

LESLLA Symposium Proceedings



Recommended citation of this article

Bigelow, M., & King, K. (2015). Peer Interaction While Learning to Read in a New Language. *LESLLA Symposium Proceedings*, 10(1), 33–52. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8024365>

Citation for LESLLA Symposium Proceedings

This article is part of a collection of articles based on presentations from the 2014 Symposium held at Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands. Please note that the year of publication is often different than the year the symposium was held. We recommend the following citation when referencing the edited collection.

Van de Craats, I., Kurvers, J., & van Hout, R. (Eds.) (2015). *Adult literacy, second language and cognition*. Centre for Language Studies. Centre for Language Studies. <https://lesllasp.journals.publicknowledgeproject.org/index.php/lesllasp/issue/view/474>

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PEER INTERACTION WHILE LEARNING TO READ IN A NEW LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This paper examines second language (L2) peer oral language interaction between two learners engaged in a partner reading activity. The data come from an English language arts class for newcomers in an all-immigrant high school in the U.S. The focus is on what happens when two asymmetrically-paired, female adolescent students try to read a book together. Through analysis of their interactions in one naturally-occurring paired reading session, we describe how these two students use their language and literacy skills to complete a reading task and in doing so, we consider the complexities of how asymmetrically paired students engage in everyday classroom tasks and the learning opportunities therein. We problematize the assumption that asymmetrical pairing is beneficial for literacy development and explain why.

Keywords: reading, East African, adolescents, peer interaction, literacy

1. Introduction

Peer interaction is widely believed to be beneficial for second language (L2) learners. Research on peer interaction indicates that it has the potential to provide students with opportunities to negotiate understandings of meaning and form (Philp, Walter, & Basturkmen 2010); to notice aspects of the new language (e.g., lexical, syntactic, phonological, pragmatic) (Schmidt 1993); and to engage in the many processes and facilitative benefits that linguistic production offers L2 learners (Sato & Ballinger 2012; Swain 2000). Furthermore, a great deal of research has explored interaction with respect to how the interlocutors' roles and relationships (e.g., Plough & Gass 1993; Storch 2002) and task features (e.g., Revesz 2009) influence interactions and L2 learning opportunities. Overall, the linguistic and interpersonal demands of tasks have been well documented in the research literature as having great potential for promoting peer interaction and language learning (Gass & Mackey 2007). However, the ways materials are used by learners while engaging in tasks

(Guerrettaz & Johnston 2013) remains less explored. In other words, the interactions between beginners with interrupted formal schooling, while using literacy materials in everyday classroom settings, have been less frequently analyzed. It is important and relevant to uncover what happens in an asymmetrically-paired literacy activity because of the common use of this approach in mixed-literacy level classes. The argument that a learner with more literacy can benefit from working with a learner with less literacy is commonplace for mutual benefit. For example, it seems logical that the learner with more literacy can improve fluency when working with a partner with developing fluency and that the learner with developing fluency can benefit from the support from a more proficient peer. These assumptions about learning, grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), often undergird teachers' everyday teaching decisions with respect to pairing students and scaffolding learning.

Those who are new to print literacy are also new to the many strategies for comprehending text. They are also in the process of building their knowledge about functions, structures and print conventions, and knowledge of how different texts work. Emergent readers are still learning onset-rime blending, individual sound blending, and blending and segmenting of compound words. These skills need to be taught, which means that they must be integrated into basic literacy instruction, often in classes with mixed literacy levels. Therefore, it is inevitable that, even with the most carefully differentiated lesson plan, students will be asked to work together across mismatched literacy levels, with texts that are either too difficult or too easy for them.

While there are many pedagogical suggestions about designing second language tasks designed to maximize learning, there are relatively few descriptive studies of naturally occurring peer interaction in classrooms (Philp, Walter, & Basturkmen 2010). Although there are notable exceptions (e.g., Storch & Aldosari 2013), overall, most peer-interaction studies rely on researcher-created, not teacher-created tasks. It is common for data collection to occur outside of regular class time, typically with adults who have volunteered to participate and who carefully attend to the task instructions they are given. It is also common to publish the results of reading such as comprehension of the text or an analysis of errors, rather than a detailed account of what occurs during the paired reading event.

To address this gap, we analyzed two students' interaction while carrying out a partner reading activity. The text the participants read together exerts a powerful mediating force in the interaction because of students' joint attention on the printed word. Within a Vygotskian analytical framework, learning cannot be understood without reference to the context within which it occurs.

Many researchers have used Vygotskian theories to understand peer interaction (e.g., Zhu & Mitchell 2012) because it provides tools to focus on multiple layers of an event—the interpersonal, the interactional, the intertextual, and the intercultural. Sociocultural theory has been widely used and adapted to explore L2 learning in many settings and with learners of all ages (de Guerrero & Villamil 2000; Kowal & Swain 1994). While Vygotsky used the ZPD as a tool for understanding the mental age levels of a child, present-day researchers have adopted this construct to examine how learners’ potentially support and scaffold each other, and negotiate the task at hand. The research in this area lends overwhelming support for the benefit of peer interaction, particularly when there is a more proficient partner, as in the pairing in this study.

In the partner reading task we analyze here, the book read by the students mediates the interaction and the potential learning that the task has to offer. We know of no research that explores second language peer interaction in which lack of print literacy was recognized or problematized with respect to task design or dyadic pairing. The tendency to exclude certain learner populations and to rarely use routine classroom contexts such as that described here is highly problematic for a field such as SLA, which strives toward universal generalizations about the nature of language learning (Bigelow & Tarone 2004). This is particularly salient in light of the substantial evidence that L2 learners without alphabetic print literacy skills tend to process oral language differently than those with print literacy, and further, to use different strengths and strategies than those with print literacy.

In light of the gaps we have identified, this paper addresses three questions for two learners with different first and second language literacy skills: (1) How do the two participants with vastly different literacy levels engage with the task and support each other’s engagement towards task completion? (2) What varied roles and participation structures are created as the two participants work on the task? (3) How do the participants’ respective literacy, linguistic, academic, and social strengths and challenges shape how this peer interaction unfolds and the learning opportunities therein?

2. Methodology

In this study, we analyzed how the participants participated in a partner reading task. Specifically, examined the data in a way that would account for the three aspects central to task completion: (a) we counted the words on each page of the book, (b) we noted the students’ physical interactions with the book using their hands and “a driver” (a piece of paper to keep the reader on the

correct line of text), and (c) we analyzed what they verbalized alone and together. This approach to understanding the interaction and engagement with the partner reading task allows us to understand how the girls worked with each other – who helped who, how and when. It allowed us to see the respective roles and contributions of each learner. This approach thus drew upon both cognitive and sociocultural research paradigms to understand how learners with divergent levels of formal schooling, literacy, and L2 skills support each other toward task-completion. This mixed approach draws from the cognitive foundations of learning to read which dominate reading research (e.g., Kamil, Pearson, Moje, & Afflerbach 2011) with a long tradition of research on reading strategies and reading comprehension. In addition, we drew upon sociocultural traditions as we analyzed how the participants engage in the reading task, and with each other, with the assumption that reading occurs in a social context, past and present, and often involves interactions with the text and other people (e.g., Bloome & Egan-Robertson 1993).

2.1. Research context

The data for this study were collected in an urban, all-immigrant high school. The vast majority of students at this school are English learners who arrived to the U.S. as adolescents or young adults (ages 14 to 21 years). The tone of the small school was close-knit, friendly and upbeat. We focused our data collection in two beginning-level ESL classes. The teacher, who is certified in K-12 ESL and reading, has a high level of intercultural competence, based on our many observations of how she interacted with students of different backgrounds. She welcomed students' languages into the instructional space and was respectful of students. Despite students' beginning-level English proficiency and emerging print literacy, the teacher regularly tried to include higher order and often very abstract language arts skills such as plot analysis, as well as materials she thought would be culturally familiar.

2.2. Participants

Ayan was 15 at the time of the study and in her second year in this introductory English class. This school was her first formal schooling experience. Ayan was outgoing and talkative (in Somali) and was often redirected back to her work by the adults in the room. She did her classwork with a lot of obvious effort. She had acquired many skills and concepts of an emergent reader such as text flows from left to right, and had mastered many aspects of 'doing school' (Roy & Roxas 2011). For instance, she was very

concerned with the performance of good student behavior (e.g., following instructions) and figuring out ways to complete a task (e.g., borrowing a students' worksheet to copy). Yet her English writing skills and productive oral skills were among the weakest in the class. While Ayan was a proficient speaker of Somali, we had no evidence that she could read or write in Somali. We administered the Somali literacy test with her and she was unable to complete any part of the assessment. She did the English reading activities very slowly, with much sub-vocalization and little confidence.

In turn, Aisha, arrived one month before this interaction was recorded. While there were other Ethiopian students in the class, she was the only Amharic speaker. She spoke in a quiet voice, but smiled often and seemed comfortable in the class. She was 19 years old and reported that she had started school when she was eight years old and had not missed any formal schooling. She demonstrated fluent and confident Amharic reading and writing skills. She was also comfortable with the routines of schooling reported that her school in Ethiopia was similar to this school in many ways and that she had studied English before she came to the U.S.

2.3. Data collection and task description

While the project yielded many hours of field notes, videos, and documents, this paper presents analysis of one audio-video recording of peer interaction during one particular partner reading activity between two students: Ayan and Aisha. The reason for exploring this data excerpt is to go into depth with one partner interaction. It is the only data of its type in our corpus because the 34-minute video-recording of a routine literacy task, was captured with a video camera at close range with high quality video and audio of the learners' process, from start to finish. We make no claims that the way this task unfolded is similar to that of other asymmetrically paired students in the same activity, or that our results are generalizable to other contexts. We do argue that what we can learn from this analysis will resonate with educators who find this literacy activity to be similar to those they implement in their own classrooms. In this way, what is learned from this analysis may be transferable, tailored, and applied to other similar settings.

During this partner reading, students who normally sit with each other did the activity together. Ayan and Aisha, like the 10 other dyads in the class, were given one book to share. The story is a folktale called *Anansi and the Pot of Beans* (Norfolk & Norfolk 2006). The teacher instructed pairs to both read each page in the following way: one student was to move a "driver" (piece of construction paper the length of the page) down each line of text as the other student read

aloud. The expectation was that they would switch roles, including switching who holds the driver, and re-read the same page. Before moving to the next page, they were asked to discuss the question, "What happened?", to aid comprehension, prompt oral interaction, and to encourage the development of comprehension strategies. These task design features required participants to engage in "bottom up" decoding skills when they needed to sound out words, as well as "top down" comprehension skills, when they needed to summarize what happened on each page. Students had done this task before with other books and the teacher modeled it again before the task started. After reading, students were asked to answer three comprehension questions on a worksheet.

2.4. Data analysis

The analysis of the transcribed video-recording focuses on Ayan and Aisha's interaction with each other and with the text. We examine how they negotiated their roles in the task and how they stayed engaged throughout the task. We also sought to analyze how the girls' academic or personal strengths, dynamics, or challenges seemed to shape the interaction. To this end, we viewed the transcript and video with an eye to the different sorts of interactions between the girls, and quantified word suppliance, as detailed below. The close-up video allowed us to track how the oral interactions corresponded with the physical pages and text of the *Anansi* book. The transcripts analyzed below include the researcher (Bigelow) and the Educational Assistant (Jane), as well as the two students.

Two constructs emerged as analytically important: participant structures and suppliance. Participant structures have been defined as the respective roles and patterns of engagement of individuals in an activity (Cazden 1986; Philips 1972). Participant structures could be determined by the instructions and assigned roles of a task, or they could emerge as the collaboration unfolds. Participant structures in this study were determined by how the girls' reading aloud, which was part of the task instructions, was organized across the task (e.g., one girl as reader and one as 'audience'). We segmented and analyzed the transcript to correspond to each page of the book as well as by the distinct participation structure that qualitatively emerged through the analysis of turns.

Suppliance refers to the solicited or unsolicited provision of the next word(s) on the printed text to the reader (sometimes referred to as 'tolds'). Suppliance often function as a means to facilitate and demonstrate shared attention on the printed text or as a means to minimize learner frustration and accelerate reading rate. Suppliance potentially support comprehension by providing oral access to an unfamiliar word, and thus speed up the rate of reading aloud.

Suppliances likely do less to develop and practice using syntax, visual cues and strategies to comprehend the text. We coded for instances when the reader received a word from someone (suppliances); when the learner was prompted to attend; when there were explicit requests for assistance; and when there was manipulation of the materials (e.g., turning pages).

3. Findings

We found that in working on the assigned task of reading the 32-page folktale, these two asymmetrically paired students engaged in four different participation structures. Below we describe in broad terms how Aisha and Ayan construct these participation structures, and collaboratively move across them as they read.

3.1. Participation structure 1 (story pages 1-6)

For the first six pages of the text, both girls read each page. e.g., Aisha read the page, then Ayan read the same page aloud (as indicated by dark grey shading for both girls in Table 1). For all six pages the asymmetry in reading fluency is stark with Aisha reading quickly, fluently, and with generally appropriately pacing intonation. Ayan, in contrast, is more hesitant, and less fluent in her oral production. Ayan's pauses elicit multiple, frequent word suppliances (i.e., the provision of the next word(s) on the printed text) by Aisha and by the researcher, Bigelow, as quantified in Table 1.

Table 1: *Overview of participation structure 1*

Page of book	1	2	3	4	5	6	Totals
Aisha outloud reading and suppliances received	-	-	1	1	-	-	2
Ayan outloud reading and suppliances received	9	6	8	4	5	1	33

As evident in Excerpt 1 below, Ayan's oral reading of the text is highly supported and scaffolded, while also frequently interrupted as she is rarely

given time to attempt to sound out a word. Here, Aisha quickly reads page 2 of text; the girls then quickly switch roles.

Excerpt 1 (see the appendix for transcription conventions)

<i>Time</i>	<i>Turn</i>	<i>Participant</i>	
2:08	1	Aisha	[using finger to follow words above driver, which is moved and held by Ayan] Grandma spider said anansi. Do you have any work for me today. Sure, said grandma spider. I want you to plant some beans in the my garden.
2.22	2	Ayan	grandma spider said anansi do you have.... (2 sec)
2.38	3	Martha B.	any.
2.40	4	Ayan	any work xxx [unintelligible]
2.49	5	Aisha	today
2.50	6	Ayan	today xxx [unintelligible]
2.55	7	Martha	sure,
2.56	8	Ayan	sure said grandma spider. i want you to
3.08	9	Martha & Aisha	plant.
3.09	10	Ayan	Plant
3.13	11	Martha	some.
3.16	12	Ayan	some ...(8 sec)
3.26	13	Martha	beans.
3.27	14	Ayan	[taps finger on word] beans in my garden [following with finger]

Of the 26 words on this page, Ayan receives supplants for 6 of them, that is in turns 3 5, 7, 9, 11, and 13. Ayan's accuracy in decoding the text is quite low; she receives supplants for 26% of the words on this page but seems to recognize few. Ayan has reached a frustration level based on her rate of reading, pauses and lack of appropriate spacing or intonation, yet she persists through the task.

Across this first participation structure, this pattern remains constant with Ayan receiving supplants for roughly a quarter of all words. Over these first five pages of text (121 words total), Ayan receives 33 word supplants (a rate of 27%). Eleven are supplied by Bigelow, and 22 by Aisha. In contrast, when Aisha reads these same 121 words, she receives only two supplants, one from Bigelow and one from Ayan ('ground'). These supplants can be interpreted as the result of Ayan's slow reading rate and/or Aisha's desire to move the task along or lack of patience. Furthermore, Ayan and Aisha are not

reading strategically. For instance, neither is initiating self-repair or coaching the other in decoding strategies.

The asymmetry between the girls is most evident in this structure in terms of reading fluency, but it is also apparent with respect to who is managing the task. Ayan, the weaker reader, exerts greater control and management of the task. Ayan manages the task physically: turning the pages of the book and transferring the 'driver' back and forth between the girls. She also prompts for a reading cue, e.g., tapping her finger on the word. Finally, we found that Ayan is a more active participant in the summary/comprehension discussions prompted by Bigelow, with Ayan participating in three out of four of these, and Aisha only once.

3.2. Participation structure 2 (story pages 6-11)

The first participation structure was quite slow. The girls worked for more than ten minutes to read just five pages. After page six, they moved into the second and more expedient participation structure, where each girl read two pages in turn (see Table 2, where shading again indicates who read each page).

Table 2: *Overview of participation structure 2*

Page of book	7	8	9	10	11	totals
Aisha outloud reading and supliances received	1	-	-	-	-	1
Ayan outloud reading and supliances received	-	-	1	23	-	24

Here Aisha still provides extensive word supliances and supports Ayan's decoding through shadow-reading, or at times simultaneous, voice-over reading. Bigelow, in turn, provides no word supliances. As evident in Excerpt 2, the girls move into this new structure with no discussion or meta-commentary about the task.

Excerpt 2

Time	Turn	Participant	
10:09	1	Aisha	grandma spider come to the porch with a large pitcher of fresh lemonade. and called to him. anansi, here is a cool drink for you.
10:30	2	Aisha &	grandma. spider. came. to:: the porch. with. a large

		Ayan	pitcher of fresh lemonade and called to: him. anansi, here is a cool. drink. for. you. [words read one by one then they move to next page]
11:06	3	Aisha	thank you grandma. as he drank the cold, sweet
11:17	4	Martha	lemonade.
11:19	5	Aisha	lemonade. I'm making. your favorite meal said grandma. I am cooking spicy beans. they'll be ready soon for our lunch
11:38	6	Martha	what happened ayan? [Ayan pounds desk lightly with her fist.]
11:42	7	Ayan	[unintelligible, pointing at the pictures] anansi
11:50	8	Aisha	[unintelligible] drink
11:56	9	Martha	good.
11:59	10	Ayan	thank you. [laughing] [Ayan misses her turn to read and the girls turn the page]
12:11	11	Aisha	I love your spicy beans. said anansi he finished his lemonade and went back to his work. grandma spider returned to the kitchen.
12:31	12	Ayan	[she's moving the driver herself and following along with her finger at the same time] grandma. spider. looked. for her bean spices, but the tins were empty. she called anansi I need spices. I must ... (2 sec.) go to the mar...(2 sec.)
13:17	13	Aisha	market.

Aisha reads page five, and then Ayan immediately moves to page six, a change in the established protocol. Rather than being supplied words one by one, Aisha reads in tandem with Ayan. They continue this pattern of taking turns reading until the end of page seven (line 5), when Bigelow prompts them for a comprehension discussion (line 6). Here, Ayan lightly pounds her fist, perhaps realizing the established pattern has been violated, or perhaps, as suggested by her laughter and 'thank you' (line 10), that she has found a way to get through reading more quickly and minimize the amount of reading she will need to do. The girls continue this back and forth reading pattern for 5 pages. Notable here is that they move into reading two pages each prior to switching reader roles. They take turns seamlessly with few prompts, albeit with little evidence of enjoyment.

3.3. Participation structure 3 (story pages 12-16)

At page 12 and continuing through page 16 of the text, the girls initiated a new participation structure, wherein Ayan reads outloud, with help from Aisha and from the Educational Assistant, Jane (Table 3).

Table 3: *Overview of participation structure 3*

Page of book	12	13	14	15	16	Totals
Aisha outloud reading and supliances received	-	-	-	-	-	0
Ayan outloud reading and supliances received	-	2	4	5	-	11

Here Ayan takes over oral reading and has full physical possession of the book, and driver, and is pointing with her fingers as she moves through the text. At the same time, Aisha begins to look at the accompanying worksheet for this task and attends less to Ayan's quiet but still vocal, reading aloud. Excerpt 3 shows what happens when Jane disrupts the girls' pattern of uninterrupted reading of larger segments of text by inserting attempts to draw Ayan's attention to how some of the words were pronounced or sounded out (e.g., 'slu::rped, like ahhhhh, slu::rped' 'taste is t-t-t-t').

Excerpt 3

Time	Turn	Participant	
19:22	1	Ayan	anansi bl...(1 sec.)
19:23	2	Aisha	Blew
19:24	3	Jane	blew [pointing to the word]
19:26	4	Ayan	blew on the hot beans and tasted them. ahhhhhh he slur,
19:50	5	Jane	slu::rped, like ahhhhh, slu::rped.
19:57	6	Ayan	he. spooned and blew. slurp..slurp...he spooned
20:09	7	Aisha	spooned.
20:10	8	Ayan	spooned and blew and slurped up
20:16	9	Aisha	spoonfuls.
20:17	10	Ayan	spoonfuls of the beans
20:24	11	Martha	what happened?
20:29	12	Ayan	[pointing to the pictures] happened eat. anansi. up the beans. that's it.
20:34	13	Jane	what's he doing here what action is that? [pointing to

			picture]
20:39	14	Ayan	the beans. slurp the beans. slurp the beans.
20:44	15	Jane	taste is t-t-t-t
20:45	16	Jane	what's this? [EA makes sound of blowing]
20:48	17	Ayan	hot.
20:49	18	Jane	blowing?
20:50	19	Ayan	Blow
20:51	20	Jane	blew. good.

As Ayan is working her way through page 15. Aisha provides three individual word supliances here: 'blew' (turn 2), 'spooned' (turn 7), 'spoonfuls' (turn 9). In contrast to other participation structures, Jane also supplies words (e.g., 'slurped' turn 5, and 'blowing', turn 18). Jane also inserts herself more fully into the interaction, for instance, by acting out a potentially confusing word 'slurped' (turn 5) and quizzing for meaning (turn 16). This sequence of multiple interruptions diverts the girls' attention away from the story-reading task. These interruptions may be a fruitful support for Ayan, who is still learning the correspondence between sounds and letters, but Aisha would benefit more from silent reading which focuses on comprehension, as seen in Excerpt 3 below. However, notable in this participation structure is the same pattern of Ayan controlling the task and using the resources at hand (Aisha, Jane, the driver, her fingers) to continue towards task completion.

3.3. Participation structure 4 (story pages 17-32)

The final structure is established at page 17 of the text, when Ayan and Aisha begin parallel independent reading. Here (see Table 4), word suppliance is reduced for Ayan, as the pressure to complete the task increases and the girls begin to co-read.

Table 4: *Overview of participation structure 4*

Page of book	17-34	23	24	25-30	31	32	Totals
Aisha outloud reading and supliances received	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Ayan outloud reading and supliances received	-	-	2	-	1	-	3

Aisha and Ayan use their respective strengths, namely Ayan's task management skills, and Aisha's oral reading fluency, to complete the book

reading. As evident in Excerpt 4 below, Ayan, while not the dominant reader, pushes to complete the reading.

Excerpt 4

Time	Turn	Participant	
21:51	1	Ayan & Aisha	[reading with Aisha] Anansi, took off his hat and filled with steaming beans
22:16	2	Aisha & Ayan	as he put the lid back on the beans he. heard. shouts. from the
22:35	3	Ayan	hey! why looking at this one?
22:37	4	Aisha	[laughs]
22:39	5	Ayan & Aisha	... the garden. hey hey hey hey get out of grandma spider's garden
22:52	6	Ayan & Aisha	anansi saw a flock of birds eating the beans he had just planted. some of the neighbors were, waving, and yelling. the scared birds flew through the open kitchen window. the neighbors ran to the porch and pounded on the door. get out of grandma's kitchen you nasty birds! anansi, let us in to help you [slow decoding word by word]
23:50	7	Ayan	to help you [Ayan turns over the driver to Aisha]
23:56	8	Aisha	[clearly and fluently] anansi didn't know what to do. he had to hide the beans. anansi let us in the neighbors yelled. the birds screeched and flapped and anansi looked around quickly. anansi did the only thing he could think to do. he pulled the hat full of hot beans on his head and opened the door. [Ayan taps on the page]
24:35	9	Martha	she wants you to go fast. [laughter]
24:39	10	Aisha	the neighbors come in yelling and sc...(1 sec)
24:48	12	Martha	Screaming
24:52	13	Aisha	screaming and chasing out the flapping birds
24:56	14	Martha	flapping birds [Ayan is turning pages, using the driver, and pointing to the words for Aisha to read. Ayan is subvocalizaing]
24:58	15	Aisha	flapping birds.

Ayan and Aisha engage in mainly independent but overlapping reading. Aisha is the more audible reader but both girls engage with the text. What is

very salient here are the ways that Ayan pushes Aisha to read aloud and to continue to focus. For instance, at turn 3, she says to Aisha, whose attention has shifted to the worksheet, “hey why you looking at this one?” in an attempt to redirect Aisha’s attention to the book, and to continue to receive support. Ayan’s question is really a request for Aisha to move back to the reading task. It is also notable as the first explicit comment about task management, and one of the few authentic, spoken interpersonal exchanges between them.

Aisha and Ayan continue to read in tandem, with Ayan ‘driving’ via the colored paper, following the words together and with overlapping, but generally synchronized voices, until turn 7, when Ayan turns the driver over to Aisha. This seems to serve as a cue for Aisha to read more audibly and independently. Her pace quickens but Ayan also continues to read and follow along, moving her lips as she decodes, subvocalizing. At page 22, Ayan taps the page, prompting Aisha to increase her pace, a message confirmed by Bigelow (turn 9). Ayan takes control again of the driver and manages the task more directly by turning the page, moving the driver, and pointing to words for Aisha to read, as Ayan follows along subvocalizing. They continue in this manner to the close of the text.

4. Discussion

How do the two participants with vastly different literacy levels engage with the task and support each other’s engagement towards task completion (Research Question #1)? Our analysis shows that the book, and the goal of finishing the book, was an overwhelming mediating factor in the type of peer interaction that occurred. As the interaction was tightly focused on decoding the written text (Ayan sounding out words), there was little negotiation for meaning. This decoding work, coupled with reading aloud produced word supplants when the reader paused or prompted. This limited focus on decoding might be due to the participants’ desire to push toward task completion without the need for confirming or checking comprehension. Or, if there was comprehension of the text, the participants possibly assumed they shared the same interpretation of the text and did not necessarily need to clarify or negotiate the meaning of the text. The reading comprehension checks by Bigelow (e.g. *What happened?*) also offered few opportunities for this dyad to focus on or negotiate meaning. However, while the task was not helpful for participants to practice comprehension, it may have been a way to review a text already read, to practice a procedure for learning to read (partner reading), or to practice decoding.

Overall, in terms of developing literacy skills, we found that Ayan and Aisha's participation in the task was likely of little benefit to either. This is partly due to the design of the instructional task. For both learners, the *Anansi* text was not an optimal choice for fostering meaning-making literacy skills. If the girls had read this book independently, they each would have likely spent very little time with the text – it was too easy for Aisha and too difficult for Ayan. The classroom setting of this task might have leveraged the participants' desire to participate in literacy activities, and the commitment they seem to have to each other to complete assigned tasks, and potentially to further develop their literacy skills. Nevertheless, neither student was equipped to optimally support the development of reading skills in the ways that an expert teacher might; this includes providing support with meaning making, print decoding, and structure. Successful completion of the task required very little meaning making or opportunities for learning; Ayan and Aisha were busy, 'on-task', and compliant with teacher directions, but this work was unlikely to promote English reading skills.

Within a sociocultural or Vygotskian framework, human action is directed or mediated by motives, and arises out of need, all within intersections of social relationships and cultural phenomenon. If we conclude that the partner reading activity did little to help Ayan and Aisha learn to read in English, then we need to explore other motives or needs that the task fulfilled. Perhaps they needed to act like a reader and be part of a classroom of students who are learning English and learning to read. Perhaps they felt obligated to each other or to the researcher with the camera. Perhaps the feeling of participating as requested by the teacher reveals Ayan and Aisha's trust in the teacher and their belief that by following the teacher's instructions, they will be successful in the class, and presumably in school. While all of these motives were likely in play, this analysis highlights the hard work that many language learners do, often without clear motives or well defined learning objectives. The learners in this activity would have benefited more from level-appropriate silent reading, or a clearer purpose for reading, for example.

Also important here is the impact of asymmetrical pairing on interactional patterns and their potential impact on learning. We found that while there was little negotiation for meaning, there was a great deal of collaboration in setting up roles, participation structures, and work towards task completion. The four different participation structures allowed for different interactional moves and roles, in response to task and material constraints as well as their own skills and strengths.

What varied roles and participation structures are created as the two participants work on the task (Research Question #2)? Across the four

structures Aisha took on the role of 'expert decoder' by reading fluently, supplying words for Ayan, and voicing decodes more audibly during parallel reading. Ayan took the role of 'expert task manager'. She prompted Aisha to stay focused; issued indirect requests for suppliance of words she needed; offered meta-comments about the task; maintained physical control of task resources (e.g., pointing to words), and participated in comprehension discussions. Ayan's strengths were in 'doing school', that is, in figuring out how to complete requirements which might, or might not, involve learning but always involve some sort of busy work (e.g., doing a worksheet) (see Bigelow & King 2014). Ayan was clearly the weaker reader but had a more dominant personality during the interaction. Although Aisha has much more extensive previous experiences with literacy, her way of interacting with Ayan was more accommodating and even passive at times.

How do the participants' respective literacy, linguistic, academic, and social strengths and challenges shape how this peer interaction unfolds and the learning opportunities therein (Research Question #3)? Our analysis complicates the notions of 'expert' and 'novice' and the potentially complementary strengths of learners. For instance, in these data, we saw how the more 'novice' reader (Ayan) managed the task, while the 'expert' reader accommodated to a particular reading style. These findings also highlight learners' own agency in figuring out how to complete tasks in a way that works for them when no further instructions or guidance were offered. These data also provide an example of the fluidity of interactional structures within one naturally occurring classroom literacy task, and serves as a reminder of the creativity of students in determining how to complete a given task and the wide variation in how this might be accomplished. Finally, despite being a requirement of the task, there was very little comprehension discussion, a fact which calls into question how meaningful that part of the task was, and pushes us to consider other ways in which this might have been structured. The learners, as inexperienced readers, might not have invested in the comprehension portion of the task, but rather in the goal of completing the task, given the absence of any other purpose set out for them to read this story.

5. Conclusion and pedagogical implications

Peer interaction has been an important construct within the field of language teaching and learning because of its potential to maximize classroom language learning by engaging learners in language use, problem solving, and higher order thinking. Language teachers often strive to increase the amount of

learner interaction in their classroom. This can be accomplished with supportive or scaffolded teaching practices, such as breaking tasks into phases with pre-teaching key lexical or syntactic structures, offering models of outcomes, task repetition, and offering learners clear instructions for how to work together, as well finding and communicating an authentic purpose for doing the task.

We maintain that it is possible for there to be learning benefits for both members of an asymmetrically paired dyad; however, our analysis here suggests that this particular partner-reading task did not facilitate literacy acquisition for either student. There are glimmers of amusement in the transcript, but for the most part, the participants completed the task by going through the motions of the task without visibly making much meaning from the text. How could it have been different? Ayan would have benefitted from a text that would allow her to recognize a much higher percentage of words and to engage common emergent reading strategies such as combining beginning sounds with picture clues and context clues, both of which have the potential to help her become a fluent reader. Aisha would have benefitted from a different, more advanced text, and the opportunity to read silently with a clear purpose in mind.

Pedagogically, the partner reading task did serve other purposes besides practicing reading aloud. There were opportunities for both Ayan and Aisha to help assist each other enacted multiple roles and identities throughout the task. With a great deal of effort, they were able to have the satisfaction of completing the task, even if this was mainly symbolic and not maximally beneficial to either of them. Perhaps this outcome was possible because Ayan and Aisha agreed to work collaboratively and this could contribute in some way to their self-efficacy as students. In other words, the participants might not have improved their literacy skills by participating in this activity, but they were likely to have felt satisfied and affirmed by their participation in the activity, as members of this classroom community.

To maximally engage and motivate learners, the reading activity should be more authentic and purposeful. Many and varied reading opportunities that are collaborative, multilingual, and individual would likely offer Ayan and Aisha the avenues toward rich classroom literacy experiences. The students would benefit from further opportunities to read level-appropriate texts across many genres and those that are high interest to them, such that their participation in literacy learning activities will contribute to their sense of being readers, good students, and valuable members of the classroom community.

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Appendix: Transcription conventions

CAPS	spoken with emphasis (minimum unit is morpheme)
.	falling intonation at the end of words
,	rising intonation at the end of words
?	rising intonation in clause
->	continuing or flat intonation (as in lists)
!	animated tone, not necessarily an exclamation
::	elongated sound
[]	transcriber's comment
... (.x)	pause and estimate of length