

Teacher Feedback, Learner Dialogue, and the Zone of Proximal Development

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Teacher Feedback, Learner Dialogue, and the Zone of Proximal Development¹⁾

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リキャストなど口頭訂正フィードバックの第二言語習得過程における役割や効果についての研究は、これまで、いわゆるインプット-インタラクション-アウトプットのモデルを用いて行われてきた。しかし、このモデルでは談話が一元的な発話の積み重ねとして捉えられるため、訂正フィードバックの機能や仕組みが曖昧である。本稿では、教師の口頭訂正フィードバックを含む談話を、社会文化的理論 (Sociocultural Theory) の視点で考察する。社会文化的理論では、談話には、時として問題解決を目的とした認知的活動の「場」、すなわち最近接発達領域 (ZPD) が生じるとされている。ZPD の枠組みを用いて分析すると、教師が与える訂正フィードバックは、学習者それぞれの能動的な学びを支える多層的な資源であることがわかる。

Key words

リキャスト (recasts), 訂正フィードバック (corrective feedback), 最近接発達領域 (ZPD)

1. Introduction

1.1. Corrective feedback in input-interaction-output studies

It is much agreed among second language (L2) researchers that corrective feedback provided to L2 learners during verbal interaction plays a role in L2 learning. The currently dominant view in L2 pedagogy is that form-focused instruction is facilitative in promoting L2 acquisition. Corrective feedback is an essential component of form-focused instruction. Thus, various studies have sought to identify the effectiveness of various types of corrective feedback. Among these types is recast, a reformulation of the learner's original, erroneous utterance provided immediately after the error is made. Recasts have been studied extensively so as to identify the most effective form of corrective feedback by comparing recasts against pre-emptive models (e.g., Ortega & Long, 1997; Ayoun, 2001) or other types (e.g., Carroll & Swain, 1993; Mackey & Philp, 1998; Lyster, 1998).

Previous studies into corrective feedback adapted the input-interaction-output model

(Block, 2003). This study investigates verbal discourse between an L2 instructor/native speaker (NS) and learners and carefully examines the dialogue surrounding the feedback. An erroneous utterance is noted as a trigger for NS corrective feedback; then, the corrective feedback is presumed to elicit a learner response modified toward a target form. As Long (1996) proposed in his interaction hypothesis, corrective feedback is presumed to mediate “selective attention and the learner’s developing L2 processing capacity” and contributes to the learner’s L2 inter-language development (p. 414).

However, studies on corrective feedback yield inconclusive results regarding its role and effect on L2 learning. The findings on recent meta-analyses of feedback studies (Mackey & Goo, 2007; Li, 2010; Lyster & Saito, 2010) suggest that corrective feedback is effective to some degree, but its effect is influenced by the target forms under investigation, learners’ proficiency levels, and/or the interaction context.

Although the input-interaction-output model (Block, 2003) is currently the dominant framework in feedback research, it is also worthwhile to examine feedback from the perspective of a different framework. Discourse between a NS teacher and L2 learners analyzed in the framework of sociocultural theory may show quite a different picture, because the theory defines language and discourse quite differently from the input-interaction-output model (Block, 2003).

1.2. Corrective feedback in sociocultural theory

Sociocultural theory, proposed by the Russian psychologist and educator Lev S. Vygotsky, defines language as a mediational tool for human cognitive activity. When humans think and regulate their own behavior, their cognitive activities are mediated by symbolic tools, one of which is language. Language can mediate one’s own cognitive activity as a form of private speech or others’ cognitive activity in the form of interactive dialogue. Verbal dialogues between two people are not mere exchanges of information; at times, they are the very process of cognitive activity evolving right in front of the hearer. Thus, human cognitive development, or learning, is mediated by language.

Cognitive development is an active process in which a novice learner gains independence in regulating her own actions; she acquires the ability to behave appropriately and internalizes proper procedures. When she increases her control of a task, she may be in the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD is defined as the “distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under [an expert’s] guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 89). Guidance from or collaboration with more

capable others involves language, and dialogue among learners potentially contains a ZPD. The question is whether a problem-solving activity that leads to a more “developed” solution (than it might have reached otherwise) may occur during such interactive dialogue. If it does, then the dialogue enacts a ZPD for learning (Swain et al., 2011). A ZPD emerges when a novice becomes actively involved in problem solving and utilizes capable others’ assistance. Interactive dialogue between a teacher and L2 learners may enact a ZPD. What researchers call “corrective feedback” is part of such interactive dialogue.

In this paper, three sets of group discourse are analyzed to determine whether a ZPD is enacted as learners and their teacher talk in class, and if so, what role the corrective feedback plays in the process of L2 learning.

2. Data for Analysis

The data in this study come from a larger study (Nabei, 2005) originally analyzed according to the input-interaction-output model (Block, 2003). The study was conducted in a theme-based English discussion class in a Japanese college that specializes in teaching English. An American NS teacher, Ms. Johnson (pseudonym), and eight students (out of twenty-eight) participated in the study. Ms. Johnson was an experienced teacher, having taught at the college for 10 years. The eight student participants were Aiko, Eiko, Fumiko, Hisako, Keiko, Shoko, Tokiko, and Yasuko (also pseudonyms). Although all the students were placed in this intermediate level course based on a placement test administered at the beginning of the school year, individual differences were observed. According to Ms. Johnson’s evaluation, Shoko and Keiko were stronger students in the class, and Tokiko was the weakest of the eight. Ms. Johnson adopted a group-work strategy in teaching and assigned tasks as group work (Teacher Recall session 1), and the students in her class were divided into groups of four during the semester.

The dataset comprises transcripts of classroom discourse, the teacher’s retrospective recall interviews, students’ retrospective recall interviews, students’ self-reports of own learning (Allwright, 1984; Slimani, 1987), and the researcher’s observation field notes. Ms. Johnson’s theme-based discussion class, which met twice a week during the 12-week semester, was observed six times. Each observed class was video- and audio-recorded, and the dialogues were immediately transcribed.

The classroom transcripts were originally analyzed for sequences of teacher-student feedback using the input-interaction-output model (Block, 2003). Feedback episodes were identified as the teacher’s recast of a learner’s erroneous utterance and the learner’s immediate reactions to

it.

After each videotaped lesson, the eight students were asked to self-report their learning. They completed a survey in which they were asked to list items such as grammatical features, words, and word usages that they had learned in the given lesson. The questionnaire was distributed at the end of the class, and the students spent approximately five minutes completing it each time.

The students met individually with the researcher for stimulated recall interviews (Gass & Mackey, 2000) within a week of each lesson. They watched the videotape of the lesson, including the feedback episodes identified beforehand, and commented on their thoughts and feelings during the class. The teacher's interview proceeded in a similar manner, except that she was interviewed twice (after each theme teaching). She also watched the video to recall her classroom activities so that her retrospective comments would be as accurate as possible.

3. Case Studies

This section analyzes three feedback episodes that occurred during small group interactions. For each case, the dialogue excerpt is presented along with a brief description of the context and its interpretation of the dialogue in the input-interaction-output model (Block, 2003). Then, the same dialogue is interpreted according to the ZPD framework.

3.1. Case 1

Case 1 occurred during an off-task group discussion. The episode, shown in Excerpt 1, begins with a student asking Ms. Johnson, who had just come to the table, whether she had heard of Uwa, a singer. Before the teacher approached the table, Tokiko and her group had been chatting in Japanese about famous figures on TV. Tokiko then mentioned that Uwa had been a student at her high school. When Ms. Johnson joined the discussion, Tokiko attempted to repeat this information to her in English.

Excerpt 1: Dialogue from Group 1A, Lesson 1, October 1. ²

- | | | |
|---------------|-------------|--|
| 1A-249 | Ss | Do you know Uwa? Singer. |
| 1A-250 | Ms. Johnson | No. |
| 1A-251 | Tokiko | Woman singer is my graduated school graduated. |
| 1A-252 | Ms. Johnson | Oh. She graduated FROM ... MY school |
| 1A-253 | Tokiko | my school |

- 1A-254** Ms. Johnson or high school or my junior high school. Oh, did you know her?
1A-255 Tokiko No.
1A-256 Ms. Johnson No. Just the same school.
1A-257 Tokiko Album. In the album.
1A-258 Ms. Johnson Oh, that's interesting.

In the input-interaction-output framework analysis, Tokiko's erroneous utterance (1A-251) was the trigger for the teacher recast "Oh. She graduated FROM ... MY school" (1A-252). Tokiko repeated the latter part of the recast, "my school" (1A-253). Then, the teacher added alternatives to the part of the recast that Tokiko had repeated, "or high school or my junior high school" (1A-254). The teacher's feedback in this episode is explicit, with phonological emphasis and alternative provisions, and Tokiko repeated part of the teacher recast. Thus, their brief exchange constitutes a typical language lesson sequence.

Analyzed according to sociocultural theory (SCT), this episode, along with the group members' stimulated recall comments, reveals that a ZPD emerged to resolve Tokiko's difficulty composing the sentence "She graduated from my school." Tokiko, who initiated the talk, realized that what she had said "did not sound right" (Tokiko's recall session 1) and turned to a possible resource (i.e., the teacher) to help her solve the problem. Tokiko gave the teacher "a quizzical look" (Teacher recall session 1), suggesting that she had encountered a problem. The other students also noticed Tokiko's confusion, and, having just heard her give the same information in Japanese, they knew what she intended to say. Yasuko thought what Tokiko said "was puzzling... 'Graduate' was confusing," and she felt that "it didn't sound right." Shoko's thinking went even further. Knowing the intended message, she asked herself the question Tokiko faced as shown by her words in Excerpt 2:

Excerpt 2: Shoko's recall session 1, October 5.

When I heard Tokiko, I thought it sounded wrong, but I didn't know how to express the idea better either. I was wondering "How to say this?"

Additionally, Ms. Johnson noticed Tokiko struggled with "easy stuff" or basic vocabulary and structures that she expected her students to know from their high school English lessons (Teacher recall session 1). Her conscious feeling that "This is the way to say it, Tokiko!" (Teacher's recall session 1) was expressed with phonological emphasis. Excerpt 3 is from Ms. Johnson's recall session for the lesson.

Excerpt 3: Teacher's recall session 1, November 2.

The vocabulary that I used to explain it, "She graduated from the same school" or "She graduated from my high school," was quite easy vocabulary ... vocabulary that [Tokiko] knew, and from now she should be able to use, at least she knows the wrong one.

Thus, the interlocutors actively committed to resolving the linguistic problem that Tokiko encountered. The teacher's feedback mediated Tokiko and the other students' problem solving and knowledge construction. As Excerpts 4 to 6 show, the students appreciated the teacher's feedback as the key to their problem solving.

Excerpt 4: Tokiko's recall session 1, October 5.

I had something I wanted to say, but I was not certain about grammar and was confused when I was telling the teacher. [The teacher said] "graduated." She rephrased [what I said]. At first, I was relieved that she understood what I wanted to say. Then [as I heard her rephrasing], I thought that was how to say it.

Excerpt 5: Shoko's recall session 1, October 5.

When I heard Tokiko, I thought it sounded wrong, but I didn't know how to express the idea better either. I was wondering "How to say this?" The teacher said a sentence, and I thought "That's the right expression."

Excerpt 6: Yasuko's recall session 1, October 5.

Teacher said "graduated," and Tokiko repeated it ... I remembered this because they repeated. It made the word impressive.

When Tokiko faced difficulty expressing her idea in English, a collaborative problem-solving activity emerged. The feedback from Ms. Johnson served as a resource for Tokiko to learn how she could better express her idea. Although silent, the other group members also recognized the issue at hand, and similarly appreciated Ms. Johnson's guidance. The dialogue developed into a language learning activity or ZPD, in which Ms. Johnson's feedback was a helpful resource provided by the capable other.

3.2. Case 2

Case 2 introduces two dialogue sets that took place during group discussions. The group was composed of Shoko, Aiko, Eiko, and Yasuko, and the discussion theme was environmental problems. In the first set, Shoko held the opinion that citizens are not environmentally conscious even though governments advocate environmentally conscious policies. As she tried to express this thought, she encountered the problem she describes in Excerpt 7.

Excerpt 7: Shoko's recall session 4, November 1.

I was wondering if "s" was necessary for "citizen" to indicate a group of citizens as a whole. I thought "citizen" can mean a group of citizens. I said [the possible auxiliary verbs for "citizen"] aloud.

The dialogue developed as follows in Excerpt 8:

Excerpt 8: Dialogue from Group 4A, Lesson 4, October 29.

- | | | |
|---------------|-------------|--|
| 4A-056 | Shoko | Government to do ... to citizen |
| 4A-057 | Aiko | Citizen |
| 4A-058 | Shoko | "It's important. It's important." But citizen doesn't ... know about it but ... don't do, doesn't, don't do. |
| 4A-059 | Ms. Johnson | doesn't. |
| 4A-060 | Ss | (laugh) |
| 4A-061 | Shoko | Thank you |
| 4A-062 | Ms. Johnson | Citizen doesn't. CitizenS don't. |
| 4A-063 | Shoko | ... Citizens don't. ... Because it's troublesome. |

According to the input-interaction-output model (Block, 2003), her incomplete utterance, including alternative repetitions of the phrases "citizen doesn't ... don't do, doesn't, don't do" (4A-058) was the trigger for the teacher feedback "doesn't" (4A-059). Two turns later, the teacher added an explicit correction; she contrasted the two verb forms, emphasizing the plural "s" in "citizens" (turn 4A-062), thereby making the sequence an explicit error correction episode. The sequence ended successfully with Shoko's uptake of the correct form, "citizens don't" (4A-063).

Viewed from the SCT perspective, this interaction can be interpreted as a collaborative activity to construct a well-formed sentence. Shoko wondered whether "citizen" could be used

as a collective noun meaning plural members of society (Shoko's recall session 4). Therefore, she debated whether the correct form of the auxiliary verb following "citizen" is "does" or "do," which was reflected in her self-directed private speech (Swain et al., 2010), "don't do, doesn't, don't do" (4A-058). Shoko's "Thank you" (4A-061) following Ms. Johnson's correction indicates that she acknowledged the teacher's assistance. After hearing the contrasted constructions "citizen doesn't, citizenS don't" (4A-062), Shoko chose to use the latter, plural form. Ms. Johnson's feedback was a useful resource for Shoko as Shoko describes in Excerpt 9.

Excerpt 9: Shoko's recall session 4, November 1.

The teacher walked by our table. Then the teacher heard what I was saying, and she said, "doesn't." [...] I thought, "Uh, I see." I always get confused about when to use "s" and when to use "don't" or "doesn't."

Meanwhile, the other group members shared an understanding of the linguistic problem Shoko faced. As the speaker, Shoko noticed the gap between what she wanted to say and her knowledge of English grammar, and her private speech made her group members aware of the problem. For instance, Yasuko recalled the following in Excerpt 10:

Excerpt 10: Yasuko's recall session 4, November 4.

[We were] confused about the plural form. [We were] not sure how to make a plural form out of a collective noun "citizen."

Because the students were aware of Shoko's problem and shared her confusion, they also perceived Ms. Johnson's feedback as useful. For example, when Yasuko noticed the teacher's feedback, she thought, "Oh, I see. It must be correct because the teacher says so" (Yasuko's recall session 4). Eiko and Aiko had similar reactions, as shown in Excerpts 11 and 12.

Excerpt 11: Eiko's recall session 4, November 1.

We learn third person singular in junior high school, so we think we are able to use [the rule] properly, but when we had the specific word, like "citizen," we were not sure. [...] We were all confused, and we almost gave up and let it go, but the teacher told us [the appropriate form] and we thought "uh-huh."

Excerpt 12: Aiko's recall session 4, November 1.

I didn't know the teacher was nearby. So I was surprised when she suddenly said "doesn't." [...] We were relieved because that was the correct answer for us.

The verbal exchanges between the students and Ms. Johnson were not a mere transmission of correct forms from a capable other to a learner; Ms. Johnson jumped in to mediate Shoko's problem solving. Although verbally inactive (i.e., no utterances were recorded), Yasuko, Aiko, and Eiko participated in the problem solving as well. Shoko's self-directed private repetition enacted a ZPD to identify the correct phrase "citizens don't."

Proper use of plural nouns then seemed to become the group's agenda for the day. Later, when the group collaboratively wrote answers to the discussion questions, they demonstrated their careful, conscious use of plural forms.

Excerpt 13: Dialogue from Group 4A, Lesson 4, October 29.

- | | | |
|--------|------------|--|
| 4A-112 | Shoko | all ... place ... has? |
| 4A-113 | Eiko | All place ha- |
| 4A-114 | Shoko | -ve? |
| 4A-115 | Yasuko | All places? |
| 4A-116 | Eiko/Shoko | All places? |
| 4A-117 | Yasuko | All places have ... all places have ... same problem ... |
| 4A-118 | Ss | XX |
| 4A-119 | Eiko | Same prob- |
| 4A-120 | Shoko | problemS |
| 4A-121 | Yasuko | and opinionS |
| 4A-122 | Shoko | and opinions ... it's troublesome! "What were the most common reason that people gave for not separating garbage?" |
| 4A-123 | Aiko | Troublesome |

In Excerpt 13, Shoko again indicated her concern about the accuracy of the form she was producing by using a rising intonation. This made other group members aware of the problem, and they collaboratively constructed a sentence whose verb form agreed with the plural noun. Although there were no "experts" such as Ms. Johnson to advise the group, their dialogue enacted a ZPD during which the learners proceeded toward appropriate use of the target language.

Emergence of a ZPD for learning appropriate use of plural nouns and verb agreement was observed twice in Case 2. The first ZPD emerged when Shoko noticed her own confusion over whether she could use “citizen” as collective noun and whether it required singular or plural agreement. Her private speech reflected the difficulty she was experiencing, thereby sharing the problem with the other interlocutors. The teacher’s feedback acted as a resource and that provided necessary information for Shoko to arrive at a correct phrase. Even after the immediate problem was solved, the students’ interest in mastering appropriate use of plural nouns with correct verb agreement continued: Forty-nine turns later, they enacted another ZPD, but this time, they solved the problem without Ms. Johnson’s assistance.

3.3. Case 3

Case 3 also introduces two episodes from the group activity in which the students were asked to create a list of ten responsibilities. This group task took place as part of the Human Rights Unit, which aimed to make students aware of the complementary relationship between rights and responsibilities. The task, however, was conceptually difficult for the students, and Ms. Johnson anticipated it would be problematic based on her past teaching experience. To assist her students in generating a list of responsibilities, Ms. Johnson adopted the technique of visiting each group, asking the students what rights they had, then presenting examples of responsibilities related to these rights (see Excerpt 14, Teacher recall session 1).

Excerpt 14: Teacher recall session 1, November 2.

In the previous year, the students had the same problem with this particular activity. [...] I’ve often found that students have had difficulty getting more than four or five responsibilities, but if they are asked, questions are given, and more examples, like “Do you have a right to vote? Don’t you also have the responsibility to vote?” then they said, you know, “Hey, maybe each one has a corresponding responsibility.”

The first episode of Case 3 took place when Ms. Johnson was facilitating a group discussion for Keiko, Fumiko, Eiko, and Aiko.

Excerpt 15: Dialogue from Group 2B, Lesson 2, October 8.

2B-128 Ms. Johnson So you have the responsibility to get the education. You have to study and you should be responsible. Ok? Uh, what other rights do you have? ... Do you have the freedom of religion?

Teacher Feedback, Learner Dialogue, and the Zone of Proximal Development (Nabei)

- 2B-129 Ss Yes.
- 2B-130 Ms. Johnson Yeah? What is the responsibility then?
- 2B-131 Ss *Ahww?*
- 2B-132** Keiko ... Not involve another people (laugh)
- 2B-133** Ms. Johnson Ok. So not try to force other people.
- 2B-134** Ss Mm, mm.
- 2B-135** Fumiko Uh, force
- 2B-136** Ms. Johnson Let them have their own religion. Ok. I think you can think of five more easily
- 2B-137 Keiko Ok. Thank you.
(Teacher leaves)

According to the input-interaction-output model (Block, 2003), in Excerpt 15, the trigger for the teacher's implicit recast was Keiko's incomplete erroneous utterance (2B-132) given in response to Ms. Johnson's earlier prompt (2B-130). Ms. Johnson replaced the inappropriate word in Keiko's utterance, "involve," with the more appropriate verb "force" in her recast (2B-133). Furthermore, she paraphrased the message again using a different verb, "let" (2b-136). After the first recast, Fumiko repeated the corrected verb (2B-135); however, Keiko, whose utterance had triggered the recast, seemed unaware of or uninterested in the correction (2B-137). Ms. Johnson's recast of Keiko's lexical error was unsuccessful at drawing her attention to the issue of her word choice.

From the perspective of the SCT framework, several cognitive activities took place during the episode. In response to Ms. Johnson's prompt, Keiko meant to say "Do not make other people get involved in a religion they don't believe in" (Keiko's recall session 2). Ms. Johnson, thinking that the use of "involve" in the given context was inappropriate (Teacher recall session 1), paraphrased Keiko's idea using the word "force" instead.

Excerpt 16: Teacher's recall session 1, November 2.

It's totally inappropriate in a way what she was trying to say. And the correct word, for her level was 'force,' and it's the word she's seen, I know, since Unit 1, because it's usually in Unit 1.

Ms. Johnson was, in part, motivated by a linguistic concern when she paraphrased Keiko's answer during the interaction. However, this concern was secondary to her content teaching

because, unlike her feedback in Cases 1 and 2, she did not place phonological emphasis on the utterance. Instead, she continued to emphasize the contrast between responsibilities and rights: “Let them have their own religion” (2b-136) because “you have freedom of religion” (2b-128). Thus, Ms. Johnson focused on content instruction.

On the other hand, some students in the group may have been more interested in language. When Ms. Johnson paraphrased “not try to force other people,” Eiko, Aiko, and Fumiko nodded (seen in the video); Fumiko even repeated the phrase (2B-135). They seemed to acknowledge that this expression was what Keiko had meant to say. For them, “force” was an important word, a solution to the difficulty of expressing a responsibility that corresponds to the right to freedom of religion. Later, the students focused again on this verb.

Immediately after the teacher left the group, the students started writing down the answer she had suggested. As they wrote, they encountered problems with the verbs “force” and “involve,” as transcribed in Excerpt 17.

Excerpt 17: Dialogue from Group 2B, Lesson 2, October 8.

- | | | |
|--------|--------|---|
| 2B-138 | Aiko | Not try to ... |
| 2B-139 | Keiko | Not try to ... force ... people ... |
| 2B-140 | Eiko | (yawn) Not to try to people ... <i>Kore, nani-wo-surutte-koto?</i> [= What are we supposed to do?] |
| 2B-141 | Fumiko | <i>Kyousei tte</i> “ought?” [= Is enforcement “ought?”] |
| 2B-142 | Keiko | “We ought not” |
| 2B-143 | Aiko | ought |
| 2B-144 | Eiko | “should” |
| 2B-145 | Eiko | <i>XX janai?</i> [= Isn’t it?] |
| 2B-146 | Fumiko | involve? |
| 2B-147 | Keiko | Involved <i>de iika</i> . [= “Involve” will do] Force people involve |
| 2B-148 | Aiko | ... Force people ... involve...? |
| 2B-149 | Keiko | religion |
| 2B-150 | Aiko | involve in religion? |
| 2B-151 | Keiko | into, involve into religion. <i>Akanno?</i> [= Is this wrong?] |
| 2B-152 | Aiko | into |
| 2B-153 | Fumiko | Force into? |
| 2B-154 | Keiko | <i>Nankasa</i> , [= Wasn’t it like ...] <i>kyousei tekini</i> [= forcefully] force <i>naninani</i> into <i>naninani chaun?</i> [= “force” so and so |

Teacher Feedback, Learner Dialogue, and the Zone of Proximal Development (Nabei)

- “into” so and so, was it?] To *iruyan*. [= Don’t we need “to” ?]
- 2B-155 S *I-hin* [= not necessary]
- 2B-156 Keiko *Dakara* ... [= so...]
- 2B-157 (disagreement/confusion)
- 2B-158 S Not force?
- 2B-159 Keiko Not ... No ... Not...
- 2B-160 Aiko Don’t? ...
- 2B-161 Keiko - force ... people ... to
- 2B-162 Eiko Not to force?
- 2B-163 Aiko Not to force. Not to forced to ...
- 2B-164 Fumiko XX ... not forced people to involve into religion.
- 2B-165 (Keiko flips pages of a book to find a section in which “force” is used.)
- 2B-166 Eiko But we understand is religion, ... *naiyo na*. [= content is...]
- 2B-167 Aiko *Un*. [= yeah]
- 2B-168 Keiko (reading out a sentence from the book) “forcing ... company to fire in” ... to XX. Not to force to involve people in religion. *Kore* [= this]
- 2B-169 Ms. Johnson (to class) OK. You’ve got 10 almost?
- 2B-170 Eiko Not yet.
- 2B-171 Ms. Johnson (to class) OK. Some groups don’t. Ok. Two more minutes only. Then, we are going to XX before we go on to the bottom part.
- 2B-172 Fumiko Not force ... to ...
- 2B-173 Keiko people, involve people in?
- 2B-174 Ss Mmm? Involve in? To *irun*? [= Do we need “to” ?]
- 2B-175 Aiko Involve?
- 2B-176 Keiko Involve people in, *jaa*. [= oh well] ...*Tekitou-de iinen*. [= It’s OK, don’t take it seriously.] Take it easy. Take it easy. ... Another...

The students attempted to compose a sentence like “Do not force other people to believe in your religion.” Their numerous repetitions (addressed either to themselves or the group) indicate that they struggled to do so. Moreover, the students perceived the same problems, as

was made evident by their post-lesson comments. In the stimulated recall session, Keiko commented, “We couldn’t write the sentence well. We rewrote the sentence many times” (Keiko’s recall session 2). Eiko recalled, “We were trying to say we shouldn’t force [religion]” (Eiko’s recall session 2). Aiko reported that “We were confused here how to put words in order, like involve and into or force and into” (Aiko’s recall session 2). Fumiko gave an extended description in her recall of the second problem, shown in Excerpt 18.

Excerpt 18: Fumiko’s recall session 2, October 12

How to use “force.” Grammar. We wondered what word comes after “force.” Like “force other people to” [...] Eiko said “not force to,” Keiko said something different; a different word came after “force,” and she asked Aiko which is better, then I thought the structure should be “force A to B”, but I was not sure what A and B were; I mean whether A should be a person or an object.

The students seemed receptive to learning how to use the verbs “force” and “involve” appropriately; yet, they were not successful at forming the ZPD. This failure may have been due to the teacher’s insufficient assistance; she did not give a metalinguistic explanation of when and how to use either verb. In addition, verbs such as these are conceptually more difficult to grasp than, for example, the grammatical rules for using plural nouns and verb agreement or verb phrases such as “graduate from.”

In fact, the words may have been too difficult for the students to learn on their own; their repetitions of “involve” and “force” with prepositions such as “into” and “to” and nouns such as “people” suggest that they had some relevant grammatical knowledge. Aiko’s “involve in religion?” (2B-150) suggests that she knew the preposition “in” was necessary after “involve.” She also suggested that “to” should come after the phrase “force people” (2B-163). Similarly, Fumiko was concerned about prepositions. She tried to see if “force” goes along with “into” (2B-153) and also came up with “force people to (infinitive)” (2B-164). Then, she proposed a better alternative, “not force (a noun) to (infinitive)” (2B-172), following Keiko’s suggestion “not to force involve people in religion” (2B-168).

Although Keiko sometimes referred to grammatical rules, her understanding of them was not solid, and her approach to language was not very analytical. She used both “to” and “into” in assertion that a preposition accompanies “force” (2B-154); she consulted a sample sentence in the textbook but not a dictionary. Instead of synthesizing and utilizing her peers’ fragmentary knowledge, she seemed to prefer to consult with texts alone (2B-168). In the end, Keiko gave

up solving the problem (2B-176). Meanwhile, each of the other group members had their own solution. Interestingly, the three students stated in their post-lesson self-report that they had learned about the word “force.” Aiko wrote “force – on –” and Eiko wrote “force (person) on.” Fumiko recorded “I didn’t know how to use *force A to B* so I looked it up in the dictionary.”

Emergence of a ZPD to acquire the appropriate use of “force” and “involve” did not occur in Case 3. This case is a rather frustrating example of an unsuccessful ZPD. Ms. Johnson mixed teaching goals when she used “force” in her conversation with the students: Their understanding of the relationship between rights and responsibilities was the primary goal, and learning the verb “force” was secondary. Since language teaching at that moment was not Ms. Johnson’s main aim, her feedback became only a provision of the desired form in the context. Although the students reacted to the verb “force,” the teacher did not foresee their needs in understanding its usage. In order for a ZPD to be successful, the needs of the novice must be met by appropriate assistance from the capable other (e.g., Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994).

The teacher feedback in Case 3 deserves special mention. Unlike the feedback in Case 1 or 2, the feedback in this case functioned to bring about an opportunity for a new level of understanding. Had it been too difficult a word, the students would not have noticed nor fixated on the verb “force.” As Ms. Johnson said, the students had almost reached a level of knowledge where they could properly use “force” (Excerpt 16). With a little more assistance and a concrete explanation of its usage, they could have learned how to use the word. Their frustration at not being able to master it was apparent in the discourse.

4. Discussion

Although verbal feedback is described as a valuable outer resource for L2 learning, analyses of feedback within the input-interaction-output model (Block, 2003) are too limited. Verbal feedback is not mere “input” to elicit desired “output,” the product of learning in the next turn. Rather, learning is a complex process that is influenced by outside surroundings; therefore, the sociocultural approach to language and discourse allows researchers to analyze the complex L2 learning process in relation to a social context. The case studies presented in this paper revealed that learner interactions with the teacher and other learners are dynamic, and within such discourses a ZPD, an active learning process, can emerge. What some researchers call “corrective feedback” may function as a helpful resource for L2 learning or serve to initiate a new level of learning.

Because the ZPD represents a brief moment in learning activity, it may either emerge within

an individual learner's speech or be shared by others in the discourse. When interlocutors share a ZPD, their understanding of it is often demonstrated in their dialogue. For example, Shoko and the other members of her group indicated their shared ZPD by phonologically emphasizing plural "s." Similar overt understanding of a shared ZPD among classroom participants was reported in Doughty and Varela's (1998) study. The teacher in their study used systematic corrective recasts to correct her students' use of tense, and the students imitated the corrective recast procedure among themselves. In other words, the students shared an understanding that correct tense marking was "the learning activity."

A ZPD can also fail to emerge. In a ZPD, both the novice and the capable other must contribute to learning. Shortages in the resource provided by the capable other can result in a lost learning opportunity, as seen in Case 3. On the other hand, learners' lack of commitment, interest in learning, or use of resources can also inhibit the emergence of a ZPD (van Lier, 2000).

5. Conclusion

In this paper, feedback episodes that emerged during small group discussions were re-analyzed using the concept of ZPD in the sociocultural theory of mind. While the input-interaction-output model (Block, 2003) dominates contemporary discussion of L2 acquisition mechanisms, different approaches to L2 learning and the findings of studies based on these approaches may deepen our understanding of the complex L2 learning process.

Appendix 1

Classroom Discourse Transcript Conventions

<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
S	unidentified student
Ss	unidentified students
words in capital letters	words pronounced with phonological emphasis
words in Italic	words in Japanese
[=]	English translation of Japanese expressions
?	rising intonation
...	pause
()	additional notes
XX	incomprehensible words/phrases

Interview Transcript Conventions

<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
[]	words/phrases supplied by the researcher for translation of the original Japanese comments into English
[...]	indication that some comments were snipped

notes

- 1) This research was supported by Kansai University's Overseas Research Program in the academic year of 2008.
- 2) Bold face turn numbers indicate the feedback episode. Refer to Appendix 1 for other transcript conventions.

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