by collaboration (e.g., equality, mutuality, and shared epistemic stance), with each activity contributing concepts and lexical expressions to the students' narratives. Implications for instructors interested in integrating prewriting discussions into their classes are provided.

INTRODUCTION

Sociocultural approaches to second language (L2) learning have highlighted the importance of peer interaction for creating opportunities for learners to engage in other- and self-mediation and the joint construction of knowledge (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Swain, 2006). When working together, learners can take on the role of a more knowledgeable expert and learn from sharing their knowledge with others (Ohta, 2001; van Lier, 1996). However, for peer interaction to create such learning conditions, both learner agency and role negotiation are of crucial importance, specifically whether learners are willing to engage in the task by working collaboratively with a peer, as opposed to working in parallel or disengaging from the task completely. For L2 writing specifically, Storch (2013, 2017) has pointed out that not all pair and small group tasks are necessarily collaborative because students may not demonstrate equal involvement or share responsibility. The extent to which learners engage in collaboration during peer interaction varies widely and can be affected by their motives and attitudes, tasks, pair

selection, and their relationships with classmates or the instructor (e.g., Chen, 2017; Mozaffari, 2017; Neumann & McDonough, 2014, 2015; Sato, 2017; Storch & Aldosari, 2013).

To identify the characteristics of collaborative peer interaction that differentiate it from non-collaborative interaction, researchers have adopted three approaches: rater judgments, qualitative coding, and lexico-grammatical analysis. In L2 assessment, researchers have asked raters to assess collaboration using rubrics that reference American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) or Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) criteria for communication skills, such as negotiating meaning, asking for elaboration, engaging with an interlocutor's ideas, and inviting an interlocutor to contribute (Ahmadi & Sadeghi, 2016; McDonough & Uludag, in press; Winke, 2013). Both L2 acquisition and assessment researchers have proposed qualitative coding frameworks with collaboration defined as having mutuality, which is the degree to which individuals work together for task completion, and equality, which is the degree to which individuals nominate and develop topics while acknowledging each other's contributions (Galazci, 2008; Storch, 2002). Unlike expert-novice or dominant-passive dynamics, collaboration is associated with high levels of equality, where learners exhibit equal control over the direction of the task (van Lier, 1996) and high levels of mutuality characterized by reciprocal feedback and abundant idea-sharing (Damon & Phelps, 1989). Finally, adopting a linguistic perspective toward collaboration, corpus researchers have identified its lexico-grammatical features, which include greater use of *wh*-questions to engage with and respond to a partner's ideas (Crawford, McDonough, Brun-Mercer, 2019; McDonough & Uludag, in press).

Although prior studies have used these approaches to identify the degree of collaboration that occurs when learners carry out a variety of tasks ranging from information gap, dictogloss and story-retell tasks to paired writing and paired oral assessments (e.g., Ahmadi & Sedeghi, 2016; Chen, 2019; Crawford et al., 2019; Dao & McDonough, 2017), less research has examined the characteristics of collaboration during prewriting discussions. Unlike paired writing tasks where learners work together to co-construct a single text with joint authorship (Storch, 2013), prewriting discussions provide opportunities for interaction during the planning stage only, after which learners compose individually. Prewriting discussions are among the most commonly used pair and small group activities in L2 writing classrooms (Fernandez Dobao, 2012; Storch, 2005). Similar to individual prewriting, prewriting discussions may help students brainstorm ideas and organize their ideas into a writing plan (Neumann & McDonough, 2015) and help them generate L2 words and expressions to use in their texts (Kang & Lee, 2018).

Prewriting discussions implemented across instructional settings have shown variation in the extent to which students engage in collaboration. In a Chinese EFL setting, Shi (1998) reported that peer prewriting discussions had relatively few extended negotiation sequences as compared to teacher-led discussions. Working in a Canadian EAP context, Neumann and McDonough (2014, 2015) reported varying levels of collaboration as evidenced by engagement with a partner's ideas, such as elaborating, evaluating, reflecting, or posing alternatives. Studies in EFL university contexts have reported positive relationships between the type of student talk (such as being about content, organization, or language) during prewriting discussions and

characteristics of their texts, including analytic ratings and measures of fluency, accuracy, and complexity (Kang & Lee, 2019; Liao, 2018; McDonough, De Vleeschauwer, & Crawford, 2018a, 2018b; McDonough & De Vleeschauwer, 2019). Although these studies characterized various dimensions of the students' talk, they did not analyze the extent to which their interaction was collaborative. In other words, they examined *what* students talked about, but did not explore *how* they interacted.

In sum, relatively less is known about the nature of collaboration during prewriting discussions as compared to other types of pair and small group activities. In addition, the prior studies have implemented relatively short prewriting discussions (e.g., 7 to 12 minutes) to capture student talk that occurred immediately before students began writing their texts individually. However, writing tasks are often implemented at the end of a class period during which learners had several opportunities to interact with their peers throughout the lesson. Reflecting the perspective that all pair and small group work in the class period prior to the writing task can be considered prewriting activities, we adopted a microgenetic analysis (De Guerrero & Villamil, 2000) to illustrate how learners' interactional practices emerge over time and provide greater insight into the origin of the concepts and linguistic expressions that appear in their written texts. Various patterns may emerge in their discussions, such as one student might provide an idea or lexical expressions that the partner then writes in her text. Alternatively, a student might receive feedback about an idea from a partner and then decide not to write about that idea. To explore these possibilities, this case study describes the collaboration that occurred during three prewriting discussions in one lesson. It also explores whether the concepts and linguistic expressions that students discussed were incorporated in their individually-written texts. The primary research question was: What concepts and linguistic expressions from collaborative prewriting discussions appear in the students' individually-written texts? Drawing upon perception data and the performance of all students in the ESL class, we also situate the focal students within the broader classroom context.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

ESL students

As part of a larger study (McDonough & Hernández González, 2019) with research ethics approval, this case study examines learner interaction that occurred during prewriting discussions in an ESL class at a community centre in Montreal, Canada. We focus specifically on two learners, Lendina and Mateo, who were selected based on interview data from the instructor and observer in which both mentioned these learners as being "active" participants during pair and group activities. Lendina was a 31-year old woman from Albania who had been in Montreal for two months and planned to stay for an additional four months. She was studying English to improve her skills in preparation for the IELTs examination and stated that her goals for the class were to improve all four skills and learn more about the style of English. She did not use English in her daily life but tried to practice speaking it with family members

and friends. When asked what was difficult about using English for speaking and writing, she believed that listening and grammar created the most difficulty for her when using English.

Mateo was a 43-year old man from Colombia who had been living in Montreal for three months and intended to stay for three more months. His goals for studying English were to develop fluency and improve his ability to write business emails. He previously used English at work in Colombia for emails, phone calls, and meetings, and he reported speaking English "in the street" for service encounters in Montreal. Mateo mentioned having trouble using tenses and understanding phrasal verbs; he also believed that he had problems with pronunciation. To situate Lendina and Mateo in the broader classroom context, their classmates (8 women, 4 men) were also adults (M = 37.2, SD = 11.9), most of whom had lived in Montreal for one to six months. However, there was one native Quebecer in the class, along with two students who had lived in Montreal for several years. They spoke a variety of first languages, including French (7), Spanish (3), Korean (1), and Portuguese (1).

Instructional setting

The students were enrolled in an English language program at a community centre. The program consisted of four levels (beginner, high-beginner, intermediate, and high-intermediate) that approximated the A1 to B1 CEFR levels. Each level held two, 3-hour lessons per week. The case study participants were enrolled in the high-intermediate level, which introduced more complex language from written (e.g., newspapers, blogs, academic texts) and oral (e.g., TED talks and documentaries) sources. The textbook (Strachan, Dygut, & Haskett, 2016) contained 10 task-based lessons organized around a specific oral or written task, such as holding a debate, writing a summary, or evaluating job applicants. The theme-based lessons included a variety of reading, listening, speaking, and writing activities that targeted the knowledge and skills necessary for task accomplishment. The lessons had a language focus that emerged from the reading and listening passages (e.g., infinitives, relative clauses, gerunds) or was relevant to the writing task (e.g., verb forms for sequencing past events). The instructor was a fourth-year student in a B.Ed. TESL program who had previously taught at the community centre as part of an internship. The instructor was assisted by another student in the TESL program who served as an observer to help with research tasks in the classroom, such as distributing audio-recorders and completing observation checklists.

Target lesson

The prewriting discussions analyzed here were part of Lesson 3, which occurred in the second week of the six-week semester. The lesson topic was deception and the learners' primary task was to write a narrative involving deception and share it with their classmates. After activating schema by asking the students whether they ever lie, differentiating among types of lies (i.e., white lies versus "big" lies), and brainstorming when lies might be acceptable, the instructor played a short TED talk by Marco Tempest about deception (5 minutes). After the video, she elicited the students' impressions about his general idea and supporting examples and wrote

them on the board. She asked students to take notes while watching the video a second time, after which they completed the first prewriting discussion, which was to work with a classmate to share their notes and check comprehension of the TED talk (5 minutes).

For the second prewriting discussion, the instructor gave students different famous quotations about deception and asked them to think about whether they agreed with the statement. The students then worked in pairs to share their quotations and opinions about the quotations (12 minutes). Finally, the instructor introduced components of a narrative (i.e., plot, beginning, event, twist, end, moral) and then asked students to work together to plan a narrative involving deception (20 minutes), which was the third and final prewriting discussion. After the third prewriting activity, the students wrote their narratives individually. The individual writing task was followed by grammar focus activities about infinitives in which students had opportunities to look for example infinitives in their stories and correct any usage issues. In sum, before individually writing their narratives, Lendina and Mateo worked together for three prewriting discussions: Comparing notes, discussing quotations, and co-constructing a narrative.

Data sources

The data for this case study included transcripts of students' interaction throughout the lesson, student perceptions about the lesson, comments from the instructor and observer, and analysis of the students' texts. Each data source is described in the subsections that follow.

Student interaction. Because the Level 4 course materials had been recently updated and were being evaluated as part of the textbook evaluation and revision process, every class period was audio-recorded. The observer placed individual audio-recorders on tables throughout the room at the beginning of each class to capture the interaction between the instructor and students during whole-class interaction as well as the conversations between students during pair and group work. The audio-recordings were transcribed and verified by research assistants.

Observer notes. The observer attended each class to compile notes about the materials and activities and assist with audio-recording. He recorded the start and end times for all the activities in each lesson along with a brief description, and provided comments about student talk and language use, teacher feedback, evidence of student engagement, and his other perceptions about the lesson content.

Instructor notes. Following each lesson, the instructor recorded her reflections about the lesson. To elicit a broad range of comments, the researchers suggested five topics (student talk and language, feedback, lesson content, student engagement) for comment, along with encouraging her reflections on other aspects of the class. She provided her perceptions about how well the lesson had gone, whether students appeared interested and engaged during the activities, and whether they had opportunities to interact with each other.

Student task evaluations. At the end of each lesson, students completed a short task evaluation questionnaire that included three Likert-scale items (1 = *strongly disagree*; 6 = *strongly agree*) about their interest in the topic, the relevance of the language topic for their use of English outside the classroom, and the usefulness of the lesson for developing their language skills. There were also two open-ended questions to find out what they had liked and disliked about the lesson.

Student texts. As part of the larger study (McDonough & Hernández González, 2019) all student texts had been rated using an analytic rubric that reflected the evaluation criteria used at the community centre. The rubric consisted of three categories (content, vocabulary, grammar) that could be scored on a scale from 1 (*low*) to 4 (*high*). Content was evaluated in terms of appropriate register, idea development, creativity, and accurate use of source information. Vocabulary was assessed in terms of range and effectiveness, along with the occurrence of major errors (e.g., wrong meaning or word form) and minor errors (e.g., spelling and capitalization). Grammar was evaluated in terms of the effectiveness of sentence structure, range and variety of sentence types, and the occurrence of major errors (e.g., sentence fragments and run-ons) and minor errors (e.g., subject-verb agreement, articles, plurals). The RAs were trained by the first researcher using paragraphs written by students who had dropped the course. After rating and discussing several texts, both raters independently coded all the texts. Interrater reliability was assessed using a two-way random average-measures intraclass correlation coefficients, which yielded the following values: content = .87, vocabulary = .86, and grammar =.88. The means for each subscore assigned by the two raters are reported.

Data analysis

The main analysis is based on transcripts of the three prewriting discussions (comparing notes, discussing quotations, and co-constructing a narrative), which were reviewed multiple times by the second researcher. Any discrepancies in the identification or classification of collaboration were resolved through discussion with the first researcher. Through an iterative process, indicators of collaboration were identified by drawing upon Storch's (2002) concepts of equality and mutuality. Equality was shown when both participants shared the control over the task and epistemic stance fluctuated (van Lier, 1996). An example of collaboration with equality is provided in (1) where Mateo and Lendina were comparing the notes they had taken while watching the TED talk.

(1) Collaboration: Equal control over the task

1	Mateo:	what about the self--
2	Lendina:	--self-deception I don't know but
3	Mateo:	I got it I got the
4	Lendina:	people deceive for money
5	Mateo:	that people deceive for money that you deceive to yourself
6	Lendina:	uh huh yes

In (1), Mateo and Lendina show a high level of equality marked by questions to elicit knowledge from a peer (turn 1), co-construction of an utterance (turns 1 & 2), explicit diminishing of epistemic stance (turn 2), and incorporation of a peer's utterance (turn 5).

Another indicator of equality was equal epistemic status (Heritage, 2012). Whereas higher epistemic stance is exhibited by expressing statements with certainty, lower epistemic stance is characterized by hedges and dysfluencies, as shown in (2). Mateo begins by suggesting that deception is important in some dire situations, such a soldier trying to hide his fear during a battle. In response, Lendina, counters that it is important to show emotions rather than hide them. However, the disfluency in her utterance acts as a diminisher of her epistemic stance by displaying less certainty.

(2) Collaboration: Equaling epistemic stance

1	Mateo:	for example if you are in the army and you are uh general or something like that a captain and you are in a middle in a war you can't start to cry or even if the if the situation is uh
2	Lendina:	--I I can cry if if crying it's part of of emotion I think it's better if you feel you cry cry
3	Mateo:	yeah but but I mean you
4	Lendina:	you are happy if you feel -
5	Mateo:	but in your—in the middle of a bad situation everyone is
6	Lendina:	okay okay
7	Mateo:	expecting that you will be brave or
8	Lendina:	of course
9	Mateo:	that's what I'm trying to say
10	Lendina:	but but for me for me if if someone it's, you know it's -
11	Mateo:	yeah someone have to deceive the others, to do something you know because if everyone is start to cry just stay there waiting somebody go to kill them but somebody has to decide then, let's go. Do this do this do—even if these feeling really bad he wants to cry and everything, he have to deceive others to
12	Lendina:	yeah
13	Mateo:	fake
14	Lendina:	of course

Lendina's challenge with lowered epistemic stance is met by Mateo's acknowledgment and the use of the hedge *I mean* to also lower his epistemic stance (turn 3). Lendina's subsequent use of *okay* and *of course* (turns 6, 8, and 14) offers reassurance for Mateo's position. In turn 9, Mateo accepts the acknowledgement and lowers his epistemic stance with *that's what I am trying to say*. In turn 10, Lendina persists with making her point about expressing emotions, but she initiates her statements with hesitations and hedges *but but for me for me (line 10)* to also lower her epistemic stance. Mateo agrees with her point and builds on it, without showing any

hesitation as to accept a shared status, which is met but Lendina's agreement (turn 12) and approval of the co-constructed outcome (turn 14).

Mutuality was evidenced by signs of engagement with each other's ideas (Damon & Phelps, 1989), which is illustrated in (3) from the comparing notes activity.

(3) Collaboration: Mutuality

1	Lendina:	war war no! Romance, romance uh romance maybe it was the the um the um when they like "hey where are you" where two men and two girl
2	Mateo:	yeah that that she say the the girls say I have been her 30 minutes darling
3	Lendina:	yeah yes
4	Mateo:	guy say that was the the girl I always want to love
5	Lendina:	yeah but uh the guys he was just to I am traffiic yes
6	Mateo:	yeah
7	Lendina:	he make the lies are are more (*chuckles*)
8	Mateo:	yeah yeah that mean romance for example, it might give away something
9	Lendina:	uh huh

After (3) begins with Lendina saying that she had not focused on deception in war in her notes, she brings up the topic of deception in romance. Mateo accepts the romance topic (turn 2) and builds on it in turn 4. Lendina continues contributing ideas to the topic in turns 5 and 7, after which Mateo offers a summary of the speaker's ideas (turn 8).

The students' narratives were analyzed to identify whether they had incorporated concepts and language forms discussed during the prewriting activities into their individually-written texts. The content, grammar, and vocabulary scores assigned by the raters were also used to characterize their texts and situate them relative to their classmates. Finally, in addition to the primary data analysis of the transcripts and texts, secondary data sources (teacher, observer, and student perceptions) were consulted to further contextualize Lendina and Mateo's interactions.

FINDINGS

To shed light on how the learners' interactions evolved across the lesson, we have organized the findings according to the three prewriting discussions that they carried out: comparing notes, discussing quotations, co-constructing a narrative. In each section, we also report whether Lendina or Mateo incorporated any of the concepts or language forms they had discussed during that activity into their individually-written texts. After presenting the findings

for each prewriting activity, we provide a more global perspective on their performance through reference to the narrative ratings and the perception data.

1. Comparing notes

After watching the TED talk video and taking notes, Lendina and Mateo worked together to compare their notes (5 minutes) as the first prewriting activity. During this activity, they explored each other's attitudes towards the task and negotiated their interactional roles. They both used positive feedback and backchanneling to support their discussion, with almost every turn met by a *yeah*, *okay, yes* or *uh huh*. Both participants equally shared epistemic status and demonstrated involvement in the discussion and used examples to align with the other's views. In (4), they work together when discussing how self-deception can be like magic because it creates positive illusions that can lead to real emotions.

(4) Self-deception and illusion

1	Lendina	you go, you you are satisfy more than you are really
2	Mateo	maybe because you want to to create a positive illusion
3	Lendina	yeah—no I think before the people deceive for themselves it was—you were spending money but you are lying to yourself because you think emotions and bad experiences—
4	Mateo	quickly disappear
5	Lendina	and art art I uh it's uh it's a deception it become magic
6	Mateo	yeah because it creates real emotion

While comparing their notes, the key expressions that they discussed included deception and self-deception (turns 1 - 2) and deception as creating illusions and emotion (turns 5 - 6).

Turning to the students' written narratives, Lendina incorporated key ideas and lexical items from this prewriting discussion into the introduction and conclusion of her story. After pointing out the popularity of virtual relationships, Lendina's introduction ended with the sentence "On the other hand, some relationships are disappointed because there is a lot of deceptions between them"[1] which set the stage for her story about deception in an online romance. To conclude her romantic story with a happy ending, Lendina declares that "indeed, romance was base on deception and positive illusion..." In this case, Lendina incorporated Mateo's phrase *positive illusion* into her narrative; however, Mateo did not use it. In terms of language, he used the form *to deceive* in a context where the noun *deception* would have been more appropriate. Although Lendina used both forms in their discussion (*deceive* in turn 3 and *deception* in turn 5) Mateo only used verb forms in his narrative. In addition, he did not contextualize his narrative through reference to the themes of self-deception or deception as positive illusion. Instead, he concluded his story by simply writing what happened next to the couple ("they decided to begin a relationship base on the truth, avoiding to deceive as much they could"). Thus, although the

opening prewriting discussion was collaborative, only Lendina drew upon the content in her narrative.

2. Discussing quotations

During the second prewriting discussion, which was about famous deception quotations (12 minutes), Lendina and Mateo reused each other's lexical expressions, backchanneled, and made links between the topic and their own personal experiences. The shared epistemic status that they established in the first activity continued, which was evident through the frequent use of diminishing or softening epistemic devices, such as *I don't know*, *maybe*, *do you know what I mean?*, *I don't know how to explain*, and *I think*. In this activity, Lendina took longer turns than Mateo, but she regularly encouraged him to contribute by inviting him to take the floor after questions like *what do you think?* Her greater participation in this activity was coupled with hesitations that softened her epistemic stance, such as *but but for me for me if if someone it's, you know it's*.

While talking about their quotations, Lendina mentioned how people can use Photoshop to make themselves more attractive in photographs, as shown in (5). Mateo initially engaged with Lendina's ideas by suggesting how someone might modify their appearance (turn 4), and later he referred back to Lendina's comments about photoshop (line 18) after they had moved on to talk about another quotation related to deception, using the verb form *deceive*.

(5) Photoshop

1	Lendina	I um I use like a photoshop. Photoshop it's like uh you know? And uh you can modify your photo…you can change your hair color uh eyes, uh you can change the skin tone make beautiful and feel you know when you see yourself modified in fake. You modified you feel better, but uh it's um you can if you are if you have pain or overweight
2	Mateo	overweight
3	Lendina	overweight yeah you can put
4	Mateo	yeah skinny
5	Lendina	yeah skinny and pretend all and you know just the second you feel like uh skinny and you can change the background…
6-17	Both	(*discuss another topic*)
18	Mateo	so uh….and people deceive to themselves to feel good to feel comfortable to feel better as you say with the photoshop

In their narratives, both students included characters who had manipulated online photos. Mateo wrote that the couple "met on the network but they had upload fake photos of themself." Similarly, Lendina wrote that when the couple met in person, the man did not recognize the woman because her appearance "was different from the photos that she sent."

The man felt "a little bit disappointed because Mary [in the photos] looks more beautiful than reality."

In this discussion, Mateo and Lendina raise the issue of whether men or women are more deceptive several times. Initially Mateo states that according to research, men tell twice as many lies as women, but Lendina's reply (*assuming*) suggests that she may not agree. After Mateo states that claim again approximately 20 turns later, Lendina interrupts to ask *what you think?* Mateo states that he thinks it is true, but Lendina replies *maybe* without elaborating. Later on, however, Mateo raises the possibility of whether women are more deceptive than men during same gender interaction and gives the example shown in the first turn of (6).

(6) Judge a book by its cover

1	Mateo:	I mean for example if you have a friend who's a girl sometime you don't tell her the truth about how they look…you always say "you looks nice." But between men it's "why do you wearing that?"
2	Lendina:	yeah it's an expression don't judge book from the cover
3	Mateo:	ah okay
4	Lendina:	you know maybe it's "oh it's so beautiful" but inside it's not
5	Mateo:	the reason I said maybe women tell twice as many as lies as men, maybe depends on the context
6	Lendina:	yeah it depend on the context
7	Mateo:	on the relation
8	Lendina:	yeah of course

In their written narratives, Mateo's story includes deception by both the male and female characters (i.e., they both alter their photos); however, Lendina's story includes deception from the female character only (i.e., she alters her photos). The concept that Lendina introduced about not judging the value of something by its appearance alone also occurred in both narratives. In her story, Lendina wrote that "appearance wasn't as important as their traits" while Mateo's couple in the end "agreed that appearance doesn't matter."

3. Brainstorming a narrative

In the final prewriting discussion (20 minutes), Lendina and Mateo worked together to co-construct the plot of a narrative involving deception. Unlike the previous two activities, their interaction here was characterized by shorter turns (one or two words), more frequent and enthusiastic backchanneling, positive feedback, and laughter. In (7), both Mateo and Lendina made substantial contributions to the content of the narrative (turns 1, 6, 10, 13) and accepted each other's contributions (turns 4, 7, 11, 14). They both used *I don't know* to lessen their epistemic status (turns 15, 16). Sharing the floor when making contributions while refraining from taking an overt higher epistemic status is indicative of what has been described as democratic discussions (Nihalani, Wilson, Thomas, & Robinson, 2010)

(7) Brainstorming story details

1	Mateo	he's thinking um you looks a little overweight and you're not so handsome as you showed the photos
2	Lendina	uh huh
3	Mateo	physical
4	Lendina	(*laughs*) yeah yeah
5	Mateo	yes
6	Lendina	yeah virtual relationship
7	Mateo	virtual relationship
8	Lendina	uh
9	Mateo	but
10	Lendina	where when and who? where in social network?
11	Mateo	uh huh
12	Lendina	yes
13	Mateo	social network...even more more than social network could be a website for relationship
14:	Lendina	ah okay
15	Mateo	I don't know
16	Lendina	but website I think I don't kn—I'm not (*laughs*)
17	Mateo	what websites don't that doesn't matter
18	Lendina	uh social network
19	Mateo	social network

Both students retained these details in their written narratives as they both included characters who met in a virtual environment who had altered their photos to appear more attractive. Reflecting their decision during the discussion not to focus on specific websites (turns 13-17), both students used the expression *social network* when describing how their characters met. Mateo started his story by explaining that a man "decided to go into the social network and upload his profile to meet someone." Similarly, Lendina's story began by stating that "virtual relationship are more popular" and that "many couple are married based on the social network."

Another characteristic of their collaboration was their ability to quickly decide what ideas were important for their narrative and which ideas did not require further discussion. In (8) both students showed a high degree of involvement by revisiting answers to the question *when*, which they had deemed essential to the task requirements. However, there seemed to be disagreement about which country the man in the narrative should be from. But Lendina suggested that they leave it unresolved (turn 21) as it was not essential for the task requirements. This diffusing strategy served as a face-saving strategy, avoiding conflict but still guaranteeing a high level of autonomy and mutuality in the co-construction of the narrative.

(8) Making decisions

1	Lendina	when? when?
2	Mateo	nowadays?
3	Lendina	nowadays yes … nowadays, who? …
4	Mateo	let's put some names
5	Lendina	yeah um John and Maria …
6	Mateo	Mary
7	Lendina	okay Mary (*laughs*) events change what happened? Um they … they know each other during event change what happen. They know each other and uh on the
8	Mateo	I'm sorry?
9	Lendina	website they tal—but no, I think John is in in Europe and Mary is in America or in Canada okay?
10	Mateo	… but it's when?
11	Lendina	when yes
12	Mateo	nowadays, it's nowadays but
13	Lendina	Europe, Italy and
14	Mateo	yeah
15	Lendina	no
16	Mateo	Italy I I think that
17	Lendina	what?
18	Mateo	Italian men are handsome
19	Lendina	yes
20	Mateo	almost every women say that
21	Lendina	Europe Europe we don't need to specify
22	Mateo	(*laughs*)

In their written texts, both students included a virtual relationship between John and Mary with Mateo's story about an Italian man, while Lendina's story was about a French woman and American man.

When discussing the story's possible ending in (9), Lendina suggests that the couple will overcome the photoshopping issue because they have good communication skills. Mateo builds on this idea by suggesting they would have *common thinking* (turn 4) and *thoughts* (turn 6), which Lendina further elaborates in turn 7 as having the same or shared values.

(9) Common thoughts and traits

1	Lendina:	the appearance was was a big problem for them and they they're they have good uh they had a good communic—uh communicate
2	Mateo:	uh I try thinking that were…they have uh
3	Lendina:	what? (laughs)
4	Mateo:	common common thinking

5	Lendina:	yeah common common yeah common
6	Mateo:	thoughts
7	Lendina:	traits they have to share value for the same value with each other
8	Mateo:	yeah

Both students included a happy ending based on the couple recognizing their common ground. Lendina wrote that the couple "realized that they have a common personality" and that appearance was not as important as "their traits." Similarly, in Mateo's story the couple communicated with each other to share the reasons for their deception and decided that their relationship would be based on factors other than appearance.

Finally, the story brainstorming discussion contained several episodes where Mateo and Lendina collaborated about the spelling or meaning of lexical items. When discussing the plot element of photoshopped images, Mateo told Lendina that he didn't know *how to write fake* which she then spelled for him. In his narrative, Mateo incorporated *fake* into his story when describing the photos: "both met on the network but they had upload fake photos of themself." In the second episode, after both using the term *looking* for several turns, Lendina introduces the term *appearance*, which Mateo then uses to describe the couple's *overweight appearance*. However, when Lendina tried to use *appearance* in a sentence, she questioned whether it is correct to say *their appearance* after which Mateo suggested *appearings*. In the end, they agreed on the term *appearance*, which they both used in their narratives. Mateo used the noun phrase *their appearance* while Lendina used *appearance* without a determiner. In the final episode, Mateo questioned how to include a reflexive with *deceiving*, which Lendina provided as *deceiving themselves*. In his narrative, Mateo included the expression *deceiving each other* to describe how the couple had both posted altered photos online.

Insights from rater, teacher, and student perceptions

Having shown how Lendina and Mateo worked collaboratively during all three prewriting discussions to generate concepts and lexical expressions that they incorporated into their individually-written narratives, we next explored various perceptions of their performance. As shown in Figure 1, both Lendina and Mateo's narratives received higher content and vocabulary ratings than those of their classmates. However, whereas Lendina also received higher grammar ratings, Mateo's grammar ratings were lower than their classmates, which may be due to the frequent verb form errors in his text, which included past tense forms.

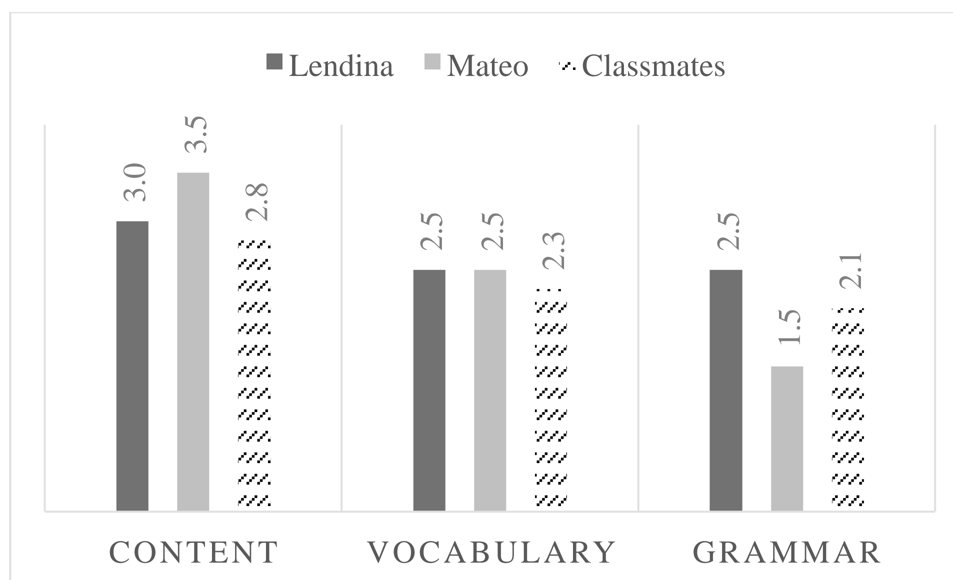

Figure 1 Narrative Text Ratings

Lendina used more concepts and phrases from the prewriting discussions than Mateo, with her vocabulary rating possibly reflecting the positive influence of their discussions. However, Mateo seems to have relied on his own, more limited linguistic repertoire as his text contained numerous collocations, such as *looking for romance*, and *being in touch*, which did not occur during the prewriting activities. Despite variation in vocabulary, the content of Mateo's text corresponded to many of the narrative elements that were co-constructed during the activities, and his content ratings are higher than both Lendina's and his classmates' ratings. In other words, it seems that both students may have benefitted from their collaboration during the prewriting activities, with Lendina reusing vocabulary and Mateo focusing on content.

Turning to the students' perceptions about the lesson, when asked if the topic was interesting, Mateo rated it 6/6 while Lendina gave it a slightly lower rating at 5/6, which was also their classmates' mean rating. Mateo also rated the usefulness of the lesson for developing his English skills (5/6) higher than Lendina (4/6) and his classmates (4.9/6). Both Lendina and Mateo rated their ability to practice the lesson's language focus outside the classroom lower than their classmates (4.0 versus 4.7). Overall, Lendina's perceptions about the lesson were slightly lower than Mateo's and her classmates. In response to the open-ended questions, Lendina reported that she liked the way the students were organized to carry out the tasks, while Mateo liked how the lesson integrated listening, speaking, and writing activities. Whereas Lendina did not report disliking any elements of the lesson (despite her lower rankings), Mateo felt that the grammar points were not clear, which could help account for his narrative's low grammar ratings.

Finally, the observer and instructor perceptions were obtained through their after-lesson notes. First, the observer highlighted that the class was more engaged when talking about the content of the TED talk after the first prewriting discussion. Prior to that activity, the whole-class

discussion about the TED talk elicited few comments and was dominated by one student. The teacher similarly remarked that the students were more able to grasp the content of the TED talk after they had opportunities to compare their notes. By implementing the first prewriting discussion, the instructor created opportunities for the students to engage more actively with the content of the TED talk. She wrote in her post-class reflection that the lesson had a good balance of teacher and student talk, with students having a great deal of time to work in pairs and small groups before whole class discussions. The observer also noted that the students were engaged during the second prewriting discussion when they talk about the deception quotations. When the students worked together to brainstorm a narrative, he pointed out that the more active pairs, like Lendina and Mateo, co-constructed a single narrative. When the students created individual narratives and then shared them with a partner, there was less engagement and feedback.

To summarize the findings, this case study has explored the collaboration that occurred during three prewriting activities and its relationship to the students' individually-written texts. In all three activities, Lendina and Mateo demonstrated collaboration as characterized by mutuality, equality, and shared epistemic stance. Each prewriting discussion provided them with opportunities to talk about key concepts and lexical expressions that they successfully incorporated into their narratives. They both introduced concepts and lexical expressions into their conversations which subsequently appeared in the narratives of one or both students. Teacher and observer perceptions highlighted how the prewriting activities allowed students to pool their resources to gain greater understanding of the TED talk, which then created more student talk during subsequent whole-class discussions.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

By adopting a qualitative approach to the analysis of prewriting activities, this case study has extended prior research that investigated *what* students talk about (e.g., Kang & Lee, 2019; Liao, 2018; Neumann & McDonough, 2014, 2015; McDonough et al., 2018a, 2018b) by examining *how* they talk to each other. Complementing studies that operationalized collaboration through rater judgments, interactional patterns, and linguistic forms, the holistic framework adopted here confirmed the positive relationship between collaboration and written performance by illustrating how students incorporated concepts, expressions, and words from their prewriting discussions into their texts. Collaboration was demonstrated through equality, shared epistemic stance, and mutuality, along with lexico-grammatical structures that invite contributions (e.g., *wh*-questions) and lessen epistemic stance (e.g., *I don't know*). Features of collaboration were evident in the three prewriting activities, with key concepts and expressions recycled throughout the lesson. The students' individually-written narratives contained elements that originated from all three prewriting discussions. Future studies of prewriting discussions might benefit from taking a broader perspective on what constitutes "prewriting" to more fully capture how interactions throughout a lesson contribute to students' written texts.

As both researchers and instructors are well aware, not all pair and small group activities elicit collaboration. Collaboration may require students to use certain interactional strategies that might not come natural to them, such as diffusing strategies or techniques for minimizing their epistemic stance. If students from different cultural backgrounds do not perceive interactional strategies similarly, there is potential for misunderstanding that could negatively impact collaboration. Instructors may find it helpful to make the interactional strategies and linguistic features of collaboration explicit when preparing students for pair and small group activities. Previous task research has confirmed the benefits of pretask models (Leeser, 2004; Kim, 2013) and strategy training (Fujii, Ziegler, & Mackey, 2016; Nakatani, 2010; Sato & Loewen, 2018) for eliciting the interactional features believed to promote L2 learning, such as feedback and discussions of language form. Future research should explore whether pretask models and strategy training also facilitate the use of interactional strategies and linguistic expressions associated with collaboration.

In conclusion, collaboration during peer interaction, characterized by high levels of mutuality, involvement, and shared epistemic status, helps create a joint problem space (Teasley & Roschelle, 1993) where students can co-construct their knowledge and experience. Research that examines what students talk about (i.e., language forms, ideas, or task requirements) contributes important information to our understanding of what happens during pair and small group activities. Due to variation in students' use of epistemic markers, studies that examine how students talk to each other and how they co-construct collaborative interactions are also needed to provide both instructors and researchers with a more complete understanding of collaboration. Our future studies aim to further uncover the nature of collaboration during pair and small group tasks and create instructional activities that help L2 instructors promote collaboration in their classrooms.

Note

[1] Excerpts from the students' texts have not been edited, so they may contain incorrectly spelled words or grammatical errors.

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