RESEARCH ARTICLE

Engaging native speakers in language scaffolding in a Chinese classroom

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Abstract

The study reported in this article was carried out in a Chinese language class at the college level to explore the benefits and challenges of language scaffolding through interactions between pairs consisting of a Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) learner and a Chinese Native Speaker (CNS). The CNSs were international students on campus. CNS and CFL learners formed tandem learning dyads to support each other's language and exchange cultural knowledge on given topics. Data included students' discussions, writing samples, and reflective interviews. Research findings revealed that the CNS provided corrective feedback through various strategies and that the CFL learner's Chinese was improved through language correction and language expansion. However, a number of challenges emerged for future improvement, including a lack of training on providing corrective feedback, unstable partnerships, and time constraints. This article includes suggestions for language program directors and instructors as they consider how to include their international student body in curriculum design.

Keywords: *Chinese, peer scaffolding, native speakers, interaction, corrective feedback*

APA Citation: Kong, K. (2021). Engaging native speakers in language scaffolding in a Chinese classroom. *Second Language Research & Practice*, *2*(1), 41-64. http://hdl.handle.net/10125/69857

Introduction

Scaffolding (e.g., Ortega, 2009; Swain et al., 2010; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1994) is highly valued and widely implemented in language classrooms to examine how learners can support each other through sharing ideas, negotiating meanings, and giving feedback, all in order to achieve the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). Forming learning partnerships is one common pedagogical approach under this perspective. Tandem learning, which consists of learners with different first language backgrounds contributing mutual efforts to learn the other person's language, aligns with sociocultural perspectives on the importance of interaction in learning. In particular, tandem learning aligns with scaffolding in terms of the gradual transition to learner autonomy and the agency of learners (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Through corrective feedback (CF) (Lightbown & Spada, 2013), partners can provide contingent assistance to help each other learn.

This study, conducted at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, documented Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) learners' tandem learning experience with Chinese Native Speakers (CNSs), who were international students learning English on campus. I use the term native speakers in this paper to emphasize that Chinese was the first language of the international student participants, and to distinguish this group from the language learners in the Chinese program. However, it is not intended to confine the international students to monolingual and homogenous individuals as depicted in a reductionist lens. On the contrary, the present study aligns with Meier's (2017) conceptualization of learners as "multilingual social

practitioners and agents with dynamic and complex biographies and identities who exist in a multilingual ecosystem" (p. 153). It was upon this baseline that I studied the tandem learning program to discover its learning affordances and its pedagogical potential.

In the present study, tandem partners utilized their first language (L1) to help each other and to exchange their cultural knowledge on specific topics. Although these activities were designed to promote both language and culture learning between these two parties, this paper focuses on the Chinese language learning aspect. In particular, this study seeks answers to two research questions:

1. What are the benefits and challenges of tandem learning?
2. How do CNSs provide feedback to CFL learners?

The goals of this study were two-fold: first, to present the benefits and challenges of tandem learning to shed light on its pedagogical potential; and second, to explore how Chinese-speaking partners helped others learn in terms of CF strategies. This paper aims to inspire judicial curricular design to engage cross-cultural interactive communication, especially in less explored languages, such as Chinese.

Literature Review

This section briefly reviews studies regarding peer scaffolding in language learning, tandem learning, and corrective feedback to provide a theoretical context and to identify research still needed in the field.

Peer Scaffolding Through Interaction with Native Speakers

According to sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1994), learners achieve higher-level knowledge by interacting with others whose peer scaffolding can activate the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, a more capable peer can provide knowledge and feedback in order to help the learner solve problems that they are unable to solve alone. Metaphorically, the process of providing support and feedback to the learner is like using scaffolding in a construction site; the scaffolding provides support so that improvements can be made to the existing structure. Similarly, scaffolding in L2 learning can help the learner build upon their existing knowledge.

The notion of scaffolding has been widely adopted to study language education in various contexts, such as formal classrooms, parent-child interaction, tandem learning partners, and private tutoring (e.g., de Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Many et al., 2009; Nassaji & Cumming, 2000). A number of educators and researchers have shifted their focus on scaffolding from highlighting the value of an expert to stressing the mutuality of scaffolding even between novices (e.g., Dong & Liu, 2020; Hanjani, 2019; Hsieh, 2017; Swain et al., 2002). In their view, scaffolding is not unidirectional support being passed from expert to novice; rather, studies show that scaffolding can occur even between novices as they act as experts to support each other "mutually and concurrently through dialogic interaction" (Hanjani, 2019, p. 43). Scholars pay more attention to the knowledge and skill set needed to support learning, rather than the formal qualifications of the person in a scaffolding pair. Scaffolding has also been extended from face-to-face interaction to online chatting (e.g., Kwok & Tan, 2004; Kessler et al., 2012; Yeh et al., 2017).

Some may argue that interacting with native speakers could create anxiety in learners, but numerous studies have reported positive results in employing native speakers in scaffolding (e.g., Schenker, 2012; Spinelli & Dolci, 2007; Thorne, 2003). Two specific elements point to the idea that tandem relations with native speakers could provide an optimal condition to foster effective scaffolding.

First, the root of tandem learning is peer interaction. Although learners are facing a native speaker, a more salient feature of this native speaker is a peer who is there to help, instead of an authority figure (like an instructor) who is there to judge. According to Resnik and Schallmoser (2019), learners perceive each other as "cultural mediators and a difference from language classroom contexts on the level of power relations" (p. 541). They argued that tandem learning with native speakers brings "language enjoyment to learners,"

which is a key to success (p. 541). When learners experience feelings of enjoyment in scaffolding, they may be more willing to invest in this process.

Second, the mutuality feature of tandem learning suggests that each participant has something to contribute. In other words, each person is an expert in some way. Knowing that they are also a valuable contributor in the process could potentially lower learners' anxiety and enhance their efficacy. Tulung's (2008) study discovered that students were more motivated and took more risks in peer interaction than in teacher-fronted lessons and felt they could benefit more from peer feedback. This is important because scaffolding is built on feedback in order to push each other to maximize learning potential.

Additionally, noticeable benefits of scaffolding from native speakers have been documented. For instance, learners can notice language forms through explicit feedback from native speakers in e-tandem partnerships (Appel & Mullen, 2000; O'Rourke, 2005; Ware & O'Dowd, 2008). Among others, Foster and Ohta (2005) pointed out that even a normal flow of conversation with native speakers allows learners to notice language forms. Similarly, Lee (2008) reported that native speakers provided step-by-step scaffolding to non-native speakers' non-target-like linguistic forms. Although studies show that many teachers and students favor tandem learning and feedback from native speakers, it is worth noting that the extent to which native speakers understand the structure of their native languages can impact the effectiveness of CF (Ware & O'Dowd, 2008). This problem will emerge again in the following discussion on peer CF and in the discussion of the current study's finding.

The majority of existing research explores EFL and ESL learners around the world. Studies are scarce as to the implementation and results of peer scaffolding in world language programs, such as Chinese. The growing popularity of learning Chinese calls for more attention to study the effectiveness of peer scaffolding in learning this historically less commonly taught language.

Scaffolding and Tandem Learning

Tandem learning has been used in language education for decades. Practices may vary in different contexts, but tandem learning generally refers to "face-to-face exchanges between two learners with different L1s, each trying to learn the other's language" (Chung et al., 2005, p. 52). Three principles are often cited in tandem learning: (a) autonomy, referring to tandem partners' ownership of their own learning; (b) reciprocity, referring to the importance of mutual benefits; and (c) intercultural learning, highlighting the value of pairing members of different language and culture communities in tandem partnerships (Brammerts, 1996; Kawaguchi & Biase, 2009; Tudini, 2007).

These principles resonate with sociocultural perspectives and suitably integrate with scaffolding for two reasons. First, they both center around learner autonomy. Although scaffolding begins with interaction between two individuals (one more advanced and the other less), the goal is for the more advanced expert to help the novice learner reach a higher level of learning. It is a gradual process for learners to move from conducting other-regulated performances to engaging in self-regulated ones (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). In other words, it is a dialogic process where learners "internalize knowledge they co-construct with more capable peers" (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 282). When learners internalize the knowledge, they are better equipped with skills to foster their own learning. Similarly, tandem learning underscores mutual contributions and equal learning. The goal is also to empower learners with skills to foster their own learning.

Second, both scaffolding and tandem learning recognize that learning is a dynamic process with mutual contributions. When scaffolding is applied in language class between dyads, one peer can be more capable in one area but less capable in another. Thus, both parties scaffold each other with their own strengths. Sociocultural perspectives consider a learner as an active rather than passive agent who actively co-constructs the learning process and product (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Therefore, scaffolding is for those involved to contribute their knowledge to help each other grow. This aligns with the reciprocity principle of tandem learning.

Despite its similarity to tutoring (both utilize a dyad format), tandem learning highlights reciprocity and considers leaners as active agents who not only help each other develop language proficiency but also build interpersonal relationships (Kinginger & Belz, 2005; Kramsch & Thorne, 2002). In fact, tutoring may be less sustainable than tandem learning when it comes to relationship building. In addition, tandem learning promotes bilingualism, intercultural competence, and learner autonomy (Kawaguchi & Biase, 2009). In other words, tandem learning allows for meaningful language communication, stimulates authentic cultural exchanges, and fosters learners' integrative motivation to achieve autonomy (Kawaguchi & Biase, 2009).

Corrective Feedback

Corrective Feedback (CF) refers to an indication to a learner that their use of the target language is incorrect (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). When a learner's speech contains a linguistic error, interlocuters initiate repair, which can consist of pointing out an error, "provision of the correct target language form… metalinguistic information about the nature of the error" (Ellis, 2009, p. 4), or any combination of these.

Existing research has examined CF in various aspects. Some studies have illustrated the effectiveness of teachers' CF (e.g., Ekanayaka & Ellis, 2020; Li, 2010; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Mackey & Goo, 2007); other studies have provided evidence to display the general benefits of peer CF. For instance, Nguyen (2013) discovered that peer CF among the Vietnamese EFL participants helped to overcome many challenges, "such as lack of ideas, shortage of materials, limited technology skills and content knowledge, and [development of] knowledge, skills, motivation and confidence needed for completing the task" (p. 71), as well as building rapport with each other. Focusing on specific language features, Sato and Lyster's (2012) empirical study showed that peer CF improved learners' utterance fluency measured by speech rates. Sippel and Jackson (2015) compared teacher and peer CF on the acquisition of German grammar and identified the most significant improvement in the peer CF group. A more recent study by Sippel (2019) added that peer CF also led to vocabulary development. Peer CF continues to be researched and adopted in language education.

Scholars have also shed light on other aspects of peer CF, such as pair dynamic and learners' willingness to give CF. Yoshida (2008) found that peer CF effectiveness was dependent on the learners' level of satisfaction with their interactions, followed by more research to examine learners' emotion, dispositions toward, and beliefs about peer CF (e.g., Foster & Ohta, 2005; Sato, 2013). Considering that learners are not only receivers but also providers of CF, researchers have offered more nuanced insights on students' awareness and willingness to provide CF. For instance, Philp, Walter, and Basturkmen (2010) reported learners' hesitation to give CF due to multiple factors, such as their own proficiency level, task-related discourses, and their social relationship with the partners. Ballinger (2013) further argued that collaborative interaction would not necessarily lead to greater willingness to provide feedback because pair dynamics play an important role. In Sato's (2007) findings, most peer CF was not even intentional but just naturally occurred during communicative activities.

As seen here, studies have provided inconsistent findings of peer CF, illuminating two potential future research areas: one, to provide explicit instructions to "teach learners both how to collaborate and how to give CF to each other" (Sato, 2013; Sippel, 2019); and the other, to conduct more studies to unearth findings across languages, especially on historically less commonly taught languages, such as Chinese. The latter makes this current study valuable and necessary.

Methodology

Context and Participants

The study reported here was conducted at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, where CFL is offered for four semesters. At the time of the study, the on-site Chinese classes were synchronously broadcasted to another campus through Interactive Television (ITV). In other words, the instructor was teaching the class with one cohort of students in the classroom and another cohort on the screen. In this particular class, there

were six students on the local campus and two on the other campus. Students in this class had taken Chinese for two semesters or had passed a placement exam. Although they had just started the intermediate class, they were still at the beginning level. Data were collected from the six students on the local campus.

At the beginning of the semester, the instructor extended an invitation to the CNSs to join the CFL classes at their availability for tandem learning activities. CNSs included international students from mainland China, Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia. The project was voluntary for the international students and many of them expressed an interest in joining, but due to scheduling conflicts, the number of international students who signed up for each activity varied. In the semester when the data were collected, a total of seven international students from mainland China participated in the peer scaffolding projects but not all seven showed up each time. There was a chance that a CFL participant would be working with a different partner; however, the data analyzed in this study were from the same dyads. In other words, during these three sessions, students were working with the same partners.

Procedure

The class covered five chapters during the semester when the data were collected:

- Weather and seasonal activities
- Dining
- Asking for directions
- Birthday party and dating
- Seeing a doctor

The topics used in the final analysis included weather and seasonal activities, dining, and birthday party and dating. Below is the process of the tandem learning project (see Figure 1).

Step One: At the end of each chapter, the instructor assigned a relevant topic and provided prompts. CFL learners created a story based on four pictures and submitted the writing in Chinese. Students had the option to submit a hand-written or typed draft.

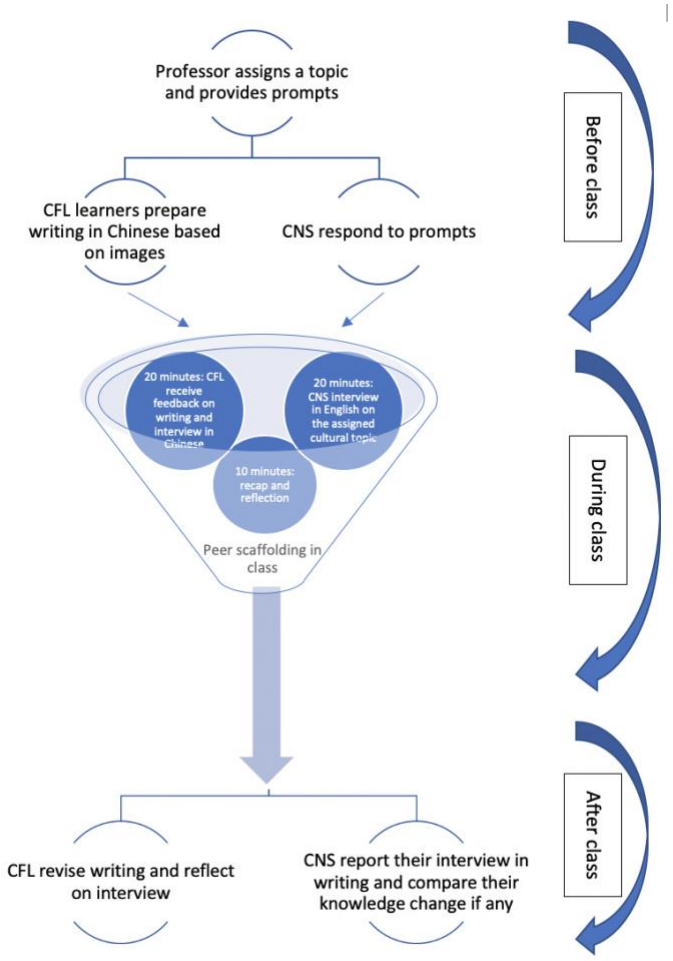
Step Two: One week before the tandem learning day, the instructor sent an email to the CNSs and invited them to join a tandem learning activity in class. The instructor stated the date and time clearly so any interested individuals could sign up based on their availability. Each time, six CNSs were invited.

Step Three: Since this activity was also intended to help the CNSs deepen their knowledge of American culture, the instructor provided some prompts in English related to the topic once the CNS participants were confirmed to participate for that particular week. These prompts allowed the CNSs to activate their prior knowledge about American culture and guided their discussion in the upcoming tandem learning. There was no length requirement for the response and the CNSs could respond in English or Chinese.

Step Four: On the activity day, a CFL learner and a CNS were paired up as tandem partners. The worksheet for CFL learners and CNSs were printed on different colors of paper to prevent confusion. For the first 20 minutes, CFL learners shared their written story with their CNS partner, received feedback, and further interviewed each other in Chinese on that topic; then, in the next 20 minutes, the CNS interviewed the CFL partner in English in order to expand their understanding of American culture. Upon completion of the activity, both partners revised what they had prepared before coming to the tandem learning session to share feedback on the worksheet. Appendix A includes sample worksheets that the dyads were required to finish when discussing the topic of birthday party and dating.

Figure 1

Tandem Learning Process



Data Collection and Analysis

Although tandem learning underscores reciprocity and equal contribution, the focus of the current paper was on how the CNSs supported the CFL learners' language learning. The data included three elements:

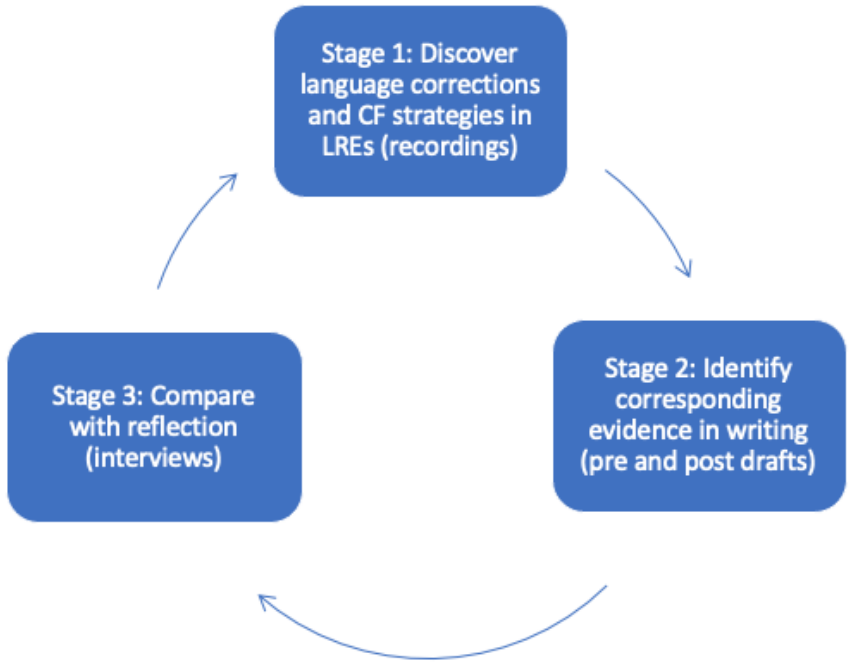
1. The CFL learners' written scripts before and after the scaffolding: Students were required to use a colored pen to make revisions on the original draft to allow the researcher to track the revisions.
2. Recordings of the discussion: Each dyad was placed in a small classroom for the interactive activity and their discussion was audio recorded.
3. End of semester interview: The participants received a semi-structured group interview to reflect on the tandem experience.

It is worth mentioning that not all participants recorded their conversation each time and not all submitted their writing revisions in the five tandem sessions; therefore, the data analyzed in this study were gathered from three tandem sessions when both recorded conversations and writing revisions were submitted. As previously mentioned, these three sessions included weather and seasonal activities, dining, and birthday party and dating.

The data analysis consisted of three stages as shown in Figure 2. During the first stage, I analyzed recorded conversations between the tandem partners to identify moments of corrective feedback and learning. I identified types of language correction and strategies of corrective feedback. During the second stage, I examined the CFL learners' writing before and after the revision. Revisions were underlined and compared with the analysis in stage one in order to discover if the learning corrections recorded in stage one were evident in CFL learners' writing. During the third stage, I scrutinized the reflection interview to understand if and in what way(s) the CFL learners viewed tandem learning as beneficial or challenging. The data analysis was a cyclical process; I compared multiple sets of data throughout (Dillon, 2012; Glaser, 1965). Following Maxwell (2005), I used memos, categorizing, and connecting strategies to generate codes and themes.

Figure 2

Data Analysis Process



To answer the first research question, I adopted Swain & Lapkin's (1998) Language-Related Episodes (LREs) as an instrument to identify learning moments and to further assess the benefits and challenges of peer scaffolding in supporting the CFL learners' study. LREs refer to segments of a dialogue in which the group members talk about the language they have produced or are producing, correct themselves or others, or question or reflect on their language use. Further, Storch (2007) generated three categories of the LREs when investigating the merits of pair work in ESL classes, including form-based LREs, lexis-based LREs, and mechanical LREs. According to Storch (2007):

> Form-focused LREs (F-LREs) were segments in the data where the learners dealt with aspects of morphology or syntax. Lexical LREs dealt with word meanings, word choices and especially use of prepositions (see Williams, 1999). Mechanical LREs (M-LREs) dealt with punctuation, spelling and pronunciation. (p. 148)

Although LREs were discussed mainly within contexts of collaborative writing and ESL/EFL teaching, the present study used the LREs to analyze the learning moments among the dyads in Chinese language use. In combination with other data sets, including the writing samples and the semi-structured interview, I was able to reveal successes and obstacles.

To answer the second research question, I examined the LREs to note what CNSs said when providing language corrections, including their tones and intonations, and paid attention to the peer's receptiveness towards the CF to gain a more nuanced view of the interaction. Then I returned to the writing data to verify whether such corrections were documented in the revised writing, and finally, I reviewed the interview data to see if and how the participants reflected on their ways of providing and receiving feedback.

To analyze the data, I referred to the CF strategies presented in existing literature (e.g., Brown, 2014; Ellis, 2009; Ortega, 2009):

- Recast refers to implicitly reformatting or expanding "an ill-formed or incomplete utterance in an unobtrusive way" (Brown, 2014, p. 272).
- Repetition refers to the corrector repeating the learner utterance, highlighting the error by means of emphatic stress.
- Clarification request refers to the corrector requesting the learner to clarify what they have said.
- Explicit correction refers to the corrector directly pointing out the learner's linguistic error and providing the correction.
- Elicitation refers to the corrector adopting techniques to prompt the learner to self-correct.
- Paralinguistic signal refers to the corrector using gestures and facial expressions to signal that the learner has made an error.
- Metalinguistic feedback refers to the corrector, rather than directly providing a correct form, analyzing the learner's error and providing information and comments to explain why it is inaccurate. Figure 3 is an example of data coding based on the CF strategies

Figure 3

Strategies and Data Examples of Corrective Feedback

Type	Examples (A: American CFL learner. C: CNS)
Recast	• A: 他们 出饭馆儿 C: 出（emphasizing pronunciations） 出 is C-H-U
Repetition	• A: 可是什么时候他去她家 C: 可是什么时候他去她家? (rising tone)
Clarification	• C: He makes a request, "我想要的菜里面少放味精？ is that what you mean? • C: You can say 一盘素饺子，点别的青菜跟米饭， 第三点一杯冰茶和只要喝…So in English it means you only order an iced tea and drink it? What do you mean?
Explicit correction	• C: You can separate into different sentence "可是，你听清楚下一次真的你请客" because we write people said, we need to add quotation marks. "他说好的" after 好 we add 的。 • C: Order, we usually say 点了很多菜
Elicitation	• A: "我弟弟一点小我" C: "有一点" A: "我弟弟有一点小"
Metalinguistic feedback	• C: The "when", in English we say when dot, dot, dot, but in Chinese we put the when at the end, 的时候

Results

This study addressed two research questions:

1. What are the benefits and challenges in tandem learning?
2. How do CNSs provide feedback to CFL learners?

In this section, I begin with the second research question by sharing some figures to present the number of LREs and the CF strategies used by the CNSs. Building on those figures, I provide more details to address the first research question.

The second research question asked about the CF strategies identified in numerous LREs. Below you will see the trend of LREs and the types of CF strategies.

Figure 4

Types and Frequency of LREs

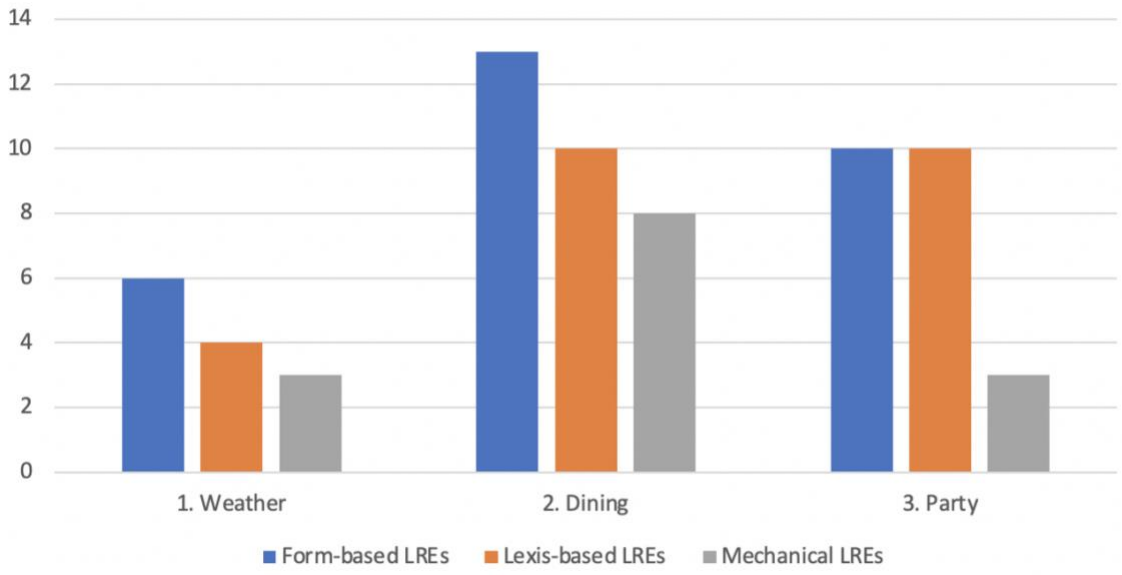


Table 1

Types of LREs and Counts for Each Topic

LRE Types	Topic 1: Weather	Topic 2: Dining	Topic 3: Party
Form-based LREs	6	13	10
Lexis-based LREs	4	10	10
Mechanical LREs	3	8	3

As shown in Figure 4 and Table 1, the number of LREs increased noticeably in topics 2 and 3, which may be explained by two reasons. One may be the increased comfort level of eliciting and providing feedback. The topic 1 (weather) tandem activity occurred in early September, and it was the first time for the tandem partners to interact, whereas topic 2 (dining) occurred in mid-October and topic 3 (party) in mid-November. As the partners interacted more, the CFL learners might have felt more comfortable asking for feedback and the CNSs might have gained a better understanding of their partners' language proficiency and personality which, in turn, informed them how to give feedback. The second reason may be the increased knowledge introduced in class. As the CFL learners covered additional chapters, they accumulated more

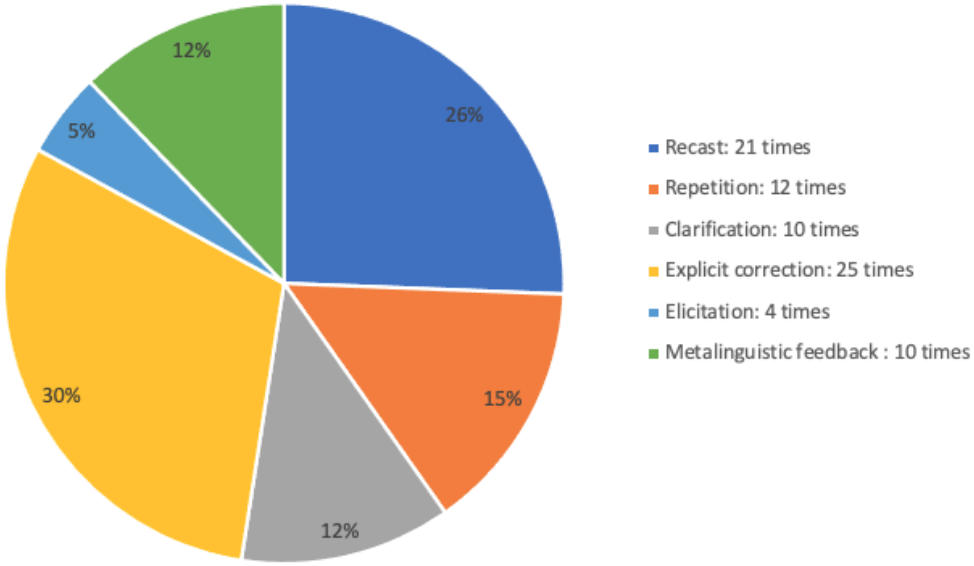
vocabulary and content to use in their language production; therefore, the CNSs had more materials to work with in order to provide support.

Strategies and Frequency of Corrective Feedback

The transcribed data showed that the CNSs provided feedback through a range of strategies listed in the data analysis section above. As shown in Figure 5, explicit correction was the most widely used feedback (25 times), followed by recast (21 times). The least used one was elicitation (four times), which refers to the correctors adopting ways to prompt the learner to self-correct. Many segments in the recording data revealed that the CNS quickly pointed out mistakes and provided correct answers to their tandem partner. In comparison, elicitation would require more skills and experience in prompting the CFL learners to self-correct. The CNSs' lack of experience in language teaching could justly account for the lack of elicitation. Furthermore, paralinguistic signals, such as gestures and facial expressions, were not presented in this figure, because the audio-recorded data did not include a visual element.

Figure 5

Strategies and Frequency of Corrective Feedback



The figures above offer an overview of the LREs and the CF strategies. The second half of this section will present several themes from the data analysis: language correction, expansion, writing, and relationship-building. Although most results were positive, the data also showed some mistakes that were neglected as well as challenges that the participants wished to address.

Support in Language Corrections

In addition to the frequency of LREs, a closer look at the constituents of conversations unfolded more details in scaffolding. Pronunciation corrections were prevalent, including 约 [to make an appointment], 出 [go out], 滑冰 [ice skate], 服务员 [waitress], 尴尬 [embarrass], 暖和 [warm]. In recorded conversations, the CNS repeated the accurate pronunciation multiple times for the partner to model; I also observed onsite that some CNS partners wrote down the phonetic transcript *pinyin* as visual support for their partners.

Vocabulary and grammar structure corrections were also frequent in the recorded data. The recorded conversations showed numerous segments in which the CNSs assisted the CFL learners with their vocabulary, as shown in the LER 1, 2, and 3 below. Huang (2012) identified such LREs as vocabulary-related LREs, including vocabulary completion, vocabulary request, and vocabulary correction.

LRE 1 (Topic 2-dining)	
CFL	里面什么? [What is lǐmiàn?]
CNS	里面means inside, so the tofu has meat on the inside.

LRE 2 (Topic 3-party)	
CFL	很多的饮料很好吃的东西很多的饮料 [A lot of drinks and delicious food]. I mean 礼物。小王很高兴因为他跟他的朋友唱歌 和 聊天儿和 吃… [Gifts. Xiao Wang is happy because he sings and chats with his friends. And they eat…] Oh, I forgot that word.
CNS	蛋糕 [Cakes]
CFL	Yeah, 蛋糕 birthday cake

LRE 3 (Topic 3-party)	
CNS	可是他, 然后. [But he, then.] He finds there is many good friends in her house. You know *find*?
CFL	Uh 找 [Look for]
CNS	No 发现 [Find]

Corrections in grammar were also identified. LRE 4 below was a clear example in which the CNS helped the CFL partner understand the different syntax when forming a time adverbial sentence, by making a metalinguistic comparison. After the explanation, the CFL learner was able to reconstruct the adverbial clause accurately and sounded more confident by saying "okay" twice in an assuring tone.

LRE 4 (Topic 3-party)	
CFL	里面的家. [Inside the house.] I think this is the wrong one I think it's supposed to be 有,有很多的好朋友. [Have, have many good friends.]
CNS	Inside his sister's home… is waiting many good friends?
CFL	Yeah, inside her home for a surprise party.
CNS	You can use here她姐姐家有很多朋友. [There are many friends in her sister's house.] Oh, I know, so you can,可是, 当他去她家的时候发现里面有很多的好朋友. [But, when he goes to her house, he sees many good friends.] The *when*, in English we say when dot, dot, dot, but in Chinese we put the when at the end, 的时候.
CFL	Okay so it would be 可是他去她家的时候. [But when he goes to her house.] Okay!

Support in Language Expansion

Additionally, the CNSs scaffolded the CFL learners to expand their language understanding and production in various ways. These included offering alternative expressions to increase clarity and improve language authenticity.

In LRE 5, the CFL learner's sentence "因为他们非常饿所以他们点菜很多的菜" was mostly grammatically correct, except for the incorrect use of the word "点菜". This mistake was not caught by the CNS, which was a missed opportunity for language learning and will be discussed further in the section on the challenges and limitations of the study. Instead, the CNS pointed out that the sentence sounded less natural, and then provided a more authentic expression to fit in the story context.

LRE 5 (Topic 2-dining)	
CNS	Oh, we normally say, uh 他们去吃饭因为他们很饿. [They go to eat because they are hungry.] 因为means because
CFL	Yea. I have it here I just said 因为他们非常饿所以他们点菜很多的菜ordered a lot of Dishes. [Because they were very hungry, they ordered a lot of food.]
CNS	So, um, you can place this sentence before

In LRE 6, the CFL learner described the dumpling filling as "牛肉的饺子" ["beef dumplings"]. The word 的can serve as a possessive and descriptive particle. When using "牛肉的饺子" ["beef dumplings"], the CFL learner considered 的 as a descriptive particle as in "红色的房子" ["red houses"]; however, it could be ambiguously understood as "the dumplings belonging to the beef" reflecting the possessive dimension of 的. Moreover, it sounded less natural. The CNS partner suggested dropping 的 and instead using a more accurate word, 馅儿[filling], to describe the dumpling filling. What was missing here was the CNS's explanation as to why 的 should be dropped, but she helped her CFL partner learn a new word and a more authentic expression.

LER 6 (Topic 2-dining)	
CNS	Yes so we can just drop the 的, 牛肉馅儿饺子[Dumplings with beef filling] you know that uh the something materials in the dumplings we say 馅儿xian'er [Filling]
CFL	I don't think we learned that
CNS	Yeah, that's okay, this is a great way to say it

In LRE 7, the language learner was trying to explain what she had wanted to express. Then the CNS pointed out the ambiguity and lack of clarity in the CFL learner's Chinese expression and suggested clearer and more authentic expressions. This LRE showcased that both partners explained, negotiated, clarified, and confirmed meanings so that the CNS provided more contingent assistance (Van Lier, 2004).

LRE 7 (Topic 2-dining)	
CFL	Yes, because he didn't want any of these foods, he's very picky so I said one, you can order vegetable dumplings, two, you can order other vegetables because 小白菜卖完了 [The baby bok choys are sold out] or three, or just order a drink, and just drink
CNS	Okay so I would suggest 你可以点一杯冰茶来喝. [You can order an iced tea to drink.] It sounds weird to say it in English because we say, "you can only drink it" means 你只能喝. [You only can drink.] It is a little bit weird to say that in English. 第三 [Thirdly] there is no subject so you should add 你点一杯冰茶然后你自己喝. [You order a glass of iced tea for yourself to drink.]

Improved Writing

The CFL learners' writing data before and after revisions were consistent with the audio data analysis. For instance, the two writing samples (see Appendix B), presented numerous revisions circled in red. These revisions further reflected the language corrections and expansion that occurred in the tandem learning.

In the two samples, corrections included (a) vocabulary completion such as adding "什么" to make a sentence complete, filling in characters "问题" ["problems"],"因为" ["because"], correcting the word "吧" [a sentence-final particle] from "把" [preposition indicating disposition]; (b) syntax corrections such as changing "我为你在开舞会" to "我在为你开舞会" ["I am hosting a party for you"] and rewriting "可是什么时候他去她的家" to "可是他去她家的时候" ["but when he goes to her house"]; (c) improving language fluidity and authenticity, such as deleting unnecessary 的 as in "他的姐姐的家" ["his sister's

house"], and changing "里面的家使很多好朋友" ["Inside the hours are many good friends"] to "在姐姐家看见有很多好朋友" [He sees many good friends in his sister's house"] in pinyin.

Reflection on Linguistic Gains and Communicative Styles

The analysis of the CFL learners' reflection interviews provided some evidence of the linguistic gains of peer scaffolding from tandem partners. The learners reported that such interactive opportunities not only allowed them to apply their knowledge in practice in an unrehearsed way, but they also improved their motivation and provided a sense of accomplishment when they were able to understand their partners. Below are two examples:

> I definitely feel like, I really like the activity because you're able to hear how some words are supposed to sound and if you make mistakes while you're talking they can correct you or like, because we only learned certain words and we haven't learned a lot of the other ways of how to say them, and so they would use a different word that would make more sense if you use it in that context that we were referring to, so it's really helpful that whenever you talk there's someone there to correct and if you listen to them talk and then sometimes you can catch some of the words like "awesome, I can understand them." (CFL participant Yong)

> There were words that we were learning that they were like "oh, why would you say that? It's not in a common vernacular" so I think interacting with them more and speaking to them more like, they gave me a more current way of saying it so something a little more natural, maybe not as robotic and memorized as learning all these phrases. I think that was probably the most helpful part of the language. (CFL participant Alex)

The responses above revealed three benefits, namely personalized corrections, alternative expressions, and a sense of accomplishment. Similar sentiments were discernible from other interview data. The majority of the CFL participants reported that they "actually learned a lot of words," their partners helped them "[figure] out which grammar points should and should not be used, what would sound better," and they helped them write paragraphs in Chinese.

When asked about how they felt when being corrected by their partners, the CFL learners' responses were mixed. Some CFL learners applauded the directness of their partners, while others had to adjust to the way that feedback was given. For instance, the following CFL learner found his partner's communicative style useful and effective:

> I was really glad that she was just upfront with me about my errors because if she was just trying to sugarcoat it like "oh, no it's okay" like I probably would've kept making the same mistake, but if she was like "no this is wrong, do it this way" then I'm like "okay, now I know." I'm really glad she wasn't like shy about it. (CFL participant Yong)

Below is an example showing the CFL learner's adjustment to her partner's constant interruptions. The CFL participant, Yasmine, was very animated when recalling her interactive experiences with her CNS partner, speaking with a considerable amount of body language, facial expressions, and laughter:

> …just like all the time and she'll be like "you don't need that there, you don't need that there, you don't need that there" and she's like cross it out on my paper and make me redo it. And like at the time it was like I felt bad because I was like "ah I'm not doing this right," but then I was like you know she was helping me and like as time went on, I realized that, you know, she was helping me write and speak more fluently, more accurately, even if she had her own peculiar way of just being "WRONG" (*laughs*). (CFL participant Yasmine)

Initially, Yasmine was startled by the direct and constant corrections from her partner, which could have been frustrating and discouraging. She admitted that it did make her feel intimidated at times, but she understood the good intention behind the feedback and adjusted to her partner's "peculiar way" with a sense

of humor. The way her partner provided feedback could be a result of a personal style or the fact that she was an English learner developing communicative competence. It was challenging for Yasmine at times, but it pushed her to adjust not only her emotional response but also her role as a participant to make communication successful. In her later communications with her CNS partner, Yasmine was more mindful of her own mistakes and her partner's interruptions decreased significantly. Moreover, her partner's feedback turned into more suggestive comments such as "This would sound better" and "Ok, that's fine."

Relationship-Building

When analyzing the recorded data, I noticed increased laughter, small talk, and jokes as the time went by. In the final interview, when asked about the feeling of this tandem experience and if the participants would do it again, all responded positively. The most-used words included "enjoy," "awesome," and "fun." Below is an additional list of quotes:

1. Like that's what I enjoy about it. That's what I find the most enjoyable, actually experiencing what you've been taught.
2. Yeah definitely, like I really enjoyed it, it was a lot of fun.
3. They are like our age. You can actually hear how and what our age talk.
4. They are like actual language, that was pretty cool.
5. Yeah. It was just really interesting to imagine how their life is like over there and how it is compared to how I'm living here.
6. I thought that was always really funny.
7. I thought it was really fun to talk about like, I could talk about that for days with a Chinese person, just like "so what is it like there, but what's specific" and like it's so cool to learn, culture to culture, it's a really really fun thing to learn, I think.
8. Yeah, it's really nice because, when you first meet them in the classroom it's really awkward and you're trying to get conversation going, you have something to talk about. And then, I see them out of the classroom, I see them in the cafeteria or something like that and I'm like "Hi, I know you."

Among the direct quotes, the last one really captured the relationship-building sentiment. Both CFL and CNS participants reported that they started the tandem learning project with a language partner but ended it with a friend.

Nonetheless, when asked what they wished could be different or improved in this project, multiple participants indicated the challenge of working with different partners and expressed their desire to build deeper relationships. As explained in the research context section, one logistic challenge was having the same volunteers committed throughout the semester. Although the data from this study were from three meetings when the dyads happened to consist of the same people, over the course of one semester the participants also worked with different partners during other meetings.

As Kate, a participant, stated in the interview:

> I think just, having just that one person for one period would be more helpful, you get to know him better, like once you open your mind you can just talk about whatever you want. But if you switch around, you have to talk all the time, the same stuff.

This statement was supported by other participants. Another participant Yong, without explicitly addressing the partnership sustainability, pointed out the inconsistent feedback from two different partners. He said:

> My first partner didn't say a lot and whenever he saw my paper, he's like, "That looks good," but then when I had another person, she looked over it and said, "Maybe you could say this in a different way."

Yong said he appreciated different perspectives, but such inconsistency could sometimes be confusing. He did not know if he was truly doing a good job or not. It is worth noting that the participants were open to meeting different partners, but they expressed that they would appreciate
working with the same person for several weeks before switching partners.

Discussion

Benefits of Tandem Scaffolding

First, in light of language gains, scaffolding ranged from small pronunciation corrections to discourse development. The CNSs introduced their partners to a variety of colloquial registers and other elements of conversational discourse (Tudini, 2007) and corrected their pronunciation. Because at the time of the research the CFL students had just started an intermediate-level class, they were still transitioning from simple sentences to more complex sentence structures. Their struggles and mistakes frequently appeared when adding a clause introduced by a temporal adverb. The CNSs were able to point out mistakes and offer correct clause syntax. Moreover, the CNSs provided more specific words to help the CFL learners express their ideas with increased clarity. The observation of learners' vocabulary expansion and increased grammar accuracy echoes previous studies that identified distinctive improvement in peer CF groups over other comparative groups (Sippel, 2019; Sippel & Jackson, 2015). Additionally, there were many moments when the CNSs helped to enhance CFL students' pronunciation by modeling, repeating, and explaining. These moments were very brief and sometimes subtle, but the process was invaluable. Learners often took advantage of the interactive process as an opportunity to test their hypothesis, check for confirmation, and request clarification. The more advanced learner, the CNS in this case, provided feedback and comprehensible input (Krashen, 1981), and thus facilitated language learning.

Second, the goal of tandem scaffolding is leading to learner autonomy. Recorded data showed numerous segments where the CFL learners produced accurate language use quickly after being corrected. It was evidence of a gradual transition from "the most explicit assistance (more other-regulated)" to "the least assistance (more self-regulated)" (Jin, 2013, p. 195). For instance, one CFL learner recognized her overuse of the possessive or descriptive particle 的, as she shared in the final interview, "I tend to overplay the 的 a lot, like I'll just throw 的 in there like wherever, I'll be like 我的，你的 [my, your]." She would not have noticed this pattern if her CNS partner had not provided repeated corrections. Now this CFL learner internalized this knowledge, became more mindful of the accurate use of 的 and was able to self-correct when mistakes occurred. In such cases, learners were making progress beyond their level and achieving more than they could have individually. These verbal exchanges between the tandem partners might be small, but they were microcosms of CNSs assisting learners to move through the Zone of Proximal Development to accomplish communicative tasks on their own.

Furthermore, tandem scaffolding was an opportunity for CFL learners to receive what Van Lier (2004) called contingency feedback, meaning tailored assistance based on learner's current language needs, which would have been hard to receive from group learning in a large class size with only one instructor. Besides the feedback strategies illustrated in the results section, micro-level scaffolding strategies were also employed. For instance, one CNS asked the CFL partner to observe his exaggerated mouth movement so the partner could model; another CNS provided regional differences in pronunciation through a joke to make the knowledge sound interesting. They utilized various techniques within their knowledge scope to help their tandem partners "make the words their own" (Storch, 2007, p. 155). As discussed in the literature review section, tandem learning emphasizes reciprocity and intercultural communication dimensions. As partners maneuvered a best way to communicate, they developed empathy and were motivated to gain and share more knowledge (Kawaguchi & Biase, 2009; Sung & Poole, 2017). A similar finding was also documented in Resnik and Schallmoser's (2019) study, where one of the participants said, "It helps if you see that other person is not that proficient as well and you can support…and help each other" (p. 553). Such direct interpersonal communication manifests a genuine effort to help the partner.

Last but not least, data indicated relationship building, an immeasurable yet invaluable benefit out of this tandem project. Similar to the findings from previous studies (Jin, 2013; O'Dowd, 2020; Sung & Poole, 2017), when participants establish rapport, they feel more relaxed, less anxious, and more invested in the scaffolding process. The fact that the LREs' frequency increased, as shown in Figure 4, underpinned that tandem learning is a relationship-building process. As a result, LREs gradually transformed from simple language tutoring to genuine mutual learning. It is worth noting that interview data also suggest that the design of the tandem-learning program was another contributing factor of lower anxiety. As Payne (2020) noted in the relationship between cognitive load and language activity design, one way to reduce students' cognitive burden and improve the level of discourse would be to allow more time for processing and pre-task planning. The current paper showed a process (Figure 1) where tandem partners had a week to prepare and draft their writing so they would utilize the ample tandem learning time to exchange ideas. The participants mentioned the usefulness of this design. That being said, an intentional design should strike a balance between preparation and spontaneous conversation to benefit students' language skills.

Challenges and Limitations of the Study

The challenges that the participants experienced in these tandem sessions also reflected the limitations of this study. First, a lack of experience and training among the CNSs led to several missed opportunities in scaffolding. For instance, explicit correction was the most used CF strategy. It was apparent from the audio data that when the CNSs noticed mistakes, several of them immediately interrupted the CFL learners and provided correct expressions, rather than guiding their partners to recognize the mistakes and self-correct. Such "over and early intervention prevents the learner from reaching self-regulation and eventually independently producing error-free language forms" (Jin, 2013, p. 207).

Second, the CNSs were international students who were also developing their communicative competence in English. Although they had good intentions, they might have ended up using more aggressive or confrontational language when asking for clarification or when offering feedback. In other words, expressions might have come across differently than what they intended. Similar to the findings in Philp, Walter, and Basturkmen's (2010) study, the CNSs in this study were not always able to clearly explain why their partner's expression was inaccurate, and on several occasions, they were not able to identify mistakes and therefore missed opportunities for improvement. In this case, the challenge was for the CNSs to provide feedback effectively and in a culturally appropriate way; it was equally a challenge for the CFL learners, as listeners and participants, to receive the feedback with cultural understanding, empathy, and a willingness to adjust in order to make the communication successful.

Moreover, the small number of participants and the nature of this qualitative study limits the generalizability of the results. Only data generated from three conversation topics were analyzed in this study because the data for the other two topics were not complete: Either the recording data or the writing revisions were not submitted. If all data were analyzed, they might better capture the developmental trajectory. In addition, the number of international students participating in this tandem activity also varied from time to time. This lack of consistency also made it hard to ensure a stable partnership between students. The alternating dyads might have caused inconsistent language feedback and deprived learners of the opportunity to develop deeper conversations. Though the participants in this study understood the logistic challenges and were open to working with various partners, their feedback did convey a desire to build a relationship with one person at a time.

Implications for Postsecondary Language Programs

Although this study could be improved in several areas, it is a contribution to the realm of engaging international students in Chinese programs to foster mutual learning. The results illuminate postsecondary language programs in several aspects.

First, language programs may design speaking and writing tasks in tandem learning to gain insights on individual performance and to document learners' progress. In order to offer differentiated learning, the first step is to identify learners' needs. Such needs may include individual knowledge gaps and varied learning styles. As Klee and Truman (2020) aptly stated, language instructors need to "be aware of the complexity of individual differences, accept that the trajectory of learning for each individual in their classroom will vary" (p. 18), and be adaptive in pedagogy design. Tandem learning could be a good option to achieve this goal. Analyzing the recorded conversations, paired with pre- and post- written drafts, could offer unique access to learners' individual style, skill, and language use. What is more valuable is that such interactions occur in an unrehearsed environment between peers so the learners may be more relaxed to display their genuine performance. Accumulating such raw data might inform language programs on curriculum design and pedagogical approaches.

Second, language programs may use tandem learning to engage learners (local and international) to recognize and celebrate their identities and cultural backgrounds and practice cross-cultural communication. Many language instructors utilize authentic resources such as newspapers, TV shows, and guest speakers to enhance students' learning about the language. Tandem learning with peers exemplifies learning-by-doing and utilizes authentic language opportunities through which students are exposed to various vernaculars; in turn, they recognize "the existence of diversity within target-language speech communities" (Blyth & Dalola, 2020, p. 103). Therefore, learners are propelled to adapt their communicative strategies, challenged to negotiate meanings, and driven to take risks. When international students and local students work together in a dyad, their communication transcends mere language practice; rather, they are practicing intercultural and social norms in an organic way.

Third, language programs may consider collaboration with international offices and other academic departments on campus to foster high-impact learning through tandem learning programs. If a language program aims to produce effective intercultural communicators, as many do, it is crucial to consider high-impact activities such as this intercultural tandem learning project. Tandem partners may enhance empathy towards others who speak a different language and spur their curiosity to know the target culture. Working with international offices and other academic departments might increase the chance to reach a larger number of international students from various disciplines, as well as promote campus internationalization. It may also present an excellent opportunity for international students to connect with the local community, starting with a peer through tandem learning.

Conclusion

This study examined the language support of six tertiary-level learners of Chinese engaged in three tandem learning sessions, where their CNS partners provided corrective feedback to help them improve writing and speaking. Although tandem learning underpins reciprocity and both partners in this study equally supported each other, the current study focused on one dimension—the corrective feedback from the CNS to CFL learners—and discussed its benefits and challenges. The research findings uncovered that the CFL learners benefited from such interactive practice through receiving language corrections from partners and through exposure to new vocabulary, authentic language expressions, and discourse development. Such scaffolding was contingent and personalized. Results also revealed various challenges such as the international students' over-intervention and directness, missed opportunities, and partner changes.

Although this is a small-scale study, it illuminates the pedagogical potential of pairing international students and language learners as tandem partners to foster peer scaffolding in language programs. This study contributes to seeking best practices to increase teaching effectiveness, especially for historically less commonly taught languages, such as Chinese. When instructors design a tandem learning project judiciously and strategically, it can be a promising learning path where tandem partners negotiate meanings, invest efforts to close the knowing-doing learning gap (Molka-Danielsen & Deutschmann, 2009), and practice strategies to develop communicative competence (Carruthers, 2015). Future studies could explore how to facilitate cross-campus peer scaffolding in a teaching environment that engages multiple campuses

and employs reliable and widely used instruments such as the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) and the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) to assess participants' language gains and intercultural competence.

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Appendix A. Two Sample Worksheets for the Topic: Birthday Party and Dating

Two sample worksheets for the topic: birthday party and dating

Party and Dating

This page is for the Chinese 201 students. *Your name:*_____

C201 students will do the following tasks: (20 minutes)

Activity #1:

Have your Chinese partner help you correct your writing (Speaking section of Test of L14).

Activity #2:

Use Chinese to ask questions and elicit answers for the following questions:

Do they have birthday parties in China?

How does your Chinese friend celebrate birthdays (preparation, guests, activities)? If they don't, ask why not.

Activity #3:

Give 3 examples of language points that your Chinese friend has helped you with?	1. 2. 3
List 2 cultural examples that you have learned from your friend?	1. 2.
Do you find this discussion helpful? Why or why not?	

Party and Dating

This page is for the Chinese native speakers. *Your name:*_____

Chinese student will do the following tasks:

1. (Before class) Pre-writing: Write a paragraph to respond to these two questions

(1) What is the dating culture in the US? 美国的恋爱文化是怎么样的?

(2) Is it common for American college students to have a boyfriend or girlfriend? 美国大学生恋爱的情况普遍吗?

(3) What are their criteria for choosing a boyfriend or girlfriend? 他们选择男女朋友的标准是什么?

2. Interview the American student about dating culture in the United States and take notes. You need to create your own questions below. Try to think of questions that can help you develop in-depth understanding of the US culture. Write down your questions below:

Questions:(1) How common is it to have a boyfriend or girlfriend on university campus?

(2) How do parents feel about dating in school?
(3) How do teachers feel about dating in school?
(4) How do they select their boyfriend or girlfriend?

Add 2 more questions. 自己加至少两个问题。

3. Write a paragraph to share 2 new things that you have learned from the cultural exchange. 请举两个例子说明你通过这次交流学到了什么新的东西。

4. How does this interview help you develop your understanding of American culture?
这次交流让你对美国文化的理解有什么变化。

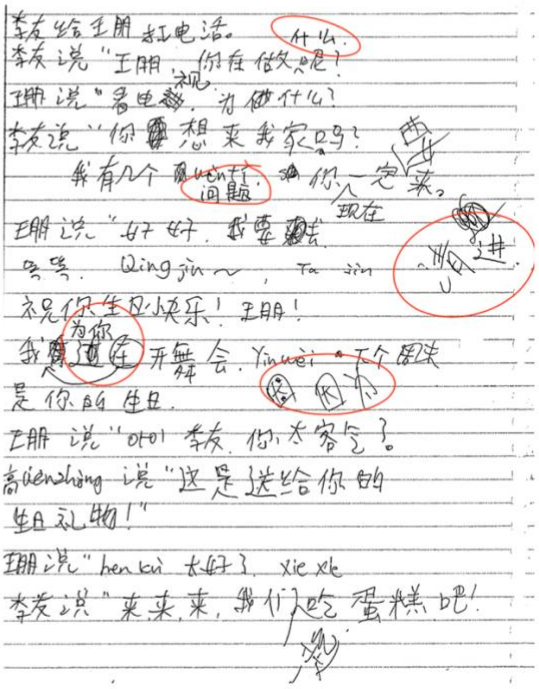
Appendix B. Writing Samples

Writing samples

Writing sample 1

Pre

Post



English translation based on the revised draft.

Li You makes a call to Wang Peng.
Li You says, “Wang Peng, what are you doing?”
Wang Peng says, “Watching TV. Why?
Li You says, “would you like to come to my house? I have several questions. You’ve got to come now.”
Wang Peng says, “Ok, I am coming.”
Come in. Come in. Happy birthday, Wang Peng.
We are hosting a party for you, because next weekend is your birthday.
Wang Peng says, “Li You, you are so kind.”
Gao Wenzhong says, “This is a birthday gift for you.”
Wang Peng says, “It’s cool. It is great. Thank you.”
Li You says, “Come on. Let’s eat the cake together.”

Writing sample

Pre

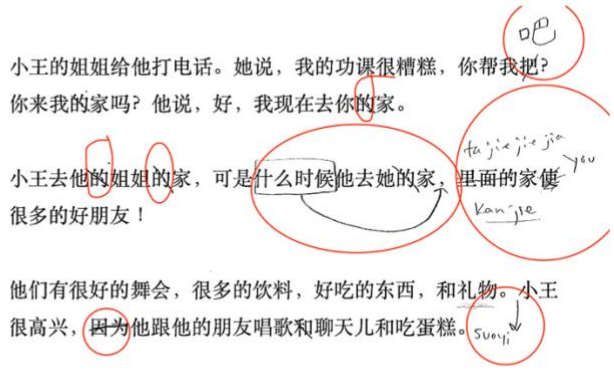
小王的姐姐给他打电话。她说，我的功课很糟糕，你帮我把？你来我的家吗？他说，好，我现在去你的家。

小王去他的姐姐的家，可是什么时候他去她的家，里面的家使很多的好朋友！

他们有很好的舞会，很多的饮料，好吃的东西，和礼物。小王很高兴，因为他跟他的朋友唱歌和聊天儿和吃蛋糕。

小王觉得这个生日舞会是最好的。

Post



English translation based on the revised draft.

Little Wang's older sister calls him. She says, "My homework is terrible. Can you help me? Can you come to my house?" He says, "Ok. I am going to your house now."
Little Wang goes to his sister's house, but when he arrives at her house, he sees many good friends. They have a great party. There is a lot of beverages, delicious food and gifts. Little Wang is very happy. He sings, chats and eats the cake with his friends.
Little Wang feels this birthday party is the best.

About the Author

Kaishan Kong, PhD, is Associate Professor of Chinese at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Her research interests include intercultural communicative competence, language acquisition and teacher education. She was recognized as both a Fulbright Scholar finalist (2020) and a Wisconsin Teaching Fellow (2015) for her teaching and research in peer interaction.

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