Université de Sherbrooke

Les interventions verbales et leur effet sur l’accomplissement des taches dans les interactions de paires et de groupes dans des classes d’anglais langue seconde

Verbal interventions and their effect on task accomplishment in pair and group interactions in English as a second language classrooms

Par

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this case study is to understand how learners’ verbal interventions contribute to a better understanding and performance of oral linguistic tasks in an English as a second language classroom (ESL). Research has shown that learners spend time on task understanding before engaging in task completion. Moreover, it has revealed that learners use different interventions to perform the tasks. However, those studies have not shown what interventions learners use and how those interventions contribute to successful task comprehension and performance. The current study examined what learners do to better understand and accomplish oral tasks.

The interactions of 10 learners were recorded during oral task completion. The context was a natural one (ESL classroom). Elements of a microgenetic, moment-to-moment method of analysis, interactional analysis, conversation analysis, and language related episodes were used to examine how verbal interventions facilitate task understanding and completion. This method of data analysis is very widespread in second language acquisition research which is interested in interaction processes.

The results showed that learners use language (native and second) to better understand and accomplish oral tasks. The discussion revealed that learners use verbal interventions to reach a common understanding of tasks and teacher expectations. Moreover, the different turns allow the learners to co-construct knowledge about the tasks and about the second language (L2). The results also showed that learners use all tools to complete the tasks at hand successfully, including their mother tongue (L1), their peers, the teacher, dictionaries, etc.

Finally, a discussion of the results shows that understanding what happens during task completion may improve L2 teachers’ practices, such as helping them design better tasks. Moreover, the results of this study may benefit even the designers of L2 teaching materials and tasks.
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DEDICATION

For my wife Nacira

For my children Nassim and Lydia

In memory of my father.

For my mother.
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I would like to thank all those who have contributed to the realization of this thesis. My apologies if I have inadvertently omitted to mention anyone to whom acknowledgement is due.

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To my wife and children. My wife encouraged me to finish this work. I would not have carried out this thesis successfully if she did not support me during the hard times. Nacira, I love you! My children put joy into my heart whenever despair wants to shake my confidence in myself!

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To all my friends who have always stood by me. My special thanks to Hacene Amroun, Rachid Amokrane and Malik Sam!

Finally and most importantly, to my mother who deserves special thanks for her devotion and love. Her prayers for me have certainly contributed to the realization of this thesis! I am forever indebted to her!
Au début des années quatre-vingt, la recherche dans le domaine de l'acquisition des langues secondees (L2) a vu l'arrivée de trois hypothèses qui tentaient d'expliquer comment les humains apprennent une deuxième ou troisième langue. Les chercheurs se sont intéressé notamment à l'apport des interactions orales des apprenantes et apprenants (Long, 1981, 1983; Swain, 1985). Ces chercheurs et d'autres ont utilisé des taches linguistiques afin d'obtenir des données pour leurs études, ce qui a suscité un intérêt accru dans l'utilisation des taches linguistiques (task-based instruction) dans l'enseignement des L2 (Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

Krashen (1981, 1985) a avancé l'hypothèse qu'il suffit d'exposer une personne à une langue seconde pour qu'elle l'apprenne. Mais Long (1981, 1983) s'est opposé à cette hypothèse. Il a admis que l'exposition à la langue cible est important mais il a ajouté que l'exposition seule n'est pas suffisante pour l'acquisition d'une L2. Il a expliqué que ce qui aide les gens à apprendre une L2 est le fait d'interagir avec d'autres personnes qui ont la langue cible comme leur langue maternelle. Dans sa version révisée et améliorée de l'hypothèse de l'interaction, Long (1996) a expliqué que dans les interactions verbales avec des natifs d'une langue, les apprenantes et apprenants et leurs interlocuteurs parfois rencontrent des difficultés à mener à bien une conversation. Cela donne lieu à une négociation du sens, c'est-à-dire les interlocuteurs essaient de se comprendre. La négociation inclut des répétitions, des reformulations, l'utilisation de mots plus accessibles pour les apprenantes et apprenants. D'après Long, ce sont ces stratégies de négociation qui facilitent l'apprentissage d'une L2. Selon Schmidt (1990), les stratégies de négociation amènent des aspects et les structures de la langue cible à l'attention des apprenantes et apprenants et ça facilite leur l'apprentissage.


Toutes les études citées plus haut ont été conduites dans un cadre théorique psycholinguistique, cognitiviste. Or dès le début des années 1990, de plus en plus de chercheurs ont commencé à critiquer ce courant (Brooks et Donato, 1994; Firth et Wagner, 1997, 2007; Ohta, 2000). Ces chercheurs ont choisi un cadre socioculturel, dérivé de la pensé Vygotskienne. Ils croient que le cadre cognitiviste n'est pas en mesure de nous renseigner sur les processus de l'apprentissage des L2. Le courant psycholinguistique qui voit la langue comme des signaux que les apprenantes et apprenant déchiffrent encourage l'utilisation des méthodes de recherche expérimentales. Or les chercheurs qui utilisent le cadre Vygotskien disent que cette méthode de recherche peut seulement nous aider à comprendre les produits des interactions mais pas leurs
processus et leurs subtilités (Thorne, 2000). Ils croient que le cadre Vygotskien est plus adapté aux études qui cherchent à comprendre les processus de l’apprentissage des L2.

Plusieurs chercheurs se sont donc penchés sur des questions reliées aux processus qui entrent en jeu pendant les interactions des apprenantes et apprenants. Ils se sont intéressé notamment à la création des zones de développement proximale, l’assistance mutuelle entre apprenantes et apprenants pendant les interactions, l’utilisation de la langue (maternelle et L2) comme outil de médiation, etc. (Alegria de la Colina et Garcia Mayo, 2009; Brooks et Donato, 1994; DeGuerrero et Villamil, 2000; Foster et Ohta, 2005; Jenks, 2009; Storch, 2007).

La recension des écrits nous a permis de faire une idée sur ce qui a été fait pour comprendre l’apport des interventions verbales pour la compréhension et la résolution des tâches orales. Par exemple, Coughlan et Duff (1994) et Brooks et Donato (1994) ont examiné comment les apprenantes et apprenants essaient de comprendre les tâches linguistiques. Les résultats s’accordent sur le fait que les apprenantes et apprenants n’ont pas toujours la même compréhension des énoncés d’une tâche. Ils comprennent les tâches différemment parce qu’ils ont différents motifs et sont influencés par diverses expériences socioculturelles (Coughland et Duff, 1994).

Alegria de la Colina et Garcia Mayo (2009) pour leur part ont vérifié comment les apprenantes et apprenants utilisent leur langue maternelle pour résoudre les tâches linguistiques dans un cours de L2. Elles ont expliqué que la langue maternelle est utilisée notamment pour combler leurs lacunes dans la langue cible. Quand leurs connaissances en L2 ne leur permettent pas d’exprimer une idée, ils recourent à leur langue maternelle. Ils l’utilisent notamment pour organiser le travail et comprendre les énoncés des tâches avant de commencer à les résoudre.

D’autres chercheurs comme Brooks et Donato (1994), Foster et Ohta (2005), Pinter (200 et Storch (2007) ont trouvé que les apprenantes et apprenants utilisent la L2 comme un outil de médiation du système cognitif et comme un moyen de construire des connaissances sur la L2. Les résultats de ces études s’accordent sur le fait que les apprenantes et apprenants s’aident mutuellement pour surmonter les difficultés qu’ils rencontrent pendant la résolution des tâches linguistiques. Ils emploient diverses stratégies pour demander de l’aide, comme l’hésitation, les questions explicites, et la répétition (Foster et Ohta, 2005; Pinter, 2006, 2007; Storch, 2007). Une fois ils ont formulé leur besoin d’assistance, leur interlocuteur utilise des stratégies pour leur fournir l’aide. Par exemple, elle ou il utilise la gesticulation, la langue maternelle, la répétition, etc. Ces études ont aussi révélé une stratégie récurrente dans l’aide mutuelle, notamment l’échafaudage. D’après Brooks et Donato (1994), l’échafaudage c’est le fait de guider une apprenante ou apprenant étape par étape à comprendre quelque chose qu’elle ou il n’est pas capable de comprendre seul. Cette stratégie est importante puisqu’elle permet aux apprenantes et apprenants de créer des zones de développement proximales qui permettent à leur tour de progresser d’un niveau à un niveau supérieur de connaissance (Vygotsky, 1978).
Après la recension des écrits, nous avons constaté que peu a été fait pour comprendre comment les apprenantes et apprenants résolvent les taches linguistiques orales. Pourtant, la compréhension des stratégies qu’utilisent les apprenantes et apprenants pour résoudre ces taches pourraient contribuer à l’amélioration de l’enseignement des L2 (Brooks et Donato, 1994; Richards et Rodgers, 2001). Cela nous a donc amené à nous poser les deux questions de recherche suivantes:

1- Quelles interventions les apprenantes et apprenants utilisent-ils pendant la résolution des taches linguistiques orales?

2- Comment ces interventions aident-elles à mieux comprendre et résoudre les taches linguistiques orales?

Afin de répondre à ces questions, nous avons enregistré et analysé qualitativement les interactions verbales de 10 étudiants de l’anglais langue seconde à l’université de Sherbrooke. Les résultats de notre étude ont corroboré quelques uns des résultats trouvés par d’autres chercheurs. Par exemple, nous avons constaté que les apprenantes et apprenants utilisent soit la demande explicite d’assistance ou d’autres stratégies indirectes, telles que l’hésitation, la répétition et les pauses. Cependant, les résultats discutés dans le cadre de notre étude n’ont pas confirmé que les étudiantes et étudiants utilisent leur langue maternelle de façon excessive au début d’une tache linguistique. Au contraire, les résultats de notre analyse ont montré que les participantes et participants ne recourent que rarement à leur langue maternelle. Ceci est peut-être dû au fait qu’ils avaient une bonne maîtrise de la L2. La présence du chercheur pourrait également être la raison de l’utilisation de la L2 comme moyen principal de communication pendant la résolution des taches linguistiques. Par ailleurs, le fait que l’enseignante a insisté pour que les étudiantes et étudiants utilisent la L2 pourrait expliquer cette tendance à communiquer seulement en Anglais.


La discussion des résultats a enfin révélé que les apprenantes et apprenants se concentrent plus sur le sens de la langue que sur la forme. Malgré le fait que l’enseignante a insisté pour qu’ils utilisent des structures cibles, ils ne le font que temporairement. Dès que l’enseignante tourne le dos ils reprennent leur habitude de se concentrer sur le contenu des taches.
La discussion nous a permis d’identifier des façons dont notre étude pourrait contribuer à une meilleure utilisation des tâches linguistiques dans les classes de langue seconde. Par exemple, les enseignantes et enseignants peuvent tolérer l’utilisation de la langue maternelle dans un cours de L2 parce qu’elle permet aux apprenantes et apprenants de construire des connaissances sur la L2. Le fait que les apprenantes et apprenants utilisent tous les outils qui sont à leur disposition pour résoudre une tâche linguistique signifie que les enseignantes et enseignants doivent être disponibles pour répondre aux questions et fournir des clarifications quand cela est nécessaire. Finalement, les enseignantes et enseignants pourraient penser à des tâches linguistiques qui permettraient aux apprenantes et apprenants de pratiquer certaines structures indirectement, tout en étant concentrés sur le contenu. La tâche de révision d’un texte écrit telle qu’utilisée par Swain (2002) est un bon exemple de tâche linguistique qui aide à travailler des structures cibles tout en étant concentré sur le contenu.
INTRODUCTION

The topic of this research is the role of peer-peer verbal interventions in the understanding and accomplishment of oral tasks in English as a second language (ESL) classrooms at the university level. Following elements of analysis drawn from interactional analysis, conversation analysis and sociocultural microgenetic analysis, learners' interactions were analyzed in order to understand the role of verbal interventions in task comprehension and completion. According to Vygotskian theory, cognitive processes are rooted in social interactions. The choice of this theory as a basis to conduct this study is not the result of a coincidence. Rather, as I will explain in more detail later, it is believed to be more likely to reveal new insights about task resolution than other perspectives, such as the cognitive perspective.

The current study has been motivated by my personal experience as a practitioner. As a teacher of English as a foreign language in Algeria, I used to design activities that required learners to interact. I noticed at that time that the learners were more motivated by interactive activities than by individual work. The students often showed enthusiasm and willingness to engage in activities where they had to interact with other peers in order to exchange information, defend an opinion or simply give their point of view about an issue. Group work has long been used in second and foreign language classrooms (L2) since the appearance of communicative language teaching. Specialists attribute many advantages to pair and group work, one of which is that it fosters classroom interactions, a key element in L2 learning (Brown, 2007). From the feedback I received from my learners, the interactive activities were motivating because they provided them with opportunities to practise the target language in authentic situations. In most foreign language environments the classroom is the only place where learners are exposed to the target language, and it is through communicative activities that they are equipped for different social contexts. Littlewood (1981) says that the classroom itself is a social context where learners are apprentices. For example, learners who perform a role giving directions on a map to a peer practise, unconsciously, the necessary language that will help them perform a similar role in real life (Littlewood, 1981).
I used to design different activities where learners had to interact to perform a variety of tasks. For example, in one of those tasks I asked the students to pretend they were journalists and had them prepare a set of questions they would ask to a public person (president, political leader, singer, sports champion, etc.). After that, the students had to choose a classmate who would answer those questions. The chosen interviewee often had no idea about the role he had to play before he or she was asked to perform it, so the answers to the interviewer’s questions were spontaneous. Throughout the interview, the other students were encouraged to give their opinion or ask further questions. This type of activity generated heated discussions where the target language was used to defend opinions, ask questions, agree or disagree, and so on. Moreover, the use of current issues encouraged even the most reluctant students to take risks and speak their minds. For further details and more examples of activities I used with my students, I would refer the reader to two brief articles about this topic (Bedjou, 2002, 2006).

That experience as a practitioner stimulated me to study peer interactions in depth. In fact, because the activities described above increased my students’ motivation and generated rich conversations, they made me feel a need to further my knowledge about the accomplishment of interactive oral tasks in order to find out how those are performed and whether and how they contribute to L2 development. An opportunity was offered to me to satisfy that curiosity when I decided to undertake an MA in education. According to Shehadeh (1999), one of the goals of SLA research is to facilitate L2 teaching and make it more efficient. Understanding the various processes that are involved in interactions will certainly benefit L2 pedagogy. One of the ways in which this study will benefit L2 learning and teaching is that it will shed more light on how learners use verbal interventions to understand and accomplish oral tasks, which in turn may inspire curriculum and materials designers as well as the daily practices of teachers when designing such tasks. Brooks and Donato (1994) say that “enabling teachers to understand better the verbal performance of their students during communicative tasks (e.g., why they may use their native language during problem-solving tasks) can unfasten the constraint on language use in many second and foreign language classrooms” (p. 263).
The data for this study were collected from a classroom of English as a second language (ESL). Learners’ interactions while accomplishing oral tasks were audio-recorded once a week over a period of three weeks. The data thus collected were then coded and analyzed according to elements from three methods of data analysis, namely interactional, conversation and microgenetic analysis. I selected what Swain and Lapkin (1995, 1998) called language related episodes (LREs), episodes in which learners talk about the target language features, as well as the interventions where instances of co-construction, self and other corrections, repetition (Foster and Ohta, 2005; Mondada and Peparek Doehler, 2005; Ohta, 1995; Swain and Lapkin, 1998) are used by participants. These methods which focus on a detailed analysis of learner speech are all believed to be likely to reveal insights about the processes of learner interaction (Ellis, 2005; Grabois, 2003; Nunan, 1991).

One of the limitations of this study is that I had no control over the number of interactive activities that the teacher used. The result was that sometimes I attended lessons without having the opportunity to record. I attended a total of five lessons but I was only able to record during four of them. Moreover, the fact that I did not obtain sufficient information about the learners’ earlier background in English, their previous experiences may have affected the analysis of the data. Finally, I did not use all the rigorous guidelines of data transcription and coding that are associated with interactional, conversation, or microgenetic analysis, which would have added more precision to the data analysis.

In chapter one, the context of the study will be presented and the problem stated. In order to situate the context in which this study was carried out, a brief history of Long’s (1983, 1996) interaction hypothesis will be provided as well as the latest developments in this theory. That will lead to a review of the literature on the role of interactional interventions in task understanding and completion. Finally, the research objectives will be presented, followed by the research questions.

Chapter two will be devoted to the theoretical foundations underlying this study. It has been deemed relevant to explain the key aspects of sociocultural theory. Concepts
such as mediation and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) are essential for this study because they are the cornerstones of Vygotskian thinking. Furthermore, some concepts that will recur throughout this study will be presented and defined.

Chapter three will be devoted to the methodology that will be followed in order to carry out this research. First, the participants and the teacher will be described. After that, the data collection instruments will be explained. Finally, data coding and analysis procedures along with the ethical considerations underlying this research will be presented.

In chapter 4 I will present and analyze the results and findings that the data revealed. Excerpts will be analyzed qualitatively in order to show how verbal interventions helped the participants complete linguistic tasks.

In chapter 5 I will discuss the findings and explain how the various interventions contribute to task understanding and accomplishment. Moreover, I will show the limitations of this study. After that, I will explain the implications of the results to practitioners and materials designers before concluding with recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER ONE: STATING THE PROBLEM

1. Scientific context of the study

Since the appearance of the communicative language teaching method, specialists have been encouraging the use of games, role plays and other activities that favour communication (Savignon, 2005). Such activities engage learners in interactions that focus on meaning, offering the learners opportunities to receive comprehensible input and produce output in the target language, two factors that are believed to be conducive to second language acquisition (SLA) (Krashen, 1981, 1985; Long, 1983, 1996; Swain, 1985, 2005). As early as 1978, Hatch asserted that "language learning evolves out of learning how to carry on conversations, out of learning how to communicate" (p. 63). That proposal and the work of Hymes (1972) encouraged researchers to investigate learner interaction (Mackey, 2007). In the second half of the 1970s much research in the field of interaction was interested in learners' errors (Burt, 1975; Dulay and Burt, 1974; Kohn and Vajda, 1975, for example). Researchers attempted to show that errors are part of the normal process in L2 learning rather than being a result of the influence of the learners' native language, a view that was long held by the proponents of behaviourism (Lado, 1964).

The publication of Krashen's (1981, 1985) and Long's (1983) works about input and interaction triggered a formidable body of research about various aspects of learners' interactions. Much of the research on interaction in the 1980s was about the nature of input that was elicited from interaction between native speakers and non-native speaker learners (Gass and Varonis, 1985; Pica, Young, and Doughty, 1987; Varonis and Gass, 1985). Gass and Varonis (1985) and Varonis and Gass (1985), for example, found that even non-native speakers who interacted with other non-native speakers negotiated for meaning when communication problems occurred. Researchers also tried to understand the differences in the modifications that were made to the interactions when a communication breakdown occurred. Long (1996) offered an updated version of his interaction hypothesis where he explained in more detail the processes that are involved in meaning negotiation, such as rephrasing, repeating, and recasts. Drawing from Schmidt's (1990) noticing hypothesis, which is based on the contention that learners
process only those L2 structures that are brought to their awareness, Long (1996) argues that these processes facilitate L2 learning because they make input more comprehensible and also because they bring different forms and language features to the learners' conscious noticing.

In the 1990s researchers attempted to provide empirical evidence about the effect of interaction and input comprehension on L2 development (Ellis, Tanaka, and Yamasaki, 1994; Mackey, 1999). The findings of these studies indicate that interaction between native speakers and non-native speaker learners in order to complete learning tasks results in target language improvement. However, a word of caution is needed here because other researchers found partially contradicting results (Loschky, 1994). In more recent years, researchers have explored specific aspects of interactions and their relation with learning discreet L2 forms (Nassaji, 2007, 2009). The results of both of Nassaji’s studies provide empirical evidence that recasts, reformulations and elicitations benefit L2 repair. The feedback that was given to learners’ errors in the form of recasts, elicitations or reformulations resulted in correct use of the structures in the future. These results are in line with previous findings and further support the claim that interaction impacts L2 learning.

In addition to Krashen’s input hypothesis and Long’s interaction hypothesis, Swain (1985) suggested the output hypothesis according to which interactions facilitate L2 learning because they provide learners with opportunities to produce “pushed output” (p. 249). That is, while producing output in the target language, learners try to convey their messages “precisely, coherently, and appropriately” (Ibid., p. 249). In order to achieve that learners test hypotheses about the target language, try out different forms and structures and notice holes in their production compared to that of native speakers. More recently, Swain (1993, 2000, 2005) has included several of the principles of sociocultural theory to explain her output hypothesis. For example, Swain (2000) contends that learners do not only use language as input and output and suggests other terms such as “speaking, writing, utterances, verbalizing, and collaborative language” (p. 103).
Since the 1990s a growing number of researchers, especially those who work within a Vygotskian sociocultural perspective, shifted their interest to the processes through which interactions facilitate target language learning (Brooks and Donato, 1994; DeGuerrero and Villamil, 2000, DiCamillia and Anton, 1997; Donato, 1994; Foster and Ohta, 2005; Storch, 2007; Swain and Lapkin, 1998, 2002). Within the last two decades, these and many other researchers investigated many interaction processes, including how language plays a mediating role in L2 learning, how it is used to regulate learners' cognitive processes and thinking, how knowledge about the target language is co-constructed by peers, and how language contributes to task understanding and completion by learners (Alegria de la Colina and Garcia Mayo, 2009; Brooks and Donato, 1994; Brooks, Donato, and McGlone, 1997; DeGuerrero and Villamil, 2000; DiCamilla and Anton, 1997; Foster and Ohta, 2005; Jenks, 2009; Pinter, 2006, 2007; Storch, 2007).

Most of the studies that have been carried out since the early 1980s have used tasks to collect data; a fact that has caused task-based instruction to flourish and gain importance (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). However, although a formidable body of research has been devoted to interaction processes, a closer look at the literature showed that a relatively limited number of those studies dealt with the relation between verbal interventions and task understanding and accomplishment. I will show this with ample detail in the section devoted to the literature review. Furthermore, many of those studies examined specific features of interventions, such as the use of the native language or feedback. This discussion brings us to the research problem.

2. Stating the research problem

In the previous section I described the scientific context in which this study was conducted. I have briefly presented the main findings of interaction research over the last three decades. I have also explained that since the 1990s a growing number of researchers have been exploring interactions within a Vygotskian perspective. They asked different questions than those posed traditionally. Their work has been focused on the processes of interaction rather than its product. Their research has revealed that language, both first (L1) and L2, is used to construct knowledge about the target language, that language is
used as a mediation tool to regulate learners’ cognitive processes, and that learners use interactions to better understand and complete oral tasks.

However, that research has not provided a thorough understanding of how interventions facilitate task understanding and accomplishment (Jenks, 2009; Philp and Tognini, 2009). This may be the reason why there are repeated calls for additional research in this area (Algria de la Colina and Garcia Mayo, 2009; Jenks, 2009; Mackey, 2006, 2007; Philp and Tognini, 2009). Therefore, this study aims to examine how verbal interventions help learners to gain greater comprehension of tasks and how they facilitate task completion. By verbal interventions, I mean learners’ interactions, including very short turns, such as nodding, pausing or exclamation marks with a rising intonation.

3. Literature review

In this section I will present the findings of research about the role of verbal interactions in task understanding and completion. This section will be divided into two parts: Task understanding and task accomplishment.

3.1. Task understanding

Research has shown that learners spend a considerable amount of time trying to understand tasks before they actually begin to perform them. In order to understand a task learners who work in pairs or groups use metatalk (Brooks and Donato, 1994) or task-related talk (e.g., talk about task instructions, requirements, and goals). According to Coughlan and Duff (1994), learners who perform the same task do not do the same activities and do not have the same preoccupations. Discourse helps the learners to reach a common understanding and orient themselves to the task, it enables the learners to achieve intersubjectivity (Rommetveit, 1979), that is “a shared social reality and joint perspective on the task” (Brooks and Donato, 1994, p. 266). Brooks, Donato, and McGlone (1997) give the following example from their data about metatalk and how it is used by learners:
"I don’t know if I’m right," “Uh oh, this is really strange," “Es un poco difícil” (“It’s a little hard”), “¿Tú quieres mi hablar mi hablo en español y tú oye oír” (“You want me to speak and you listen?”) (p. 529).

The authors say that learners “feel compelled to speak about what they were supposed to do, or the procedures for completing the task” (p. 529). This need to talk about task resolution procedures is believed to help the learners reconstruct the task in order to take possession of it (Mondada and Peparek Doehler, 2005). This is important because, in these authors’ view, it facilitates task completion later on.

One way of achieving joint understanding of tasks is the use of the learners’ native language (L1). Alegria de la Colina and Garcia Mayo (2009) found that L1 plays an important role in task understanding. When they engage in talk about the task, or metatalk, learners use L1 for “planning, organizing, and monitoring the activity, setting goals and checking comprehension” (p. 330). The authors explain the use of L1 by the limitedness of the learners’ L2 knowledge. I would add here that the use of L1 could also be explained by the desire of the learners to reach a safe understanding. That is, when speaking in their native language to explain the task and reconstruct it, they are sure there is no language barrier and that what they believe the task is about is shared by all pair or group members. This study corroborates the findings of previous research that L1 plays a mediating role that leads the learners to restructure tasks (Brooks and Donato, 1994; Brooks, Donato, and McGlone, 1997; Kobayashi, 2003).

Task restructuring, according to researchers, involves different processes. In addition to the ones mentioned above—planning, organization, setting goals, and checking comprehension (Alegria de la Colina and Garcia Mayo, 2009), some researchers found that one of the first steps that learners take when required to accomplish a task is redefining the task (Ohta, 1995). For example, learners reread the instructions, analyze the language used to state them, and paraphrase the task (Brooks and Donato, 1994; Kobayashi, 2003; Myers, 2000). This enables the learners to restructure the task and gain control of it (Mondada and Peparek Doehler, 2005). By redefining them, learners make new versions of the tasks, versions they are familiar with.
Setting goals is another element that seems to be recurrent at the stage of task understanding. When they are assigned a task, learners first make sure they know what is expected from them. Learners overtly ask each other about what the teacher expects from them and set goals (Alegria de la Colina and Garcia Mayo, 2009; Brooks and Donato, 1994; DeGuerrero and Villamil, 2000; Kobayashi, 2003). This excerpt from Kobayashi (2003) gives an idea about how learners set goals: "Kiku: Purezen- mo nani wo mananda ka yan na The presentation is supposed to be about what we learned, right?...Shun: Un Yeah" (p. 347).

Interestingly, most of the interventions at this stage were in the learners’ L1. The learners read parts of the instructions and ask each other what they meant. Repetition and comprehension checks are frequent particularly when setting goals (DiCamilla and Anton, 1997; Kobayashi, 2003). L2 learners use repetitions for several purposes. They repeat their own utterances and those of their peers and teachers to check comprehension (DiCamilla and Anton, 1997; Hellermann, 2007). They repeat an utterance to check whether someone from the group will correct or contradict them. DiCamilla and Anton (1997) say that repetition serves to establish intersubjectivity.

Finally, after restructuring and redefining the task, learners engage in setting goals as to how to proceed with task accomplishment. Here again research shows that learners talk explicitly about the task. At this stage they also share roles and decide who will do the different parts of a task and set a timeframe (Kobayashi, 2003). What emerges at this point in the learners’ interactions is that they draw from their personal experiences (Kobayashi, 2003; Mondada and Peparek Doehler, 2005). Learners share their ways of performing tasks and their way of organizing work, even social work outside the classroom. This organizational talk is relevant to task completion because it allows each learner to know exactly what to do, and each member of the pair or group benefits from the experiences of others regarding how to accomplish his or her part of the task.

I would conclude this subsection by pointing out that metatalk and all the interactions that occur at the beginning of task performance facilitate successful task accomplishment (Brooks and Donato, 1994; Ohta, 1995). Understanding the tasks makes
their completion easier because learners become familiar with the task and know exactly what is expected from them (Brooks et al., 1997). Another aspect that emerges from the literature is that language plays an important mediating role at the beginning of work on language tasks. Used in the form of repetition, co-construction, L1 or L2, language constitutes a key tool that facilitates task understanding.

3.2. Task accomplishment

A significant amount of research has been conducted about the moment-to-moment performance of language tasks. In this subsection I will review the most pertinent of those studies and attempt to show how verbal interventions affect task completion by L2 learners.

One common aspect that has been noticed in all the reviewed literature is that the main concern of learners while performing tasks is to communicate, to express meaning. They participate in those tasks just like they take part in other activities in their daily lives. Even in grammar-based tasks learners do not only talk about grammar (Mondada and Peparek Doehler, 2005). In fact, there is no clear-cut boundary that shows when learners are talking about form or about meaning (Aline and Hosoda, 2009). They solve language problems the same way as they resolve real life difficulties. Foster and Ohta (2005) say that “the interactive task is revealed here as a social event to which learners bring their instinct to be co-operative and helpful, and to express a natural human interest in what their interlocutor is saying” (p. 425). This is very important because it expresses the gist of sociocultural theory. As we have seen in the first subsection, throughout this second part we will see learners acting like social beings, communicating first of all to reach common understanding.

Verbal interventions are a mediation tool used to achieve different functions (Brooks and Donato, 1994; Swain, 2000). The notion that speech mediates people’s thinking and regulates their mental processes is also a crucial aspect of Vygotskian theory. Ohta (2000) and Swain, Brooks and Tocalli-Beller (2002) have shown how language is used by L2 learners to construct knowledge about the target language. When
asked to accomplish a task, learners use the main tool of thinking, language (Vygotsky, 1960), in order to perform the task. As stated in the previous subsection, before they go into the details of performing a task, learners first assure that they have a common understanding of the instructions and the expectations of the teacher from them. Learners spend a lot of time talking about the task (using language) and trying to establish intersubjectivity. Once this is achieved, they engage safely in task performance. As the Algerian saying goes, understanding a question is half of the answer. Throughout the task, learners assist each other through interaction.

Research has examined peers assisting each other to complete language tasks for several decades, even though the name given to that work was different from one trend to another. From a psycholinguistic perspective, Long (1983, 1996) called negotiation for meaning the conversations native speakers engage in with non-native speakers to reach mutual understanding when misunderstanding arises. Peer assistance is very important for researchers working from a sociocultural perspective as well because it shows how language mediates learning. As we will see shortly, assistance can take the form of other-correction, co-construction or recast. The need for assistance is sometimes expressed overtly, learners explicitly asking for help (Foster and Ohta, 2005; Pinter, 2007) or implicitly, through hesitation (Jenks, 2009; Storch, 2007). According to these studies, whether expressed overtly or shown through uncertainty, learners provide each other with help and jointly find solutions to the problems facing them. Pinter (2007) reports that learners help one another not only with grammar problems, but even with lexical difficulties.

Foster and Ohta (2005) reported four types of verbal interventions used by participants in their study: co-construction, self-correction, other-correction, and continuers. They examined interaction from both a cognitive and a sociocultural view. They analyzed the data quantitatively to find out how many communication breakdowns occurred during the interaction. They found only a small number of instances where the flow of conversation was interrupted because of misunderstanding between the learners. However, a qualitative analysis of the data revealed that the four types of interventions and others were used even in the absence of communication breakdowns.
Foster and Ohta (2005) define co-construction as the joint construction of an utterance by two or more learners. They believe that learners co-construct utterances that they cannot produce individually, because of their limited L2 skills. This excerpt from Foster and Ohta (2005, p. 420) shows how learners co-construct an utterance:

1  G: Watashi no uchi: no uh chikaku de (.) uhh booringu:
   Near my house, bowling:
2  Sr: o shimasu?
   Do?
   (the verb ‘to bowl’ is ‘booringu o shimasu’)
3  G: Hai.
   Yes.

In my view, this is not the only reason. Even native speakers do sometimes co-construct utterances, not because they do not have command of their L1, but because sometimes a speaker does not find the word that best expresses his or her idea or because he or she is overwhelmed by the subject of the conversation. Co-construction of knowledge about the target language has been instantiated by several researchers (Foster and Ohta, 2005; Hellermann, 2007; Jenks, 2009; Mondada and Peparek Doehler, 2005; Storch, 2007; Swain and Lapkin, 1998). According to Storch (2007), co-construction, among other features of interaction, helps L2 development. However, no study attempted to show the relation between co-construction of knowledge and successful completion of tasks. I would suggest that co-construction does facilitate task accomplishment. Foster and Ohta (2005) provide examples where learners appropriate jointly constructed information and use it later on in task performance. This suggests that the knowledge built together helped the learners to better accomplish the task. As Jenks puts it, it is verbal interaction that “move the task forward” (2009, p. 188).

Self-repair and other-corrections are also recurrent in the literature. Self-repair is when a learner provides a self-initiated correction to an error he or she has just committed, whereas other-correction involves another learner correcting the utterance of a speaker (Foster and Ohta, 2005). While completing language tasks, learners pay attention to meaning and to form (Aline and Hosoda, 2009). When they perform tasks, learners pay attention to the way information is expressed, that is to the structures of
language. When they realize a mistake in their speech, some learners repeat their utterance using the correct structure. However, self-repair does not always result in correct utterances. Sometimes learners are not sure about their utterances, they self-correct them but, after a moment of hesitation, they make a wrong choice (Foster and Ohta, 2005; Swain and Lapkin, 1998). This could be explained by Krashen's monitor hypothesis. According to Krashen (1985), one of the conditions of using the monitor correctly is that the learner has to know the rule. The reluctance reported above may be attributed to the ignorance of the right form or word by those learners.

Sometimes when a learner does not correct his or her own mistakes, their peers do. While Swain and Lapkin (1998) and Pinter (2007) showed instances of other-correction concerning grammar and vocabulary choices, Mondada and Peparek Doehler (2005) found that other-correction involves other features of speech, such as pronunciation. Other-correction is done either by supplying the correct form or word overtly or implicitly, using recasts, reformulations, or rewording. This is one of the interventions used in negotiation for meaning when communication breakdowns occur and it is believed to be conducive to L2 learning (Long, 1996).

However, Foster and Ohta (2005) found that learners use other-correction and other types of assistance even in the absence of communication breakdowns. In their view, assistance is just a natural aspect of peer interaction. Learners help each other not because they are worried that communication might break down, but because they are social beings who have the tendency to share work and to create relations. Pinter (2007) gives an example of a learner providing his interlocutor with appropriate vocabulary even if no communication breakdown was signaled. After the speaker used L1 for the word kitchen, the interlocutor told him the English equivalent for that word. In this instance there is no worry about communication breakdown because both learners have the same native language. Other-correction here is rather akin to peer assistance, where the learner who knows something instinctively shares it with his peer.

Continuers are used by learners to encourage each other to carry on a conversation. Foster and Ohta (2005) found that learners used continuers in the form of
questions in order to elicit additional information about each other’s experiences. By using a continuer, they indirectly ask the speaker to elaborate on something he or she just said. The following example was provided by Foster and Ohta (2005, p. 221) to show how a continuer helps learners to elaborate about a point in the task: “2 M1 I wasn’t so fat before I came to England. V2 fat? M3 yeah, but now I eat a lot of bread”. Pinter (2007), however, reports the use of continuers by one of the participants in her study for a completely different purpose. In the above cited example, the learner who supplied the English word for kitchen used a soft voice and added “it doesn’t matter” (p. 195) in order not to dwell longer on that correction. By minimizing the effect of the correction he wanted his interlocutor to keep focused on task performance (spotting differences between two pictures).

Finally, another major finding that emerged from this review is the use of scaffolding. The findings of several studies indicate that peers use scaffolding to build new knowledge about the target language (DeGuerrero and Villamil, 2000; Foster and Ohta, 2005; Pinter, 2006; Storch, 2007). Using various verbal interventions, a learner who knows a language item or structure scaffolds his peers to understand it. In these studies we do not find more capable learners scaffolding novices, but we find pairs and groups of students working together, contributing to solve problems. This confirms Donato’s (1994) claim that scaffolding is used even by learners of the same level of competence in the target language.

Several interventions are involved in scaffolding, e.g., repetition, code-switching (intermittent use of L1 and L2), co-construction and feedback (self and other-corrections). Storch (2007) explains that when asked to work together on a task, learners “engage in deliberations about language form involving questions and requests for confirmation, offering explanations, confirming and repeating each other’s suggestion” (p. 149). These interactional moves constitute scaffolding (DeGuerrero and Villamil, 2000; Foster and Ohta, 2005; Philp and Tognini, 2009) and are not only used when working on language form but also about meaning. As we have seen from the onset, learners use L1 and repetition at the early stages of task performance. They are used to understand tasks and to achieve intersubjectivity (Alegria de la Colina and Garcia Mayo,
2009; DiCamilla and Anton, 1997). Other researchers have shown that scaffolding is also used at different stages of task completion (DeGuerrero and Villamil, 2000). DeGuerrero and Villamil (2000) provide a large number of examples of scaffolding but unfortunately those are too large to include in this literature review. The reader could refer to pages 58, 59 or 60 for such examples. Scaffolding enables learners to complete tasks in that they solve the problems in those tasks jointly, constantly helping each other to build new knowledge and move forward.

Scaffolding leads us to the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). The existence of scaffolding between peers is believed to activate the learners’ ZPDs (DeGuerrero and Villamil, 2000; Foster and Ohta, 2005). By helping each other, learners find solutions to problems they may not be able to solve individually. This, according to Vygotsky (1978), helps learners move forward in their learning. In Foster and Ohta (2005), Pinter (2007) and Jenks (2009), there are examples of learners progressively leading their peers to understand concepts or find differences between two pictures or explain new words. All these are believed to activate learners’ ZPD (DeGuerrero and Villamil, 2000; Foster and Ohta, 2005).

In this subsection I reviewed some studies about task understanding and resolution in order to identify what has been done and what is still to be done in the field of interactions in general and that of task performance in particular. This review has allowed me to identify and understand the most important findings of other researchers about task understanding and accomplishment. Moreover, it has allowed me to realize that the subject has not been explored in an exhaustive way.

4. Research objectives

I have shown in the preceding sections that little has been done to show the relation between verbal interventions of learners and task understanding and completion. The main objective of this study is to identify verbal interventions (repetition, co-construction, repetition, etc.) used by learners in a classroom context to complete oral
tasks, and then to explain how those interventions facilitate successful task comprehension and accomplishment.

5. Research questions

This study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1- What verbal interventions do learners use when they interact to complete L2 tasks?

2- How do those interventions contribute to successful L2 task understanding and completion?
CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS

In this chapter the theoretical basis of the study will be provided. First, the most relevant aspects of Vygotskian sociocultural theory will be defined. Such concepts as activity theory, mediation and zone of proximal development (ZPD) are at the heart of Vygotskian theory and therefore, they are particularly relevant. After that, other key concepts will be defined and explained. These are relevant because they will appear at different stages of this research.

Most of the studies about interaction in the 1980s and after were carried out within a psycholinguistic, cognitive perspective. However, since the early 1990s this perspective has been criticized by many researchers who work within a Vygotskian, sociocultural perspective (Brooks and Donato, 1994; Firth and Wagner, 1997; Ohta, 2005; Zuengler and Miller, 2006). These and other researchers have disagreed with several aspects of the cognitive orientation in SLA research. Firth and Wagner (1997) believe that the psycholinguistic framework puts too much emphasis on language as input. This view presupposes that L2 learners develop their knowledge in the target language by encoding and decoding linguistic messages that are exchanged through input. Cognitive researchers also hold that L2 learning is a matter of the brain. Learners interact with each other and process the input they receive from the more advanced learners or teachers. This explains the tremendous number of studies about such aspects of L2 learning as focus on form and feedback.

In fact, as we will see in the last chapters of this study, some views about focus on form need to be corrected. The results of the current study show that there is no need to force learners to pay attention to specific structures during oral tasks. In most cases, the learners focus on both content and form simultaneously, without any clear-cut limit when they concentrate on one or the other. This is in line with the findings of Aline and Hosoda (2009). This suggests that correcting learners’ errors and urging them to use specific structures is not beneficial for learners.

However, in Firth and Wagner’s (1997) view, this perspective does not take into consideration the social aspect of L2 learning. Brooks and Donato (1994) and Donato
(2000) believe that L2 learning involves more than input processing and encoding and decoding linguistic messages. They argue that L2 learning is affected by other factors such as learners’ sociocultural background, their goals, etc. Those factors are crucial according to Vygotskian theory because they shape and guide learning. This entails that learning a second language is mediated by the learning environment, learners’ motivation, and many other factors that learners bring to the class.

Another argument that is stated by the opponents of the cognitive perspective is the methodological designs it proposes. Researchers who take a psycholinguistic theoretical orientation favour experimental designs in decontextualized, controlled environments (Thorne, 2000). These type of studies are carried out in laboratory settings and employ a pre-test, treatment, post-test design to collect data. After that, they compare the L2 developments or some aspect of L2 made by a group that took the treatment and a comparison group that did not take any treatment. However, this design cannot reveal information on the processes of learning (Mackey, 2006; Ohta, 2000; Thorne, 2000). More and more researchers agree that only qualitative research methods of data collection and analysis which explore L2 processes in natural settings such as real classrooms are likely to inform us about the subtleties involved in L2 learning (Firth and Wagner, 2007; Ohta, 2000; Spada, 2005; Thorne, 2000).

This is one of the reasons why I have chosen a sociocultural theoretical perspective for the current study. I believe that the data will be richer and more natural if collected in a real classroom than if they were collected in a laboratory setting because they will include all the sociocultural and environmental aspects of interaction. These are important if we want to gain a thorough understanding of L2 learning processes, such as understanding how learners resolve interactive linguistic tasks. The social context cannot be dissociated from L2 learning because without interaction with others and with their environment, humans cannot learn a language, be it first or second (Lightbown and Spada, 2006).

Mackey (2006) calls for more studies that take the social and cultural factors of learners into account because they may shed more light on L2 learning processes. In
order to understand how verbal interventions shape task completion, I think that a sociocultural theoretical framework is the most suitable because it offers opportunities to collect and analyze data in such a way as to gain a better understanding of the process under study. This perspective will serve as a basis to examine how moment-to-moment interventions lead L2 learners to better understand and accomplish language tasks. Vygotskian theory is based on several principles but I will limit the current discussion to mediation, activity theory and the ZPD, which I believe are the most relevant to this research.

1. **Sociocultural theory**

Sociocultural theory is based on the belief that all learning originates from social interactions. Swain (2000) says: “From a sociocultural theory of mind perspective, internal mental activity has its origins in external dialogic activity” (p.113). In other words, knowledge is constructed when people interact with other people and with their environment. Sociocultural theory holds that the sociocultural environment in which humans evolve shapes their mental system (Vygotsky, 1978). Humans create social and cultural symbols that they transmit from one generation to the next, each generation imbuing those symbols with its own specific aspects (Lantolf, 2006). Vygotsky (1978) contends that humans are biologically endowed with a thinking mechanism; in addition, he believes that the social and cultural milieu exerts a great influence on humans’ mental development. In order to understand how higher mental processes develop, Vygotsky suggested using the microgenetic method in research; that is, analysis of the moment-to-moment evolution of the phenomena under investigation (Werstch, 1985).

Researchers who work within a sociocultural theory believe that this perspective is more likely to inform us about the processes that lead to L2 learning than the traditional, psycholinguistic perspective. Because, unlike the latter, sociocultural theory holds that language learners are participants in social activities, rather than encoders and decoders of linguistic messages (input and output). By adopting a Vygotskian perspective, these researchers hope to better understand the role of speaking as a cognitive activity. They “contend that what is gained by reappraising the encoding
approach is a more refined psycholinguistic understanding of what learners are trying to achieve during verbal interaction” (Brooks and Donato, 1994, p. 263).

1.1. Activity theory

According to Lantolf (2005, p. 345), activity theory “holds that all higher forms of human activity arise as a direct consequence of their motives and goals.” This means that humans do different activities in life the way they do them because of the motives and goals that are behind those activities. This in turns suggests that learners in a L2 classroom may complete the same task in different ways because their motives and goals are different (Coughlan and Duff, 1994). Moreover, according to the activity theory, task resolution is unpredictable because “what begins as one activity can reshape itself into another activity in the course of its unfolding” (Lantolf, 2000, p. 11).

This was confirmed by Coughlan and Duff (1994) who found that learners react to linguistic tasks differently. The results of their study show that learners do not understand and approach tasks in the same way. This indicates that task resolution is not linear and that it is shaped and guided by learners’ motives and by the environment (Ohta, 2000). Activity theory is crucial to the analysis of the data of the current study because it will allow me to understand how motives affect task understanding and performance.

1.2. Mediation

According to Vygotsky, “all the higher psychic functions are mediated processes, and signs are the basic means used to master and direct them” (1960, p. 56). Language is one of the most important signs used by humans to develop intellectually. “The child’s intellectual growth is contingent on his mastering the social means of thought, that is, language” (Vygotsky, 1960, p. 51). In other words, people use language to mediate their thinking. When learning a second language, learners use different types of mediation. As Donato and McCormick put it, in an L2 classroom: “this mediation can take the form of the textbook, visual material, classroom discourse patterns, opportunities for second language interaction, types of direct instruction, or various kinds of teacher assistance” (1994, p. 456).
Mediation is essential for understanding how verbal interventions affect task comprehension and completion because Vygotskian theory holds that task accomplishment is mediated by speech. Vygotsky contends that “children solve practical tasks with the help of their speech” (1978, p. 26). However, as the literature review for this study has revealed, this tendency to use discourse to solve tasks is neither exclusive to children nor limited to practical tasks. Speech has been found to mediate even solving cognitive tasks, such as the ones performed by adult learners in ESL classrooms.

1.3. The zone of proximal development

According to Vygotsky (1978), the (ZPD) is the symbolic area where knowledge which is beyond the current level of the learner is constructed as a result of interaction between the learner and a more expert adult or peer. That knowledge undergoes different transformations until it is appropriated by the learner. Vygotsky explained that the ZPD helps a child to move from an initial to a higher intellectual stage. That is, “what a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow” (1978, p.87) because she or he will appropriate what she did with the help of another person and become able to accomplish it on her or his own. In Vygotsky’s view, ZPD is particularly important in the case of academic instruction. Children learn complex subjects that they would not learn if they did not go to school. The teachers, peers, textbooks and books mediate a learner’s development and allow her or him to go beyond her or his current mental capacities.

However, in L2 learning researchers (Donato, 1994; Lantolf and Pavlenko, 1994; Nassaji and Swain, 2000; Ohta, 2000) have extended the notion of interaction between an expert and a novice to include interaction between novice learners. Lantolf and Pavlenko (1995) say:

“The construction of a ZPD does not require the presence of expertise. Individuals, none of whom qualifies as an expert, can often come together in a collaborative posture and jointly construct a ZPD in which each person contributes something to, and takes something away from, the interaction” (p.116).

Donato (1994) and Nassaji and Swain (2000) conducted experiments that support the idea that novice learners co-construct knowledge and provide assistance to each other in a
similar way that an expert (parent or teacher) provides help to a novice. DeGuerrero and Villamil (2000) and Foster and Ohta (2005) explain that when learners engage in interaction to complete language tasks, they activate each other’s ZPD. This is due to the fact that learners of approximately the same level do not necessarily know exactly the same L2 vocabulary and structures. As a result, when they interact to complete tasks they lead one another to understand what their peers do not know in order to make task accomplishment easier. Those different interventions are thought by the above cited researchers to activate learners’ ZPD and facilitate L2 development.

2. Definition of other key concepts

In this subsection, some words that are deemed relevant for this study are defined. They are important because they will recur at different stages of this research.

2.1. Negotiating of meaning

Negotiation for meaning is a negotiated modification of the interactional discourse between a non-native speaker of a language and a native speaker of that language or a more capable learner (Loschky, 1994). It occurs when the native speaker or more advanced learner fails to understand the learner. That misunderstanding is called communication breakdown (Mackey, 1999). For Long (1996) “negotiation for meaning by definition involves denser than usual frequencies of semantically contingent speech of various kinds (i.e., utterances by a competent speaker, such as repetitions, extensions, reformulations, rephrasing, expansions and recasts), which immediately follow learner utterances” (p. 452). Here is an example illustrating negotiation of meaning according to Long: “NS: What’s the boy’s name? NNS: Uh? NS: The boy, what’s his name?” (Long, 1983, p. 127). Long believes that meaning negotiation is conducive to L2 learning because it makes L2 input simpler and thus more comprehensible to the learner. Moreover, the interactional modifications are thought to bring target forms to the learner’s selective attention, a condition that facilitates L2 processing (Schmidt, 1990).
2.2. Metatalk

Metatalk is speech about the task at hand. When asked to complete a linguistic task, learners spend a considerable amount of time talking about the task, before actually beginning to perform the task. Metatalk helps the learners to achieve a common understanding of the task or intersubjectivity (Brooks and Donato, 1994; Myers, 2000). They talk about the task in order to make sure all group members share the same comprehension of the instructions and teacher expectations. In this example, learners use metatalk to check if they have reached a common understanding of task instructions: “Do we have to use red ink to revise” “Do we have to revise everything including punctuation marks” (DeGuerrero and Villamil, 2000, p. 56).

Furthermore, metatalk is used to set goals, share the work and exchange experiences (Alegria de la Colina and Garcia Mayo, 2009; Kobayashi, 2003). According to Brooks and Donato (1994) metatalk is not only used at the beginning of task performance; it is used whenever a difficulty in task performance arises.

2.3. Scaffolding

Scaffolding consists of the guiding behaviours and language that a learner offers to a peer or a tutor to a tutee in order to facilitate her or his “progress to a higher level of language development” (DeGuerrero and Villamil, 2000, p. 53). Scaffolding, according to Aljaafareh and Lantolf (1994), has to be “graduated”, “contingent”, and “dialogic” (p. 468). That is to say, help should be gradual, should be given only when asked for, and has to be offered through interaction and dialogue. Scaffolding is moment-to-moment mediation. It is the process of leading a learner from one stage to a higher one by subtle steps, not by providing the answers without any effort on the part of the learner. According to many studies reviewed above, learners scaffold each other at different stages of task accomplishment. They use scaffolding to understand the task, explain target language items, spot differences, and so on.
2.4. Co-construction

Co-construction is the creation of a sentence or utterance by two or more learners, one beginning and the other completing it. Foster and Ohta (2005) define co-construction as the "joint creation of an utterance, whether one person completes what another has began, or whether various people chime in to create an utterance" (p. 420). The jointly produced utterance could be a sentence, a phrase or just one word. Co-construction has been reported by several researchers (e.g., Foster and Ohta 2005; Storch, 2007; Swain and Lapkin, 1998). Foster and Ohta (2005) say that co-construction enables learners to produce utterances that they cannot produce individually.

2.5. Tasks

A task is defined as "some kind of activity designed to engage the learner in using the language communicatively in order to arrive at an outcome other than that of learning a specified feature of the L2" (Ellis, 1994, p. 595). Other researchers, such as Breen (1987, in Ellis, 1997) call all activities that generate interactions tasks, be they focused on form or on meaning. The word task in the current study refers to any activity that engages learners in meaningful interactions. Tasks are used in interaction research because they generate interactions that inform us about the different processes that are involved in SLA (Bygate, Skehan and Swain, 2001). Moreover, tasks offer opportunities to explore either quantitative or qualitative data. For copies of tasks that were completed by the participants in this study during data collection please refer to appendix C.

While the above definition of tasks was used for data collection, for data analysis I dealt with activities. According to Coughlan and Duff (1994), the latter are the actual negotiations, assistance and moves that learners engage in when completing a task. This suggests that learners who complete the same task may engage in different activities. While the instructions and requirements of a task are the same, the activities that learners will do to accomplish the task will be different because of the learners' different motives. In his criticism of cognitive experimental research designs, Grabois (2003) explains that while researchers can control the instructions and requirements of a task, they cannot predict and control what activities learners will engage in to complete the task.
In this chapter, I have explained the theoretical perspective underlying this study. I first explained why the psycholinguistic framework was criticized by researchers before I defended my preference for the sociocultural perspective. I argued that a sociocultural theoretical perspective is more likely to help me understand the process of task completion in L2 classrooms because, among other reasons, it encourages the use of qualitative research methods which study processes in their natural contexts. Finally, I described the main principles of the Vygotskian theoretical perspective and defined some relevant key concepts.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter will be devoted to the methodology that was followed and the design that was implemented in order to carry out this study. The participants, the teacher, the data collection instruments, and the phases of data collection will be explained. These important aspects of the research will be presented in detail because each of them is relevant. Finally, the data coding, analysis and validation procedures as well as the ethical considerations underlying this study will be described.

1. The setting

The language center in the social sciences faculty at the Université de Sherbrooke where the data were collected offers a variety of language courses, including French, English, Spanish and other languages when a sufficient number of students enroll. Students come from different faculties and different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. They take ESL courses for various reasons such as improving their work opportunities, travelling, and completing academic requirements of their programs. The courses are divided into different levels, such as intermediate, intermediate oral communication, English and the North American culture, phonetics and pronunciation as well as other more advanced courses (Université de Sherbrooke, 2009). Each of these courses aims at developing a number of skills and competencies. The courses generally focus on communicative activities that favour simulation situations and oral communication (Université de Sherbrooke, 2009). The teachers are highly qualified native speakers of the languages they teach.

The data were collected from an ESL classroom during the fall of 2010. Each lesson lasted three hours, about half of which was devoted to oral communication. The students were assigned various tasks to complete in pairs or groups. The tasks engaged the students in interaction to collaboratively write an ending to a story, discuss pictures, make predictions about the future or interpret the lines on people’s palms. I have chosen to collect the data during such tasks because they offer an opportunity to examine task understanding and accomplishment in a real classroom, not in a laboratory setting. The benefit of research conducted in a real classroom, with real learners and a real teacher is
that it is more likely to give a realistic idea about classroom practices (Spada, 2005). This is important if research aspires to improve the daily practices of second language teachers.

The learners were asked to complete oral tasks in the second half of each lesson. They generally sat in pairs or in groups. They expressed themselves in English most of the time and seemed quite comfortable with the tasks. The learners seemed to know each other well enough to make jokes and work together in a comfortable way. That was probably due to the fact that I chose to collect the data over a month after the semester had started.

Sometimes the teacher and learners made jokes and teased each other which contributed to create a friendly atmosphere. The learners did not show any signs of shyness or even fatigue, even though the lessons took place from 7 to 10 pm. The learners did not hesitate to ask the teacher and other peers when they had questions. They were also free to use dictionaries. All these aspects of the classroom contributed to make a natural social environment which is very different from a laboratory setting where learners meet for the explicit purpose of data collection.

2. Choice of a method

The data for this study were analyzed following interactional, conversation and sociocultural microgenetic methods of data analysis. According to Nunan (1991), interactional and conversation analysis methods “favour a discursive, interpretive type of analysis” (p. 160). That is, they favour the analysis of learner speech and try to interpret it in order to better understand how language is used. Interactional analysis was used because “it tells us what kinds of function learners perform when they interact with other learners or native speakers in different contexts” (Ellis, 2005, p. 166). This is my main aim in this study; I wanted to understand how learners use discourse when they perform oral linguistic tasks. As we will see shortly, I implemented many of the practical principles of interactional analysis to code and analyze the data of this study.

Conversation analysis also focuses on learner interactions, more specifically, “in order to understand what is going on in interaction, conversation analysis attempts to do...
so from the participants' perspective" (Ellis, 2005, p. 205). This is crucial for my study because it takes into consideration the learners' background, motives and goals while performing language tasks. The participants' perspective is relevant to my study because it helped me better understand how motives shape learners' activities. For example, as we will see in the next chapter, learners may negotiate for several minutes about an aspect of language before they realize that one learner is concerned with form while the other is focused on meaning.

The main principles of conversation analysis that I implemented in my study include the use of authentic recorded data, analyzing single cases (such as the beginning of a task or illustrative passages in task completion), and eschewing the quantification of data (Ellis, 2005). These aspects of conversation analysis combined with relevant tenets of interactional analysis and sociocultural theory helped me to uncover some interesting aspects about task resolution.

As mentioned above, I also used elements of the sociocultural theory, especially microgenetic analysis of the data. This method of data analysis is drawn from Vygotsky's (1978) belief that in order to understand human psychological processes, researchers need to understand the genesis of those processes, that is, how they emerged and came to existence. Werstch (1985) explains that microgenetic analysis is the study of very short moments of peoples' attempts to resolve tasks because those moments show how a behaviour occurs.

Microgenetic analysis requires the researcher to use some specific data coding guidelines, such as indicating the duration of pauses, the use of L1 by the participants, the funny comments made by the participants, etc. DeGuerrero and Villamil (2000), for example, asked the participants in their study to speak out loud when revising a written texts in order to record their speech. The transcribed version of their data included parts of speech in bold letters, others in italics and comments about the learners' interactions. Even though I did not include the different print colours in the extracts I analyzed in the current study, I did indicate where learners used hesitation, whispers, or a specific
intonation when I transcribed the data. I also used brackets and different colour of print to write comments and notes to indicate relevant information for data analysis.

Moreover, I used a microgenetic method of analysis, such as the analysis of the participants’ short turns, their use of humour, that is, the moment-to-moment attempts made by learners to complete the tasks. Samples of interactions where learners used verbal interventions were selected for analysis. Instances where the participants used self-corrections, other-corrections, repetitions or other interventions were analyzed in order to find out how they allowed learners to better understand and complete the tasks. This is called microgenetic analysis in Vygotskian theory (Werstch, 1985). In order to study the human psychological and mental processes, such as memorizing and concept formation (all involved in L2 learning), researchers have to understand the roots or the genesis of those processes. The best way to understand them is through analyzing “observation of subjects’ repeated trials in a task setting” (Werstch, 1985, p. 55). That is, I examined the short turns and language moves used by the learners and tried to relate them to each other in order to better understand how those contributed to task resolution. As Frawley and Lantolf (1985) put it, the analysis was “done of the actual instances of discourse by individuals” (p. 24). This example taken from DeGuerrero and Villamil (2000) will illustrate how microgenetic analysis is carried out:

57. W: Put it in Spanish, she (the teacher)...
58: R: She is going to think we mean the drink (laughter)

In this segment, the students share a moment of laughter based on common knowledge (sangria, the word for “indent” in Spanish, is also a popular drink made of red wine which looks like blood (Sangre). The opening joke not only relieves stress but also helps the interlocutors consolidate intersubjectivity, a concept used by Rommetveit (1985) to signify that subjects participating in a common task have shared understanding of the situation and are in tune with one another” (p. 59)

This type of analysis is particularly appropriate for my study. The examination of learners’ repeated attempts to solve problems related to various L2 tasks allowed me to see how verbal interventions were used by learners. That in turn enabled me to understand how those interventions facilitated task completion.
Moreover, language related episodes were analyzed in order to see how they contribute to task understanding and accomplishment. Swain and Lapkin (1995) define LREs as instances where a learner encounters a language problem and attempts to correct it. In the case of this study, LREs are instances where the participants faced linguistic problems and attempted to resolve them, either individually or in collaboration. These data analysis methods have been largely used by SLA researchers (e.g., Foster and Ohta, 2005; Mondada and Peparek Doehler, 2005; Storch, 2007; Swain and Lapkin, 1995, 1998, 2002).

The teacher gave me a copy of each task instructions. That helped me understand what the tasks were about and what was expected from the learners. Moreover, teacher explanations further clarified the tasks. This helped me to examine to what extent the participants answered task requirements. The fact that I was present during task correction allowed me to verify whether the learners' performance of the tasks was successful.

The above elements of different methods of data analysis helped me answer the questions and understand how learners' interventions and short utterances facilitate "the transitions that lead up to [the] later form" (Werstch, 1985, p. 55) of larger conversations that learners engage in when performing oral linguistic tasks. A close examination of the moment-to-moment attempts to resolve tasks helped me better understand what processes learners go through when performing tasks, how each turn and utterance shape the course of the conversation and why learners go through all these processes when completing tasks (the motives behind the processes).

3. The participants

Ten students participated in this study. They came from different faculties to learn English for various purposes such as improving their work perspectives and completing academic requisites. The learners were grouped in the same class because the placement test determined that their level was intermediate. The intermediate level was chosen because at this stage learners have sufficient command of English to carry out interactive tasks.
The learners came from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds but they all shared French as a common language of communication. Their native languages included French, Spanish and Portuguese. Their age ranged from twenty three to fifty five years. Most of them were part of an international exchange group but there were some students who enrolled for personal reasons, such as learning English to increase their employment opportunities. Please refer to Table 2 below for more details about the learners.

Tableau 1 - Details about the participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learners’ pseudonyms</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>L1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stephane</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylvie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Portuguese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sebastien</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Cote d’Ivoire</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melanie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. The teacher

The teacher is a female native speaker of English who has many years experience teaching ESL. She was selected because she uses a great deal of interactive activities and tasks with her students. Furthermore, she was willing to host me. Prior to the study I contacted and informed her about my research project and the methodology. She then invited me to attend a lesson as a guest. She introduced me and asked me to inform the learners about my research project.
5. **Procedure**

I will now describe the methodological framework of this research. The different steps that were followed to carry out this study will be described along with the measures that were taken to guarantee the participants’ privacy and free choice.

5.1. The data

This study is qualitative in nature because I did not seek to examine the quantity of a phenomenon; rather, I attempted to understand processes of learning, namely the learners’ verbal interventions during task resolution. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest that five features characterize qualitative research: naturalistic data, descriptive data, concern with process, inductive analysis and concern with meaning. The data are descriptive, in “the form of words or pictures rather than numbers” (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007, p. 5), and attempt to describe learners’ interactions in a classroom context and relate them to task completion. The results of this study include “quotations from the data to illustrate and substantiate the presentation” (*Ibid.*, p. 5). Furthermore, the concern of this study is a single aspect of classroom interactions. The analysis was inductive, that is, I did not collect the data with a clear idea about what the result would be. This means that as a researcher I did not go to test hypotheses I held before the study. It is only after analyzing the data that the process was clarified. Finally, this study aims to make meaning of what happens during task completion, understand it and describe it in detail. These are some of the main characterizing aspects of case studies according to Bogdan and Biklen (2007) and Johnson and Christensen (2008).

5.1.1. The recordings

The interactions of learners in an ESL class were audio recorded. The use of electronic devices to record classroom interactions in ESL classrooms offers several advantages. Audio recordings have been chosen to carry out this research for several reasons. First, the data collected with such equipment usually do not degrade. Secondly, digital recorders are easy to manipulate. Finally, they allow the researcher to keep a vivid idea of what takes place in the classroom (Gass and Mackey, 2007). Perakyla (2005) says that “audio recordings are what provide the richest possible data for the study of talk and
interaction today” (p. 875). Moreover, data in the form of recorded interactions is one of the principles of conversation analysis and interactional analysis (Ellis, 2005). The recordings allowed me to examine learners’ interactions, compare interactions of different groups and thoroughly depict how learners’ verbal interventions facilitate task completion. A great number of researchers who study processes of L2 learning use qualitative data in the form of recorded interactions (e.g. Brooks and Donato, 1994; Foster and Ohta, 2005; Storch, 2007) because they give a naturalistic idea of what happens in the L2 classroom.

The course is called ANS 300 and is intermediate II. Its goal is to increase learners’ abilities in order to enable them to understand, interact, and express themselves clearly orally and in writing in a variety of current situations. The course began in September and ended in December. A total of twenty six students enrolled in the course. The data were collected between October 14th, 2010 and December 09th, 2010. I wanted to give time to the learners to know each other and become well acquainted with the teacher in order to collect the data in an inhibition-free environment. Moreover, by then the learners became comfortable with the teacher’s method and the class environment in general.

The lessons took place every Thursday and lasted three hours, from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. I attended a total of five lessons but I only recorded the participants in three. At the beginning of the first lesson I attended on October 7th, 2010 the teacher introduced me and asked me to describe my research project. I described my study and asked if there were any students who were willing to participate in it. I then handed the consent form to the students and explained what was expected from their participation in the study and how that participation would affect them. At the end of the hour I collected all the forms, ten of which were signed by students who agreed to be recorded while completing oral tasks.

During the second lesson (October 14th, 2010) I recorded five pairs of students who resolved two oral tasks. The instructions of the first task required the learners to

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1 The translation from the University of Sherbrooke website is mine.
make predictions about what some aspects of life would be in twenty years, namely, transportation, food supplies, communications, housing, and clothing. The teachers encouraged the students to imagine what those aspects would be like and urged them to practise the future tenses (will and going to). The second task was about palm reading. The learners were given a picture on which the lines of people's palms are explained. They were then asked to look at the page and interpret the lines on their own palms.

During the second lesson (October 28th, 2010), I recorded three pairs and a group of three students while they resolved a task which required the learners to decide on an ending to a story. A dangerous insane man who had a hook instead of his right hand escaped from an asylum. A woman and her boyfriend were on a date and were kissing in a parking lane when they heard a warning about “the hook man”. The woman asked her boyfriend to drive home. When they arrived home they discovered a bloody hook hanging from the handle of the passenger-side door. I could not record on the fourth lesson that I attended on November 25th, 2010 because the teacher had to finish a grammar lesson and then correct homework.

During the fifth lesson I recorded two pairs and two groups of three students performing a task about picture interpretation. A man and a woman were standing on a cliff. The students were asked to guess what they were doing and what they would do next.

Three digital recorders were placed in the middle of the tables of three different pairs or groups to record the students' interactions. At the beginning of each activity, I wrote down the instructions of the task and other clues that would affect data analysis, such as the teacher expectations and the times learners had to spend to complete the task. I collected a total of 153 minutes of recorded learner speech.

5.1.2. Validation of the data collection instrument

The digital recorders were tried before using them for data collection. I used the recorders in order to become familiar with them and to ascertain that they recorded properly. Furthermore, prior to using them for data collection, the recorders were used in
a classroom in the same conditions as the ones that prevailed during data collection in order to cater for any difficulties that might occur during official data collection.

5.1.3. Data reliability

One of the measures that were taken to guarantee the reliability of the data included gathering data from different groups and pairs simultaneously. Thus I was able to compare how different learners approached and resolved oral tasks. Moreover, the fact that recording was systematic and that it lasted four weeks certainly added to reliability. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) explain that examining the same phenomenon over a period of time assures reliability. That is to say, the fact that learners accomplished different tasks, with different partners ensures that the data are varied and are representative of the phenomenon under study.

5.1.4. Coding the data

The data I used for analysis in this study were taken from a corpus of 45 pages of transcribed speech. Those pages were selected because I deemed them to be very rich. They included all the strategies of task resolution that were identified in the literature review. Some passages of the remaining data were not intelligible because of background noise and others were not pertinent because the teacher addressed the whole class in the middle of a task in order to give a mini lesson about a specific structure (e.g. the use of the simple past versus the use of the past perfect). The data were coded according to the reading grid that was used for the literature review (Appendix A). Many categories (co-construction, code-switching, etc.) emerged from the literature review. Some categories were added after reading the collected data several times. After each reading I underlined and noted new interventions in the margins. This coding method was drawn from the interactional analysis method (Ellis, 2005). Ellis proposes the development of a set of categories for coding. He explains that “where possible you should use categories taken from the literature (for example, those relating to the negotiation of meaning) but you may need to modify these to ensure a good fit with the data” (2005, p. 194). Furthermore, as part of data coding, I selected language related episodes (LREs), instances where learners talked about the language they produced—choosing correct words, making
decisions and editing (Swain and Lapkin, 1995). The categories and LREs were analyzed in order to understand how they were put into practice by the learners and how they contributed to task accomplishment.

5.1.5 Data analysis

First, I listened to the recordings several times to get a general idea about the data. After that, I listened and transcribed the data. Then I read the verbatim several times and highlighted and underlined recurring categories. In order not to forget, I also wrote notes in the margins about how different interventions contributed to overcoming specific difficulties and contributed to moving task resolution forward. The notes included immediate impressions, ideas about data analysis, my understanding of parts of speech, etc. That helped me to design a table that summarizes the main interventions used by the participants to understand and complete the tasks (Table 1). That systematic reading also facilitated data analysis and prevented me from missing relevant categories.

The selection of passages to analyze was done after several readings of the transcribed data. I decided to analyze passages that were identified in the literature review. I wanted to compare my results to the findings of other researchers to see whether they corroborate or differ from them. The only obstacle at this stage of the study was that I had to discard from analysis some passages that were not intelligible because of the quality of the recording (background noise, learners whispering inaudible speech, etc.). However, the different readings suggested that the categories were used almost by all groups and at different stages of the interactions. That assured me that the selected passages were representative of the corpus of data.

After that, I read the selected passages several times in order to understand how different learner interventions helped them to better understand the tasks and complete them. I wrote notes using a different print colour to explain how utterances contributed to move the tasks forward. These are aspects of the microgenetic method of data analysis according to Aljaafareh and Lantolf (1994) and DeGuerrero and Villamil (2000). DeGuerrero and Villamil (2000) contend that microgenetic analysis is the analysis of learners' interactions on the moment-to-moment scale. Aljaafareh and Lantolf believe
Microgenetic analysis is the analysis of learner interactions "in the space of a few seconds or fractions of seconds" (p. 467). In the current study, I analyzed learners' short turns, including single words or even nodding and using a different intonation.

Throughout this process I was guided by the theoretical perspective and literature review which I had to read again and again to make sense of what the participants in my study were doing with speech while working on the different tasks. For example, I went back to the theoretical perspective in order to identify passages where learners scaffolded each other or used L1 for self or other regulation.

6. Ethical considerations

Measures were taken in order to guarantee the participants' right for privacy and free choice. Several researchers and methodologists agree that when research involves human subjects, there is a need to get the participants' consent to take part in the research; moreover, the research should not cause physical or moral damage to the participants (Seliger and Shohamy, 1989; Mackey and Gass, 2005). The protection of the rights of participants in research projects is guaranteed by the ethical protocol of the University of Sherbrooke (University of Sherbrooke, 2005). Prior to collecting the data I submitted an application form to an ethics committee which approved the research project and allowed me to record learners' interactions. The reader can find a copy of the ethics permission in Appendix B. So, in order to insure a maximum of transparency, a letter of consent was signed by the participants, which clearly stated that participation in the research was not mandatory and that they were free to withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind. A copy of the form that learners signed prior to participation in the study can be found in Appendix C. In order to prevent identification, the participants' names were replaced by pseudonyms in the transcriptions. These pseudonyms were used throughout data analysis and discussion. Moreover, the study had no negative effects on the participants' learning because during data collection they were attending regular lessons with their teacher.
In this chapter I described the methodology that was followed to conduct this case study, including the setting, participants, teacher and procedure.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter will be devoted to data analysis and results. Data analysis consists of two sections. In the first section examples will be provided about learners’ interventions at the beginning of tasks. Those will show what learners do to understand tasks. In the second section I will give excerpts from the data and show what interventions learners use to complete linguistic tasks. Data will be analyzed following what Swain and Lapkin (1995) called language related episodes. Moreover, the same categories that were included in the reading grid were used to examine learners’ interventions in order to understand how the interventions contribute to better task comprehension and accomplishment. As explained above, this is one of the principles of the interactional analysis method (Ellis, 2005).

1. Task understanding

As mentioned previously, before engaging in task accomplishment, learners spend time trying to understand the task and gain control of it (Brooks and Donato, 1994; Mondada and Peparek Doehler, 2005). Language was used by the participants in this study as a tool to understand the tasks at hand and to regulate their thinking toward those tasks. They use various interventions in order to take control of the tasks and reach common understanding before they resolve the tasks. In order to achieve task comprehension they use metatalk or speech about the task. Metatalk is believed to serve as a cognitive tool to regulate learners’ thinking to the task at hand, among other uses (Brooks and Donato, 1994; Foster and Ohta, 2005). Below I will provide several examples of language being used to regulate mental processes and how that helped the participants to better understand linguistic tasks. Following elements of conversation, interactional analysis and microgenetic analysis, I will show how the moment-to-moment attempts to understand tasks helped the learners to better comprehend them and move the process of their completion forward. Sometimes I will dwell on short moments of speech, or specific cases as they are known in conversation analysis, in order to show how they function in real life. To borrow Vygotsky’s words, those illustrations will help me grasp the process in flight (1978).
Example 1:

1 Stéphane: OK
2 Sylvie: OK
3 Sylvie: So...
4 Stéphane: So what is your prediction for the next thousand...one thousand? No one hundred...
5 Sylvie: No, 20 years...
6 Stéphane: Ah 20 years only? OK, it has another sense.
7 Sylvie: Transportations?
8 Stéphane: Yeah for transportations.

In this excerpt the learners use "OK" and "so" to break the ice and approach the task. The task required them to make predictions about what transportation, communication, housing, clothing and fashion would be in the next twenty years. Stéphane asked Sylvie about her predictions about transportations but he was not sure about how far in the future the predictions should be. He showed his uncertainty by trying out two suggestions: "thousand" and "hundred." Sylvie corrected him immediately, saying twenty years. Stéphane checked comprehension by repeating Sylvie's utterance in the form of a question. The question here, I believe, was not meant to elicit information. Through the interrogative form Stéphane signified to his partner that he understood something different. He did not wait for an answer; he immediately added a comment that shows that they did not share the same understanding of the instruction, "that has another sense." When intersubjectivity was reached, it was easier for the learners to move on to task accomplishment which will be presented in the next section.

When Stéphane expressed his agreement with "twenty years", Sylvie wanted to check the next information. Because the prediction concerned four aspects (transportation, communications, clothing and fashion), Sylvie wanted to confirm which aspect they would discuss first. Stéphane's error with the number of years compelled his partner to clarify the subject of discussion right at the beginning of task resolution. This is a good example of how suggestions trigger new ideas, like a chain reaction. According to Werstch (1985), paying attention to how ideas develop and create transitions that lead up to a new form of interactions is one of the tenets of microgenetic analysis.
This makes it difficult to predict learners’ next ideas during task completion. This example confirms what Coughlan and Duff (1994) pointed out, namely that learners do not always share a common understanding of linguistic tasks. If Stéphane had not brought up his incorrect understanding of the task right from the beginning, the learners would have wasted time talking about different things. The first turns of the interaction determined the course of task completion. If misunderstanding continued, it would have certainly affected task accomplishment. This confirms that reaching a shared comprehension of task instructions and requirements is crucial for subsequent work.

I will now provide another example where intersubjectivity was not reached easily. In the example below two learners wanted to write an ending to a story but they misunderstood each other at the early stage of task performance. A minute analysis of such small extracts, or cases in the terminology of conversation analysis allowed me to see problems that learners come across while performing a task and how they surmount them.

Example 2:

1 Stéphane: So, Louise, what really you have the end this past story.
2 Louise: Ehmmm...
3 Stéphane: We help us eh... Sorry but it’s very hard yeah.
4 Louise: I think...
5 Stéphane: I think that the guy he died.
6 Louise: Not, the hook...
7 Stéphane: Dead, dead....
8 Louise: Not dead. He just...
9 Stéphane: It’s simple past because it’s finished. It’s finished caput as we say.
10 Louise: Yes but he is not dead because just if hum...
11 Stéphane: Who is...?
12 Louise: The hook?
13 Stéphane: The hook, the hook. But she can talk to me if she wants.
    Both students laugh.
14 Louise: So, he loses his hook and then eh...
15 Stéphane: And he’s run after the car...

In this task the learners had to write an ending to a story of a man and his girlfriend who were listening to the radio in a parking lot. The news on the radio
announced that a dangerous crazy man who had a hook instead of his right hand had escaped from a local asylum. The girl was scared and asked her boyfriend to go home but the latter did not want to go. After a moment of argument the couple went home in silence. When they reached home, they noticed that a hook was hanging at the door of the passenger’s side.

In these turns Stephane said that the man with a hook died. But Louise said he did not die. Stephane thought that she did not understand the word dead so he repeated it and then explained that the action was finished and they had to use the simple past. Louise agreed that they had to use past simple by saying “yes” but she wanted to convince her partner that the hook could not be dead at the beginning of the story otherwise they would have nothing to add. While Stephane was concentrated on the tense of the verb “die”, Louise wanted to attract his attention to the fact that he was not dead. For a moment the learners did not have the same concern and that misunderstanding delayed work on task completion. Stephane made a funny comment, saying that the girl could talk to him since her boyfriend did not want to talk to her. That comment made his partner laugh. After that, Louise moved the task forward, suggesting that the insane man lost his hook, and Stephane extended that idea. After the misunderstanding was overcome, Stephane used humour maybe to appease the atmosphere and then both learners began work on the task again. From an interactional analysis method, the above example shows how language can achieve different functions. It shows how learners expressed their understanding of a task and after a problem occurred language was used to appease the atmosphere and move forward.

Example 3:

1 Susan: I don't how eh... know where I will be in tens years.
2 Teacher: I know...Use your imagination, use your imagination about housing.
3 Jim: OK
4 Teacher: For example, I would like to visit. There's a place to visit somewhere in Magog where they have a new material to build houses with corkwood. I can't remember what it is but I wanna see it and they say apparently cheaper it is much more flexible in how you can design a building with it as well.
5 Jim: Ah OK, with some...
6 Teacher: Yeah.
Jim: You can change with a long...
Teacher: Well, I don’t know but apparently it’s easier. The frame is stronger so you can put bigger windows or windows in places you couldn’t place them... Use your imagination.
Jim: OK

One of the interventions that were used by the participants in this study and were not identified in the literature review was asking the teacher for help at different stages of task accomplishment. In this excerpt the learners asked the teacher how to begin the task. They did not seem to misunderstand the instruction. There was no hint of that by either of the two learners. Susan said that she did not know what housing would be like in twenty years. She lacked inspiration or ideas. She opened the interaction by showing hesitation: “I don’t know how eh...know where I will be in ten years”. The teacher encouraged her to use her imagination and engaged in a chat about housing. But even after that, the learners did not know how to begin. That is expressed through different repetitions and false-starts. It is worthwhile to note that the repetition and false-starts were used by the learners as tools to regulate their thinking to the task.

Those pauses, false-starts and repetition were not useless and neither were they a result of students’ limited English as one may be tempted to think. According to interactional analysis, each move and each utterance has a function that will shape the next turns. Using that method of analysis, we can understand the functions of such moves as the use of pauses, repetitions, hesitations. A closer look at the different turns shows that those pauses, false-starts and repetition were rather social tools that all humans use when facing a task (Foster and Ohta, 2005). Learners used repetition and hesitations as a way to regulate their thinking to the task. As proof of that, the learners fully engaged in task completion in the following turns. It was as if they were looking for the edge of the thread and when they found it the conversation flowed more smoothly and fluently. These turns show regulation happening and are in line with Brooks and Donato’s (1994) findings.

It was stated in the literature review that learners reread instructions in order to restructure the tasks and gain control of them. Researchers such as Mondada and Peparek Doehler (2005) contend that learners create their own version of the task which is more
familiar to them. In the following excerpt, learners reread the instructions but not only to restructure the task.

Example 4:

1 Melissa: I am writing.
2 Jean: OK, yes. Fate is what it says. No with only lifeline. Life is this one no?
3 Melissa: Life? No it is this one.
4 Jean: OK, OK.
5 Melissa: This is fate, fate and...
6 Jean: Yes, this is fate and this is life.
7 Melissa: Right.
8 Jean: OK.
9 Melissa: La ligne...
10 Jean: There’s a line across your lifeline. Yes there is. This is.

This task was about palm reading. The learners had to look at pictures and compare them to the lines on their hands. So they had to refer to the instructions and pictures throughout task completion. The instructions in this task served as a model for task performance. The learners were attempting to reach a common understanding of the instructions, that is, which lines represented fate and which represented life. When Jean asked whether a line represented life or fate, Melissa checked comprehension by repeating the word “Life” and then offered an answer. Melissa used a hesitant tone and a pause at the end of her utterance in order to elicit information from her partner. She indirectly asked which line expressed fate and which indicated life. She mispronounced the word “fate”, and she self-corrected it immediately. Jean guessed that Melissa needed a clarification, and he supplied it. Melissa agreed but in the next turn she expressed her doubt again by repeating the word in LI, “La ligne...” The pause and the use of LI expressed her doubt. Jean again helped by giving an example on Melissa’s hand, saying “there’s a line across your lifeline.” When we relate all the turns, one could understand that the questioning, choices, pauses and hesitation were used as tools to better understand task requirements before delving into its resolution. Each word added something to the learners’ understanding. Turn after turn, the learners reconstructed the instruction and reached a common understanding of the task.
One type of intervention that allowed learners to spend minimum time on task understanding was direct questioning. Two of the participants used this strategy. They read the instructions and asked their partners about them, thus going directly to the gist of task performance. Below are three examples of direct questioning at the beginning of task completion.

Example 5:

1 Stephane: So what is your prediction for the next thousand...one thousand?? No one hundred...?

Example 6:

1 Stephane: So, Louise, what really you have the end this past story?

Example 7:

1 Stephane: So, hum, what's gonna happen in the next 20 years about house? What do you think about this?

The use of the direct questions by the two learners was a way to save time and effort on task understanding. It enabled them to delve into task performance without any delay. Yet, it was also a way of creating intersubjectivity just like the other interventions used by other learners. The advantage of this way of approaching tasks is that it goes straight to the subject of the task and also, as shown above, it eliminates misunderstanding right at the beginning, if there is any, about task requirements and teacher expectations. Because the learners asked their questions according to what was in the instructions, it was an opportunity to check if both members of the pair or all members of the group shared the same understanding of the task.

In another example, rereading the instructions was used not only to regulate learners' thinking toward the task. The learners were given a picture and were asked to decide what the people on the picture were doing and what would happen.

Example 8:

1 Stephane: It's recording so we have to speak English now.
2 Sylvie: laugh. OK.
3 Stephane: (Reads the instructions)
4 Sebastien: We can give the name. The type kidnapped...
5 Stephane: Which one wants give us the name?
6 Sylvie: eh...The name of Peter and Bianca?
7 Stephane: Peter and...?........
8 Sebastien: Unintelligible whispers.
9 Stephane: So they are doing like...?

The first aspect of the interaction that I would like to point out in this excerpt is the use of language to socialize. The learners were using French and when Stephane turned the recorder on he asked his colleagues to speak English, a comment that made them laugh. The comment was probably meant to create a positive and friendly atmosphere and to invite his colleagues to begin resolving the task. This example shows how L2 is used not only for completing tasks but also for creating social ties and making jokes.

Sebastien first got the idea to assign names to the characters of the task. He wanted to suggest an idea to begin task performance but he used the word “type” which is used in French instead of “guy” in English. That made him think of giving names to the characters in order to identify them more easily. Stephane asked overtly if someone could suggest names. Sylvie proposed “Peter and Bianca” and Stephane used répétition and a pause to check compréhension. In the last turn Stephane used an interrogative tone in order to invite his partners to begin task resolution, signalling that task understanding was over.

Another aspect that needs attention here is the call to assign names to the people in the picture. This is additional use of L2 for social and communicative purposes. By assigning names to the characters in the picture, the learners decided to personify them. This may be a way to feel closer or more familiar with those characters. In addition to regulating their thinking to the task, this step was probably meant to create a tie between the learners and the characters and with the task. That is, the learners wanted to make a new version of the task (Mondada and Peparek Doehler, 2005).

One of the interventions that were common in the literature review about task understanding was the use of L1. Strangely, this was not used at this level in the data for
In this subsection I analyzed the data and attempted to show how learners use interventions to better understand tasks before they begin performing them. The data have shown that learners use repetition, comprehension checks, hesitation and overt questioning, among others, as tools to reconstruct tasks and reach common understanding of task instructions and requirements.

2. Task completion

In this section I will provide examples from the data about interventions that learners used while solving linguistic tasks. Language in these interactions is used as a cognitive tool that mediates learners' thinking and learning processes. As explained in the previous chapters, Vygotsky (1978) contended that humans use psychological tools to mediate their thinking just like they use physical tools to affect the outside world. One of the most important psychological tools according to Vygotsky is language. Examples will be provided about learners using language as a tool to build up new knowledge about the L2.

2.1. Examples of categories that emerged from the data

Below I will present a summary of the various categories of interventions used by learners to complete tasks (table 1). Most of these categories were included in the reading grid that inspired it. However, some new categories emerged. Under each category I will supply one example from learner speech. The table is meant as a summary to show samples of the results. A detailed analysis with longer excerpts will be presented in the following subsections. Each category can be found at different stages of task completion.
accomplishment and used by different pairs or groups. The categories show that learners use everything that is at their disposal to complete linguistic tasks, notably their mother tongue, the teacher, their peers and the target language.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Co-construction</th>
<th>Use of L1</th>
<th>Repetition</th>
<th>Asking for clarification</th>
<th>Self-corrections</th>
<th>Other-correction</th>
<th>Asking for teacher assistance</th>
<th>Negotiation of meaning (LRE)</th>
<th>Peer assistance</th>
<th>Sharing experiences</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stephane:</strong></td>
<td>Ok the computer, the..., the...</td>
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<td><strong>Sylvie:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Stephane:</strong></td>
<td>The car connected to the computer...</td>
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<td><strong>Susan:</strong></td>
<td>The girl go on the back eh... place? Ok? Place? La place en arriere?</td>
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<td><strong>Jim:</strong></td>
<td>Seat in the back?</td>
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<td><strong>Susan:</strong></td>
<td>Elle a pris le fauteuil en arriere. Elle etait a coté mais...</td>
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<td><strong>Jim:</strong></td>
<td>je sais pas, je sais pas...</td>
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<td><strong>Susan:</strong></td>
<td>Her boyfriend</td>
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<td><strong>Stephane:</strong></td>
<td>Have been married for 14 years or oh non 15, 50 years, 50 years it will be very nice. Fifty years or eh...19...19...</td>
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<td><strong>Catherine:</strong></td>
<td>Yeah.</td>
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<td><strong>Melanie:</strong></td>
<td>Maybe the policeman will came...</td>
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<td><strong>Teacher:</strong></td>
<td>A cliff? A cliff, a cliff.</td>
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<td><strong>Sylvie:</strong></td>
<td>Ok, they have been married for...</td>
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<td><strong>Sebastien:</strong></td>
<td>They are married?</td>
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<td><strong>Stephane:</strong></td>
<td>Everywere. In Brazil now we have ...</td>
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<td><strong>Sylvie:</strong></td>
<td>Cell phones?</td>
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<td><strong>Stephane:</strong></td>
<td>Yeah. Ninety million? NO. How do you say? Thousand? non</td>
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<td><strong>Sylvie:</strong></td>
<td>One hundred and ninety billion.</td>
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<td><strong>Stephane:</strong></td>
<td>They are...We can</td>
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<td><strong>Jim:</strong></td>
<td>For a second language, yes. You speak Spanish, German.</td>
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<td><strong>Sylvie:</strong></td>
<td>Italian, French and the ...La langue de des Vikings.</td>
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<td><strong>Sylvie:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Sylvie:</strong></td>
<td>Bianca is looking...</td>
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<td><strong>Sylvie:</strong></td>
<td>Yeah. The Vick...</td>
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<td><strong>Sylvie:</strong></td>
<td>Vicks. The Vick...</td>
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<td><strong>Stephane:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Jim:</strong></td>
<td>Ah the the</td>
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<td><strong>Susan:</strong></td>
<td>I take courses in Italian...I think communication is very important that's why I say all people will speak just one language in our world because it is difficult to chatter</td>
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<td>was out of the car and gotted in the car.</td>
<td>Jim: OK he was outside the car.</td>
<td>Susan: Okeeeey...</td>
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<td><strong>Jim</strong></td>
<td><strong>Susan</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sylvie</strong></td>
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<td>OK</td>
<td>he was outside the car.</td>
<td>Billion?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jim: OK he was outside the car.</td>
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<td><strong>Sylvie</strong>: This is million, this is billion.</td>
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<td><strong>Sylvie</strong>: Ah, one hundred ninety million.</td>
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<td><strong>Stephane</strong>: million. Now one moment...</td>
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<td><strong>Sylvie</strong>: Plan? To plan, to plan.</td>
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<td><strong>Sylvie</strong>: Plan</td>
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<td><strong>Stephane</strong>: Plan? To plan, to plan.</td>
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<td><strong>Stephane</strong>: Plan</td>
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<td><strong>Susan</strong>: Ok.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Jim</strong>: You can’t learn all languages, it’s very difficult.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Susan</strong>: You you speak ehh..?</td>
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<td><strong>Jim</strong>: German, a little bit German, Spanish and English.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Susan</strong>: And German you learn in ? Do you learn it?</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Jim</strong>: Yes, sometimes.</td>
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<td><strong>Susan</strong>: Ok.</td>
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Table 2 partly answers the first research question of this study. It summarizes the most recurring interventions that were used by learners when they resolve linguistic tasks. The learners used these and some other interventions (which were not verbal) in an intricate way. In the same extract they used several interventions to achieve various purposes, such as checking understanding, reaching common understanding, and negotiating form or meaning.

In order to answer the second research question, I will now analyze excerpts of the transcribed data and show how the interventions served to help the learners to perform the tasks. The data have also confirmed that learners use most of the interventions that I discussed in the literature review, such as the use of the mother tongue, repetition and others. Some other interventions have been identified in the analyzed data.

2.2. Co-construction and scaffolding

Co-construction was very common in the speech of the participants. They used it at different stages of task performance to make up words, phrases or even sentences they could not produce individually. Sometimes both learners said the same item at the same time because both learners knew the item but one thought about it before the other. Moreover, the data indicate that co-construction not only involves words but even phrases and longer parts of speech.

Example 1:

1 Sylvie: OK. I think everybody will have a finder you just put in a computer where you wanna go.
2 Stephane: Ah yeah!
3 Sylvie: And it drives you...like you don't have to do nothing and you go to the place you want...just the computer drives you there.
4 Stephane: OK, the computer, the..., the...
5 Sylvie: The car...
6 Stephane: The car connected to the computer...
7 Sylvie: Ya.
8 Stéphane: The computer drive.
9 Sylvie: Yeah. And I have seen that. They are like doing some proto...prototypes.
10 Stéphane: Oh ya?
11 Sylvie: It's like a robot or something like that.
12 Stéphane: Oh yeah? Say ehh Sherbrooke and eh...
13 Sylvie: Yeah you go to Sherbrooke.
14 Stéphane: So I don't need to drive you mean...
15 Sylvie: No you have to...
16 Stéphane: We have to...
17 Stéphane: put it in the computer, I think. Just....
18 Stéphane: With the car
19 Sylvie: Car with a computer.
20 Stéphane: Drive automatic...Automatic? (in a low voice to express uncertainty).
21 Sylvie: Yeah.

In this extract Sylvie and Stephane were asked to predict what transportation would be like in 20 years. Sylvie said that cars would be equipped with finders that would drive people where they wanted. After an exclamation from Stephane, showing his interest in the idea, Sylvie added more details. She explained that cars would be connected to computers that would be able to drive after receiving instructions about the destination. Stephane wanted to show his interest but he paused because he could not find the word “car”. Sylvie encouraged him with the word “ya” and Stephane completed the idea.

After that, Sylvie introduced a new idea, saying that she had seen prototypes of those cars and explained how they worked. Stephane encouraged her with a surprised tone. Sylvie explained the idea of robots, and Stephane extended the idea, saying that all people would have to do in such cars would be to say the destination. Stephane extended the idea according to what he had understood from his partner’s previous turns about “robot.” The hints by Sylvie inspired Stephane to extend the idea. The last turns of the extract were again co-constructed, each learner contributing an utterance until they finished the idea. Sylvie expressed her satisfaction with the positive word “yeah.”
In this excerpt no one student could finish the entire idea alone. Sylvie introduced the idea but she did not say everything. The first words she said activated Stephane’s thinking and enabled him to extend the idea as if he were reading from Sylvie’s mind. The different turns reflect the learners’ understanding and make the interaction sound as if the learners were thinking aloud while completing the task.

In the following LRE the learners used different interventions to co-construct ideas and come up with new knowledge about the target language. The various interventions served as a scaffold that allowed both learners to reach a common understanding of the idea.

Example 2:

1 Stephane: the transportation?
2 Sylvie: Sure.
3 Stephane: I think the people will go, or people are going to use the ...common transportation?
4 Sylvie: Ah, OK.
5 Stephane: Common transportation?
6 Sylvie: Yeah.
7 Stephane: The bus...because the...we...we will have meme problem with hum...
8 Sylvie: Public....
9 Stephane: Public transportation.
10 Sylvie: Yeah...OK. For communication. Use public...
Long silence.
11 Stephane: Two reasons? Two reasons for this, so one the problem with a lot of car...
12 Sylvie: OK, too much cars.
13 Stephane: And more conscient conscience? The people were, non the people will be more conscientious? More reason? NON...more
14 Sylvie: More aware of the environment?
15 Stephane: aware.. yeah... OUI. I think.

In the first turn Stephane indirectly called for assistance by using a low, hesitant voice and interrogative tone. This is in line with what Foster and Ohta (2005) and Jenks (2009) pointed out, namely that learners use hesitation to
express a need for assistance. After Sylvie had expressed her interest in the idea, Stephane initiated and idea but at the end he overtly asked whether the word “common transportation” was correct. Sylvie did not understand his question immediately. She said “ya, OK” but she did not give any answer about the problematic word. That could be because of the fact that she was focused on the idea, and “ya, ok” was rather used to encourage her partner to finish the idea. So, in order to attract her attention, Stephane repeated his question again about “common transportation.” The question proves his insistence to get help. Sylvie confirmed the word “common transportation” by repeating it but Stephane was not convinced and gave further examples to show what the difficulty was, he gave the example of bus and finally resorted to L1. When Sylvie finally realized that the question was about lexis, she supplied the word “public” in English. Stephane took it up and completed the compound word “public transportation”. It is interesting to note that he did not request help overtly from the outset. He only resorted to it when his attempt to express it indirectly failed. He used an interrogative tone and low voice as tools to attract Sylvie’s attention to his difficulty but when that did not work, he asked her for the word. This shows how mediation tools can vary.

I would also like to point out that the LRE was not caused by a communication breakdown. The LRE was rather a step in task completion. The talk about the right word did not delay work on the task. It was rather part of task completion. The task required the learners to predict what transportation would be like in 20 years using the target language. So the time they spent on finding the appropriate English words and expression was not a delay in task accomplishment but rather a step toward task performance. Only after reaching agreement on the right word did Stephane move to the next idea.

In the next part of the same excerpt reaching a decision on the appropriate word was necessary for task completion. Stephane said that there would be two
reasons for people to use public transportation, the first of which would be the big number of cars in the world. Again, in order to show his uncertainty about the word “conscientious” Stephane used hesitation, mother tongue and the interrogative tone. In the same sentence he used different self-corrections because while thinking about content his mind was also thinking about form. First, he used French pronunciation for “conscience” before correcting it and then “were” that he repaired again using the future tense. He finally asked for assistance concerning the word “conscientious” and Sylvie gave him the right word “aware”. Sylvie completed her interlocutor’s sentence using the correct word, and Stephane expressed his satisfaction through agreement both in L2 and in L1. However, a few seconds later he expressed doubt again, using répétition and the interrogative form. The use of the French pronunciation of the word “conscience” is significant because it indicates that the learner did not know its equivalent in the target language and was asking for assistance because the word was relevant to successful task completion. Using répétition and L1 Sylvie was able to create a scaffold that helped Stephane understand the word “aware”. When he finally understood it he expressed his agreement and repeated the word, pronouncing each syllable as if to rehearse its pronunciation.

Scaffolding is sometimes achieved through other mediation tools than co-construction. In the example below one of the learners used drawing and gestures to describe a word she did not know.

Example 3:

1 Jim: Transportation...
2 Susan: yeah.
(silence)
3 Susan: I saw a CD from Japan because the new cars from Japan are hum...
4 Jim: A circle?
5 Susan: A circle yes. And the people is sitting like this...
6 Jim: Yes. Like a flying saucer? OK, that’s good.
7 Susan: And the conductor is there in the middle.
Jim: (writing down) OK, car will be in the shape of a flying saucer.

In line 3 Susan wanted to use a word but she did not know its equivalent in the target language. Even though there is no video recording to look at, one can understand from the context that Susan was drawing or making gestures. In line 4 Jim asked if she meant “circle” and Susan confirmed. Then she described the way people would be sitting, using the phrase “like this” which suggests that she was making gestures. Jim guessed what she was trying to express and proposed the word “flying saucer” using the interrogative form as a comprehension check. Susan did not confirm overtly, but by finishing her idea Jim understood that she accepted the word and he wrote the idea down. L2 and gestures and maybe drawing were used in this excerpt as mediation tools to create a scaffold that served to ask for assistance. This is in line with McCafferty’s (2002) finding that learners use gestures as a mediation tools during interactions. Thanks to the gestures Jim could understand the idea his partner wanted to convey even though she did not know the words that expressed it.

2.3. Peer assistance and language as a mediation tool

In this subsection I will present the findings about peer assistance. The excerpts that will follow show how learners help each other at different stages of task resolution and their collaboration results in successful task completion in most cases. Throughout task resolution the learners showed willingness to assist each other to overcome the difficulties that faced them. Moreover, even in the absence of hurdles they helped each other in order to reach a good outcome.

According to researchers, learners provide assistance when they are asked for it (Pinter, 2007) or even when they are not asked to help (Jenks, 2009). Sometimes assistance is asked for overtly and some other times it is signified using indirect questions, hesitation or giving descriptions. In the following excerpts, using a microgenetic, minute examination of specific utterances, I will
show both types of requesting assistance and how it is provided. Moreover, I will show how assistance contributed to task completion.

Example 4:

1 Sylvie: Yeah. I think everybody will have a...a cell and everybody will have a probably like internet everywhere so they will be online all the time.
2 Stephane: Probably the free internet every place.
3 Sylvie: Everywhere.
4 Stephane: Everywhere. In Brazil now we have...
5 Sylvie: Cell phones?
7 Sylvie: Billion.
8 Stephane: Thousand?
9 Sylvie: One hundred and ninety billion.
10 Stephane: Billion?
11 Sylvie: This is million, this is billion.
12 Sylvie: Ah, one hundred ninety million.
13 Stephane: million. Now one moment...

The learners were making predictions about communication technologies in the next twenty years. Sylvie initiated a suggestion about the availability of cell phones and Internet everywhere. In turn 2, Stephane wanted to extend the idea but he used an incorrect word “every place” and Sylvie helped him and supplied the right word “everywhere” even though she was not asked for assistance. Stephane repeated the word to himself maybe to rehearse it or in order to memorize it and then he went on with his idea. He wanted to talk about the number of cell phones in Brazil but he paused. His hesitation elicited a suggestion from Sylvie. Stephane said “yeah” but what he said right after that indicates that he was not thinking about the word “cell phone” but rather on the right number. He finally asked overtly whether the number “ninety million” was correct. He used an uncertain, interrogative tone when he said the number and asked for the right number. Sylvie suggested a wrong number and Stephane’s hesitation shows that he was not convinced. He offered “thousand”, still using the interrogative tone to show uncertainty and invite for further assistance. For a
third time he used the interrogative intonation to express his doubt whether to use “million” or “billion”. The disagreement was eventually resolved after resorting to a new mediation tool, namely writing. The learners’ interactions suggest that. For example, Sylvie said “this is million and this is billion.” This means that the learners were comparing the numbers. Sylvie realized her error and repeated Stephane’s sentence to show her agreement with him. Stephane repeated the number in a triumphant tone to show he was right. Repetition at this stage was used by both learners to convey two different ideas: agreement and triumph.

In this example Stephane asked for assistance because he was not sure about the number of people who have cell phones in Brazil. He used hesitation and an interrogative tone before overtly requesting help. Even though Sylvie did not give a correct answer, the two learners engaged in a negotiation where other mediation tools such as writing were used to settle the problem. They finally resolved the misunderstanding by comparing what Stephane meant to the two numbers. Initially the learners were not sure and did not agree on which number was appropriate in the context of the task. Assistance in this excerpt did not result in a quick agreement but it encouraged the learners and that led to learners activating other processes. The outcome of the negotiation was agreement on the right word “million”. I could suppose here that the negotiation activated both learners’ ZPDs because initially neither of them was sure about which number was appropriate for the context. It enabled the learners to advance in task completion and move forward. It was not a waste of time or effort because it contributed to the final outcome of the task.

Assistance does not necessarily mean one learner guiding another. Generally when they face a difficulty while resolving a task, all members of a group or a pair collaborate to overcome it and move forward. The data that were analyzed here show that help is mostly mutual, with each learner contributing to
task accomplishment. Below is a case of mutual assistance where learners did not attempt to dominate the conversation.

Example 5:

1 Sylvie: OK. What do you think eh...it's going to happen with the migration of people?
2 Stephane: People. I don't know, maybe...too much.
3 Sylvie: In twenty years...
4 Stephane: Twenty years...Probably more immigration because the problem of the the clim...weather.
5 Sylvie: Yeah.
6 Stephane: One possibility. Another is no more immigration because each country will will be close like USA will be close to another countries. I know because the problem eh...How do you say the bombs, the ...
7 Sylvie: The terrorists?
8 Stephane: The terrorist problem. I don't know it's too...
9 Sylvie: Because the terrorist problem, because of the climates problem, OK.
 (Long silence, thinking). Me I think they are going to restrict the law to accept an immigrant in a country because we have some problems and so I think there will be still some immigration but it will be more eh...
10 Stephane: More control.
11 Sylvie: Yeah more control.
12 Stephane: OK. So more control,...
13 Sylvie:More control 
14 Stephane: more selective?
15 Sylvie: Yeah.
Silence while Stephane writes down.
16 Stephane: So because now in Quebec, in Canada we have we have a lot of control
17 Sylvie: yeah
18 Stephane: Yeah. So we will... We will be, we will...
19 Sylvie: We will do? Non?
20 Stephane: We will be more eh...
21 Sylvie: Selective.
22 Stephane: Selective, yeah. Selective because we need a l...we need more people? We need a lot of people but we need, we eh... we want people with eh...
23 Sylvie: education and money.
24 Stephane: degrees, eh no problem of terrorist and same culture who...

I would like to underline the learners' frequent use of the first article 'we' in the above extract. According to Storch (2002) andDeGuerrero and Villamil
(2000), the use of the article “we” by learners indicates their willingness to assist each other mutually, without anyone trying to dominate the conversation. The two participants in the following extract helped each other throughout the interaction, supplying assistance when they were asked for it.

Stéphane was asked about his predictions about immigration in the next twenty years. His first possibility was that there might be more immigration because of climate change. He first used the French pronunciation of “climat” before self-correcting and supplying the English equivalent “weather”. Sylvie’s encouragement with the acquiescing word encouraged Stéphane to come up with his second proposition, which was an opposite of the first suggestion. He explained that countries might restrict immigration because of security issues. But at the end of that second proposition Stéphane did not know the word “terrorist” or “terrorism” and used a description and an example “bombs”. Sylvie understood that he needed help so she offered the word “terrorists”. So here the assistance was called for both through hesitation and description. The answer encouraged the conversation to flow. After that Sylvie expressed her own view about immigration, taking up her partner’s idea of terrorism as one of the problems that host countries would face. Here again the ZPDs of both learners seem to have been activated by the collaboration.

Sylvie’s intervention ended with a pause that meant she needed assistance. Stéphane told her the right word and both learners repeated the words “more control”, most probably to rehearse and memorize it. Repetition could also be a way of thinking aloud because it enabled Stéphane to come up with a better word, “selective”, and he gave Canada as an example of a country where immigration is selective. Sylvie encouraged her partner with an agreement and Stéphane went on with his idea but he hesitated again about the correct verb to use, “be” or “do”. Sylvie opted for the latter but Stéphane preferred “be” but he did not know how to finish his idea. The learners again collaborated to explain
why immigration might be selective (e.g. Terrorism, education and cultural differences). The learners helped each other throughout the last turns, calling for help when needed, using pauses, and interrogative tones to attract their interlocutor’s attention to their difficulty. Mutual assistance was used not only at a specific problem in communication but to jointly complete the task. Both learners contributed to task accomplishment, even if sometimes one or the other expressed doubt about some item.

Learners do not always reach agreement, and when that happens either the communication breaks down as Long (1996) suggested or they propose ideas that are not compatible with the previous parts of their interactions. In the following extract the learners showed agreement quickly but at the end their conversations finished in a dead end.

Example 6:

1 *Stéphane*: Clothing?
2 *Sylvie*: *I think it will be hum like, the cycle? So what is cool now will be cool maybe in twenty years.*
3 *Stéphane*: *Maybe the how do you say? The old...*
4 *Sylvie*: *The old fashion will come back and so, maybe it will be this year in twenty years...I don’t know.*
5 *Stéphane*: *Maybe. Because it’s like a cycle of the fashion.*
6 *Sylvie*: *Fashion that we have already seen because...*
7 *Stéphane*: *Because ecological clothes.*

*Sylvie* started an utterance but she called for assistance using an interrogative intonation and providing examples for her idea, “what is cool now will be cool maybe in twenty years”. Instead of answering her call for assistance Stéphane asked for assistance concerning the word “fashion”. He used a hint “old” to mediate Sylvie’s thinking and that helped her. Sylvie supplied “old fashion” and extended her own idea. Stéphane appropriated his partner’s initial idea of “cycle” and added “fashion” to it, and Sylvie repeated her own idea using different words.
In this extract Sylvie and Stéphane assisted each other, supplying words, asking for help, co-constructing utterances until they reached the final solution for the task. For instance, in the last turns they both wanted to say that fashion is cyclic, that is, what is in vogue today may be fashionable again sometime in the future. However, because of the fact that they did not take the necessary time to negotiate their ideas and make sure they shared common ideas and understanding, their interaction ended in misunderstanding. The words "ecological clothes" at the last turn show that clearly. The word was not fit as an answer to the preceding comment.

In the following excerpt the learners did not spend time discussing their propositions as in the previous one and the outcome is not much different.

Example 7:

1 Jim: Housing.
2 Susan: OK. Hum...
3 Jim: Housing will be...
4 Susan: House will be ...hum...avec la menette.
5 Jim: La montre?
6 Susan: Yeah...Because I don't know but in Mexico there are so many house... And you can go to work and with a manette like this you turn on the ...
7 Jim: The lights, OK,OK.
8 Susan: Aha everything.
9 Jim: OK.
10 Susan: Maybe after it will be with teletools? You know what it is?
11 Jim: A token like this by the lamp?
12 Susan: Yeah. By the lamp.
13 Jim: Wow. OK. Housing will be... not easy hum.
14 Susan: Hum?
15 Jim: Not easy.
16 Susan: No.
17 Jim: OK, housing will be like a remote control.
18 Susan: laugh.
19 Jim: You can light up by the resets.
20 Susan: And this is what.
21 Jim: Light up, shut up, light up a....
22 Susan: Store?
Jim began by introducing the next item they needed to discuss, to signal that they were moving to something new. Susan said yes and then paused, probably thinking what to say. Then Jim attempted another false-start but did not finish his idea. The false starts here served as tools to regulate learners' thinking to the task. They were talking about something different a few minutes earlier, so they needed some time to orient their cognition to a new topic. Susan introduced the word “manette” in French because she was thinking about an idea but she did not have all the linguistic background needed to express the entire idea. The word “manette” is in Quebec French and according to his answer “la montre?” Jim did not know it. Susan agreed but her use of a lower intonation when she said “yeah” suggests that she either did not really understand what her partner meant or she was concentrated on another idea. Susan then gave more details about her idea, explaining that people would use remote controls to open doors, turn on lights and operate everything in a house. Jim used the word “resets” for “remote control” and Susan asked him to explain what that was. He gave a synonym of “light up” but did not answer the actual question which was about the word “resets.” Susan offered “store” as synonym to “light up” and Jim agreed but at the end of the sentence he expressed his doubt. “Jim: Light up OK, light up the store. (long silence). (long silence). OK?” From his answer one can guess that Jim knew the meaning of the words “store” and “light up” but he was not sure about his partner’s comment. And the phrase “light up the store” indicates that he assumed that was what Susan wanted to say. Jim used long pauses to express doubt. Yet he did not ask for clarification and the conversation ended with misunderstanding. He even insisted by taking an interrogative intonation when he said “OK?” before asking in his mother tongue “Pas quelque chose à ajouter?” The use of L1 here is very significant. Jim used his first language to make sure
that no misunderstanding remained about the final turns. If learners had used explicit questioning about what they were thinking about, the misunderstanding might have been settled earlier.

The same two participants engaged in a longer negotiation about another task and the outcome was interesting. In the following excerpt Jim and Susan were asked to write an end to a story. Throughout the interaction they helped each other both on content and on form in order to overcome the difficulties that they faced.

Example 8:

1 Susan: So we can say she cries, no...
2 Jim: No she screams.
3 Susan: She screams...louder?
4 Jim: She screams louder than he wakes up?
5 Susan: No, she screams louder and makes her boyfriend to look at him.
6 Jim: She screams and then...
7 Susan: Her boyfriend drowns? Falls? No... She screams...
8 Jim: Then her boyfriend asking what's going on? OK?
9 Susan: But she screams or she is screamed? ed?
10 Jim: She screamed.

Understanding the two functions of language in the above extract was facilitated by one of the tenets of interactional analysis, namely, the use of language to achieve diverse functions. That principle of interactional analysis allowed me to understand how language is used to focus on both content and form. While performing this task, the two participants used language both to express content and ideas and also to make sure they use correct language.

Right from the outset both learners had to agree on the word "cry". Susan suggested that word with an interrogative tone to call for help. Jim supplied the appropriate word "scream" and Susan reformulated the sentence and added the phrase "makes her boyfriend to look at him." The use of "makes" is probably meant to add more action to the story. Jim used direct speech in order to put even
more action in the story but his sentence was grammatically incorrect. After agreement on content, Susan raised the question of form, notably whether to say "screams" or "is screamed." Jim supplied the correct verb and the tense "screamed." Susan used a new way of asking for assistance, that is, offering choice or asking which utterance was correct. Another point to retain here is that negotiation for the appropriate tense did not arise after a communication breakdown had occurred as Long (1996) had suggested. It was rather the will of learners to be precise that compelled Susan to ask about the appropriate verb and tense. The negotiation itself was relevant to the task in that it enabled the learners to write a meaningful end to the story with the correct tense.

Immediately after this passage, the two learners engaged in a long negotiation about both the content and the form of the story.

Example 9:

1 Susan: I think...
2 Jim: No he has not seen the hook.
3 Susan: I think it's that because he hasn't seen the hook at this moment and suddenly at the same time he has what's going on. The killer appears.
4 Jim: OK. And suddenly the killer appears... (silence)
5 Susan: And broke eh... And broken a window.
6 Jim: Broke, broke a window and with his hook...
7 Susan: (Whispers a question in French).
8 Jim: Which.
9 Susan: Which?
   (Long silence, thinking)
10 Jim: He doesn't seem and with his hook he stabbed her.
11 Susan: (smiles) Her hand with his hoo...
12 Jim: He stabbed on the...
13 Susan: Ah Ok OK.
14 Jim: And this...And the girlfriend
15 Susan: Come...came..
16 Jim: I don't know...Run away.
17 Teacher: Ran, ran away. This is the past form.
18 Jim: The girlfriend asked what's going on but he doesn't seen yet the...
19 Teacher: He didn't.
20 Jim: He didn't
21 Susan: Saw...
22 Teacher: He didn’t. The modal auxiliary he didn’t see.
23 Jim: The hook yet?
24 Teacher: Yeah. Oh oh he hadn’t
25 Jim: no...
26 Teacher: Hadn’t, the negative form, he hadn’t, he hadn’t seen the hook yet.
27 Jim: He hadn’t.
28 Teacher: He had not seen the hook yet, because of yet, that’s true. So with yet you can also use the past perfect, not just present perfect but that was in the past because this is a story in the past so use past perfect.
29 Jim: OK.
30 Susan: Hadn’t see?
31 Teacher: Hadn’t seen the hook yet

Susan attempted to initiate an idea but she paused, signalling her difficulty. Jim said that the man did not see the hook. Susan agreed and extended the idea. She added that the boyfriend did not see the crazy man with a hook but suddenly the latter appeared. Jim accepted the idea and wrote it down. That encouraged his partner to carry on. So she extended her thought saying that the hook broke a window. For a moment the interaction was interrupted because Susan whispered a comment in French, but after that Jim contributed a new idea again. He used the verb “seem” to say that the hook was hiding or was not visible before he appeared and stabbed the girl. Susan specified that the girl was stabbed on the hand but Jim disagreed. From Susan’s interjection one can understand that Jim was using gestures because Susan agreed with him without hearing the part of the body he pointed at. Jim finally added that the girl ran away. At that moment the teacher arrived and corrected the pronunciation of the verb, using the simple past.

The conversation between Susan and Jim was not dominated by one learner. They had agreed on every utterance and idea. Whenever a learner initiated an idea, he or she used a low intonation or interrogative tone to check if the other would agree. When Jim did not agree with the part of the body that was stabbed by the hook, expressed his disagreement and used gestures to convince his partner about his own choice.
The assistance was mutual throughout the extract. Each learner initiated or extended an idea, thus allowing the conversation to move forward. The above excerpt indicates that assistance is neither a simple nor a linear process. The learners did not blindly accept each other’s ideas. They had to produce utterances that were coherent with what was said before, and when one of the learners did not agree on an idea, they negotiated or tried to convince each other.

At that time, the teacher who was going from one group to another arrived at the pair and corrected Jim’s verb, inviting him to use past simple. She gave a mini lesson about two past tenses that the learners misused namely simple and past perfect. What followed indicates the teacher’s intervention did not help the learners to overcome the difficulties they were facing.

Example 10:

1 Susan: (whispering, like thinking aloud) The girl go on the back eh... place?
Ok? Place? La place en arriere?
2 Jim: Seat in the back?
3 Susan: Elle a pris le fauteuil en arriere. Elle était à coté mais...
4 Jim : je sais pas, je sais pas...
5 Susan : Her boyfriend was out of the car and gotted in the car.
6 Jim: OK he was outside the car.
7 Susan: Okeeeey...
8 Jim: But his girlfriend leaped out of the car. In a couple of... in a couple a second
9 Susan: And he see it...
10 Jim: And he saw it from the outside.
11 Susan: From the outside?
12 Jim: From the outside.
13 Susan: From the...a bloody hook hung from the handle of the place of the...
14 Jim: The passenger seats.
15 Susan: C’est à l’intérieur ou à l’extérieur?
16 Jim : Lui il est, il est sorti à l’extérieur, il a vu de l’extérieur le crochet...
17 Susan : OK.

The learners resorted to the L1 for the first time in that long interaction. Susan wanted to suggest that the girl went to the back seat but she did not have
the equivalent of that word and said it in French. She asked for assistance in her mother tongue, but Jim provided her with an incorrect word. Because he used an interrogative tone Susan guessed his uncertainty and gave more details in the L1. Jim declared his incapability to help, repeating “Je sais pas, je sais pas…”

After that Susan initiated an idea in L2 and succeeded to encourage Jim who contributed to the rest of the interaction. Susan encouraged him with the word “Okeey” and Jim introduced a new word “leaped” but his hesitation signalled his need for help. Susan offered her assistance and Jim was able to finish the idea. Susan asked a question about the boyfriend seeing the hook from the outside in order to make sure she understood him and Jim confirmed that. So she reformulated the sentence and paused at the end because she was not sure again about the “passenger seat” which was supplied by Jim. She used a comprehension check again but in L1 in order to clear all doubt. This is proof that she was not convinced earlier when Jim had confirmed that the boyfriend had seen the hook from outside. She probably did not insist at that stage in order not to interrupt Jim’s attempt to finish his idea. Jim explained the situation in L1 to make sure they reached consensus. After that was achieved Susan switched to L2.

What is interesting about this extract is that it shows what happens when the learners are urged by the teacher to use a specific form. After the teacher had prompted the pair to use the simple past, the learners sometimes tried to use them even if they did not know their rules. That resulted in mistakes such as “gotted.” Furthermore, the learners used their mother tongue excessively after being urged to use the simple past. That could be attributed to the fact that they were so concerned about using the right tense that they could not concentrate on content. They used L1 to think and produce content and only used L2 to include the right tense.
As mentioned previously, asking for teacher assistance was not a recurring intervention in the reviewed literature. In the data used for this study learners asked the teacher for assistance at different stages of task completion and about various aspects of the tasks. The following extract is an example of learners overtly asking the teacher for assistance.

Example 11:

1 Catherine: I have not seen what he means.
2 Melanie: From the handle?
3 Catherine: Yes. It goes out from the handle of the passenger’s side.
4 Melanie: Handle.
5 Catherine: The hook...
6 Melanie: Yes
7 Catherine: was in the handle of the
8 Melanie: Oh...
9 Catherine: passenger’s side.
10 Melanie: But at the other guy?
11 Catherine: other guy, yeah.
12 Melanie: Because eh...
13 Catherine: Because he was trying to open the...
14 Melanie: Trying to open the door.
15 Catherine: And he got stuck?
16 Melanie: Yeah. The bloody hook. So he’s eh...
17 Catherine: It means maybe he killed someone before.
18 Melanie: Maybe. But she wants to eh...
19 Catherine: It’s the end of the story.
20 Melanie: Yeah. Melissa? Do we have to do another end? Because it’s the end of the story.
21 Teacher: Yeah, you can make it go a bit longer, you see?

The teacher had urged the learners to extend the end of a story. Catherine said overtly that she did not understand what the instruction meant. Melanie checked comprehension, and Catherine confirmed that she did not understand the fact that the hook was hanging at the door. In order to better understand the instruction, the learners reread it, each learner reading part of it. Rereading task instructions in order to better understand them has already pointed out by researchers such as Foster and Ohta (2005), Mondada and Peparek Doehler
Melanie read “Handle” and Catherine read “The hook...” At the pause Melanie said “yes” as if asking what was wrong or what Catherine did not understand. When Catherine read the rest of the instruction, Melanie introduced “the other guy”, who is in fact another character in the task, the boyfriend. After that both students co-constructed what was happening. They finally came up with the idea that the hook was at the door of the passenger’s side because the crazy man with the hook had tried to open the door but his hook got stuck. After that, Melanie added the hook was “bloody” and Catherine explained that that was probably due to the fact that the insane man had “killed someone before.” Melanie was doubtful about the path that was taken by the conversation. She used “maybe” and a pause to express that. Catherine then decided that it was the end of the story. That decision was probably a consequence of her difficulty to extend the story further. But when she told the teacher that it was the end, the latter prompted her to extend the story more.

In this extract, the learners faced some difficulty while trying to understand task instruction in order to begin to perform the task. They had to reread the instruction and pronounce each word as if thinking aloud or trying to get an image of what had happened before. Another interpretation that could probably explain Catherine’s difficulty to understand the instruction may be the fact that she was not thinking about the hook as a device but as the whole person. She could not grasp the idea that a person could hang on the door of a car. I am even tempted to think that Catherine made an association between the story and the movie “The fugitive” where a man with a hook killed Harrison Ford’s wife. One has to bear in mind that in the French version of that movie, the criminal was only referred to as “Le manchot”, which means the hook in English. That association may have caused Catherine’s problem of understanding.

In the following extract I will show how learners help each other while they focus both on meaning and on form. Sometimes the learners negotiated
about form or a lexical item but their interaction does not reveal any sign of communication breakdown.

Example 12:

1 Catherine: arrived at their house.
2 Melanie: At their house or to their house?
3 Catherine: Arrived...
4 Melanie: At their...
5 Catherine: House... I don’t know.
6 Melanie: laughs
7 Catherine: At their house.
8 Melanie: And then checked.
9 Catherine: And then they checked...
10 Melanie: The car.
11 Catherine: The car and guess...
12 Melanie: And found.
13 Catherine: What...
14 Melanie: And guess what they found...
15 Catherine: They found in a trunk
16 Melanie: In the trunk...
17 Catherine: And checked if the person is still alive.
18 Melanie: Ah another dead...
19 Catherine: Another dead body? (silence). Found a missing person...
20 Melanie: Found a missing person...
21 Catherine: still alive or...?
22 Melanie: Dead.

Catherine explained that the police arrived, and Melanie repeated the main verb “arrived” maybe as a way to agree with the idea. Catherine extended the idea but Melanie expressed her doubt about the preposition “to” or “at.” Catherine repeated the verb but she too paused to signal her doubt. Melanie repeated the problematic utterance again with a doubtful tone. Catherine again expressed her doubt and frustration by saying “I don’t know.” But she finally opted for “at” and moved on. Catherine’s decision about the preposition put an end to the negotiation. After that Melanie started a new idea and the learners co-constructed the rest of the extract. The turns that followed the negotiation were a
good example of learner cooperation. Each learner extended his or her partner's idea till the end of the extract.

The negotiation here could be interpreted as a negotiation of meaning in light of Long's (1996) interaction hypothesis. However, one can clearly see that the negotiation was not caused by a break in communication. The learners could have extended the initial utterance and that would not have affected their understanding. The use of "to" would not have caused the communication to break down. What fostered the negotiation was rather the learners' concern with meaning and with form simultaneously.

In the extract below a group of three learners had to guess what a man and a woman were doing on a sea shore, not far from a cliff and what they were going to do next.

Example 13:

1 Stephane: So, they are old, they picnic? OK.
2 Sebastien: They picnic...
3 Stephane: Now regarding in the picture, they are... they are looking the landscape, they are looking the landscape.
4 Sylvie: The landscape?
5 Stephane: The landscape and the guy, the guy, the guy is looking his wife.
   Yeah, Peter, Peter Pan is looking his wife.
   Sylvie laughs.
6 Stephane: Peter is looking his wife. They are looking the landscape
7 Sylvie: OK.
8 Stephane: and Peter is looking is wife. Bianca is looking the landscape.
9 Sylvie: Bianca is looking...
10 Sebastien: They are married?
11 Stephane: Eh...?
12 Sebastien: They are married?
13 Stephane: No single, single
14 Stephane: They are... We can say they eh...
15 Sylvie: Can we say play? Plane?
16 Stephane: What for?
17 Sylvie: Plane, pour planifier?
18 Stephane: Plan? To plan, to plan.
19 Sylvie: Plan
20 Stéphane: It's very good on the shore. (social use of l2 again. Humour).
Sylvie laughs
21 Sebastien: It's very very good.

Stephane opened the conversation after a long silence, inviting his colleagues to carry on. He repeated what was agreed on previously and showed his agreement and then he paused to let them suggest something. Sebastien repeated “they picnic” and paused either to express doubt or to rehearse and learn the expression. Since no one came up with propositions Stephane said his own. He attracted his partners’ attention to the picture, using an English pronunciation and verb ending of a French verb “regarding”. He suggested that the two characters were watching the landscape. He used repetition as a comprehension check to make sure that his colleagues knew the latter word. Sylvie asked about that word but instead of answering her question Stephane gave more details about the picture, clarifying that Peter was looking at his wife and the latter was watching the landscape. Sylvie agreed and Peter repeated the sentence using the names they had assigned to the characters. Sylvie then asked “Bianca looking?” without finishing her question. She probably had doubts about the verb or the missing preposition “at” that should have been used after looking. Stephane did not respond to Sylvie’s question probably because she did not say explicitly what was wrong with the sentence. But a few turns later, when she had doubts about lexis, she did not hesitate to ask overtly, in French and in English, about the word “plan.” When Stephane provided the equivalent of that word in English she repeated it to herself.

When he heard the word “play” Stephane said something funny and Sebastien added that it would be very good. Sylviee laughed out loud. The learners associated playing on the shore to sexual intercourse. This confirms that language is used to socialize and exchange feelings. Learners do not always limit themselves to task completion. They use language to communicate and build relationships. Earlier, Stephane used “Peter Pan” to refer to the character “Peter”
in order to make a joke. His colleagues laughed. Even though these comments and interventions did not contribute directly to task completion, they helped create a friendly environment and facilitated interaction between the learners.

Sometimes assistance does not result in overcoming the difficulty. When the learners do not think about a common problem while they believe they do so or when the learner who is asked for help does not supply the appropriate answer, the difficulty may persist and other mediation tools are required. In the extract below, a learner provides a word to his peers but doubt persisted and the group could not move forward in task completion.

Example 14:

1 Stephane: So what they are doing in life...?
2 Sylvie: How can we say eh... retraite? They are old eh...
3 Stephane: Reformed, reformed.
4 Sylvie: Reformed?
5 Stephane: Reformed.
6 Sylvie: OK. I think they are old...
7 Stephane: They are old, ok. In reform.
9 Sebastien: Reformed...
10 Stephane: Reformed, just a second, I am not quite...une seconde... (looking the word in a dictionary, sound of paper)
11 Sebastien: You can...en français.
Laugh
12 Sylvie: Hum...They are having picnic...An article he carries here and a little table there...
13 Stephane: This one took eh...
14 Stephane: Let’s say they are...
15 Stephane: It’s a question reform...he thinks is wrong. You are so fortunate (Reading from a dictionary) Pension (French pronunciation) Pension (using English pronunciation).
16 Teacher: Pension? Retired.
17 Stephane: Retired.
18 Teacher: They’re retired, yeah.

Stephane invited his colleagues to propose an interpretation of a picture and Sylvie initiated a suggestion but she ended it with an explicit call for
assistance because she did not know the English equivalent for the word “retraite.” Stéphane supplied “reformed” and repeated it to check comprehension. Sylvie asked again to confirm the word he had told her. Stéphane confirmed by repeating the word for the third time. Sylvie agreed and attempted to finish her utterance but she paused again either to think or because she needed assistance. Stéphane repeated the incomplete sentence using “reformed” instead of “old.” At that time, Sebastien showed his doubt about the word “reformed”, using repetition and pausing. Repetition here is probably used to convey the opposite of confirming, that is, showing uncertainty. Sebastien’s tone and pause affected Stéphane’s thinking and he began doubting the correctness of the word “reformed.” Sebastien offered to use the French equivalent and Sylvie attempted to override that word by proposing a sentence without the problematic item. But Stéphane took a dictionary to look the word up. He was reading different descriptions aloud and the sound of paper could be heard on the recording when the teacher finally came by and supplied the appropriate word “retired” which was repeated by Stéphane. If Sebastien did not express doubt about the word after Sylvie had agreed with Stéphane, the misunderstanding would have persisted. The learners would have either wasted time talking about different things or they would have used a wrong word in the final version of the task solution.

In this chapter I analyzed the data and presented the results of this research. I gave examples from learner speech and attempted to show what learners do when completing linguistic tasks. The results of this data analysis show that learners use verbal and other interventions to mediate each other’s thinking, and to better understand tasks and perform them. The various interventions contribute to reconstruct the tasks and move them forward until they reach an outcome they all agree about.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter will consist of a discussion of the analyzed data and conclusions. First, I will discuss the findings in light of the literature review and theoretical framework. After that, I will explain how the findings of this study could affect teaching practices and the design of materials. I will then present the main difficulties that I encountered while carrying out this research and the limitations of the study. The chapter will end with recommendations for further research, implications for L2 classrooms and conclusions.

Throughout this chapter I will attempt to answer the research questions of this study, namely what interventions are used by learners to resolve tasks and how those verbal interventions facilitate task completion. As mentioned earlier, little has been done to uncover the way in which learners’ interventions facilitate task performance. In the previous chapter and in an attempt to answer the first research question of this research, I identified and provided a table summarizing the most recurring interventions. Now I will explain how those interventions and others help learners overcome the difficulties that stand in their way while accomplishing linguistic tasks.

The analysis of dyadic and group interactions within a natural ESL classroom has revealed a great deal about learners’ use of verbal and other interventions while completing linguistic tasks. Most importantly, this study has shown that learners use language as a tool to communicate and exchange information. Even when simulating situations, they implement all the tools that are at their disposal in order to resolve the tasks at hand. The use of those tools offers learners opportunities to construct knowledge about the target language and consolidate what was previously acquired.
1. Interventions and task understanding

The analyzed data showed that learners did not always have a common understanding of tasks. Rather, participants sometimes had different understandings of instructions, confirming Coughlan and Duff's (1994) findings. However, learners' verbal interventions resulted most of the time in clearing misunderstanding and overcoming difficulties. Learners used various interventions to reach common understanding, such as overt questioning and requesting the teacher's assistance. Sometimes the course of the interaction enabled the learners to discover their misunderstanding and clear it. As Mondada and Peparek Doehler (2005) put it, "social interaction and the related coordination of perspectives, activities, and cognitive efforts contribute to creating the task at hand, to defining the problem to be solved, and thereby to shaping the context of learning" (p. 514). In other words, interactions help learners to clarify task requirements and reconstruct the task. Analyzed data have shown that misunderstanding can be expressed unintentionally by a learner and rectified through negotiation. For example, one of the learners began to propose a solution to a task that required them to predict changes that would take place in the future, but his partner corrected him immediately, explaining that they had to make predictions about the next twenty years instead of the next one hundred or one thousand years.

Before beginning to resolve a task, learners first orient their thinking to it (Aline and Hosoda, 2009). Data have revealed that learners use what I may call ice breakers to approach a new task. Words such as "so" or "OK" or even expressions of hesitation such as "hum" are used by learners to signal that they are beginning a new task or a new part of it. Through these words learners invite each other to think about the task at hand and begin work on it.

One of the interventions that were used by the participants in this study included asking the teacher for assistance. The teacher encouraged the learners
and gave examples about task requirements. The teacher did not do the work for the learners; she just gave a model on how to resolve it. That helped the learners to understand the task and reconstruct it. According to Aline and Hosoda (2009), "learners, as active participants in interaction do not simply follow the task instructions but they vigorously co-construct the task with the teacher or other students" (p. 62). This supports what I stated above, namely, that learners use whatever tools that are at their disposal (eg. teachers' help, dictionary, L1, etc.) in order to resolve linguistic tasks.

The assistance offered by the teacher or colleague to a learner does not result in copying their ideas. Rather, the examples or suggestions enable the learner to activate his or her cognitive system and processes. The data have shown that what follows assistance is not just repetition or imitation of what was said to learners. Vygotsky (1978) says that imitation is one of the ways through which [L2 learners] learn new information from their social environment. Learners use repetition to achieve different goals but after that they extend the ideas and develop them and come up with new knowledge about the task and about L2. The repetition and imitation are rather creative. This may be explained by what Mondada and Peparek Doehler (2005) call "ongoing transformation of activities" that is used in social interaction. That is to say, while accomplishing tasks, learners continually restructure, transform and process information and the give and take that happens during interaction helps the learners to move the task forward.

Understanding task instructions and requirements is an important step to task resolution according to researchers (Alegria de la Colina and Garcia Mayo, 2009; Brooks and Donato, 1994; Kobayashi, 2003; Ohta, 1995). Kobayashi (2003) and Alegria de la Colina and Garcia Mayo (2009) found that learners mainly use L1 at the early stages of task completion. The data of my current study do not support that finding. The participants in this study did not use
French, which was shared by all, as the main language of communication at the beginning of task resolution. They used English almost exclusively at the early stages of task accomplishment. That was probably due to their good mastery of that language, compared to Alegria de la Colina and Garcia Mayo's (2009) participants who were at the elementary level. Furthermore, that could be a result of the observer's

The data of this study have shown that learners use rereading the instructions as well as overt questioning, among other interventions, in order to better understand tasks. They reread the instructions aloud in order to take hold of them. Rereading the instructions, just like self-directed speech, is used to regulate learners' thinking to the task. That allows learners to make sense of the instructions and reconstruct the task.

Some learners read the instructions and asked their partners about them. That was a way to delve directly into task accomplishment. The data have shown that this kind of intervention did not leave place for misunderstanding. The learner expressed his or her understanding and if it was mistaken his or her partner would notice and correct it before they advanced in task completion.

In conclusion to this subsection, I would like to point out that learners' various interventions at the beginning of task accomplishment are crucial for successful task resolution because they allow learners to better understand the tasks and regulate their thinking to them. Rereading the instructions, questioning of peers or the teacher and other interactional interventions help the learners to reconstruct tasks and have command of them, which in turn allows them to resolve them successfully.
2. **Interventions and task resolution**

I will now attempt to explain what the analyzed data have revealed about task completion.

2.1. Unpredictability of task resolution

The analyzed data of the current study have revealed that task resolution is not a linear process, and as such, it is unpredictable. Learners co-construct the tasks and reshape them (Donato, 2004). The different turns, suggestions and negotiation moves lead learners to new ideas which could not be predicted beforehand. Several extracts from the data suggest that learners themselves did not know in advance what the outcome of their interaction would be. Each learner proposed ideas and utterances that were either accepted or negotiated, resulting in co-constructed knowledge about the task and about the L2. This could be explained by Mondada and Peparek Doehler’s (2005) belief that “learners themselves can be actively involved in reconfiguring the task at hand” (p. 510). Learners do not follow a linear course while resolving tasks. They explore different paths, exchange information and experiences, and negotiate ideas until they come up with speech that is acceptable for them. The final outcome is the result of many transformations and mental efforts.

2.2. Language and other tools are used to mediate task completion

Below I will discuss how different interventions help learners to resolve linguistic tasks and thus attempt to answer question two of this study. The analyzed data have unveiled interesting information about learners’ interventions and the way they contribute to task accomplishment. Above all, as this discussion will show, learners’ interventions mediate their mental processes and shape task completion.
2.2.1. Co-construction

Joint construction of utterances has been a recurring tool that learners used to solve the tasks. It was used by learners at different stages of task completion to build knowledge about the target language as well as about the tasks at hand. Sometimes long parts of dialogue were jointly constructed by the learners. The data indicate that co-construction serves many purposes.

One of the main uses of co-construction is that it enabled the learners to overcome lexical difficulties. Learners jointly produced words they were not able to make individually, adding support to Foster and Ohta's (2005) findings. When a learner paused to signal that he or she was thinking about an item, his or her partner supplied it and thus let the task move forward. Sometimes the proposed item became the subject of negotiation. The learners tested different items and made decisions about the most appropriate word or expression for their context. In one extract from the data, such negotiation occurred about the word million. There was disagreement about the number of cell phones in circulation in Brazil. The learners had to negotiate about the right number to use, million, thousand or billion. The learners in this case used oral and written tools to settle the misunderstanding. The tools served as a scaffold through which the learners cleared their divergent views. This brings this discussion to the next use of co-construction, namely scaffolding.

As I have shown in the previous chapter, one of the most interesting uses of co-construction is scaffolding because it helps learners to move from one stage of task completion to another or from a given level of L2 to a higher one. DeGuerrero and Villamil (2000) describe scaffolding as the “supportive behaviours” (p. 53) that are adopted by learners in order to facilitate their progress to a higher level of language development. The data of this study contain a great number of instances that confirm this description. When they faced a difficulty to accomplish a task, learners supported each other in order to
move the task forward. A learner who knew an item or idea helped his or her partner to understand it. Co-construction was particularly used in such cases because when a learner who received assistance did not grasp his or her partner's idea, the latter had to resort to different tools to reach understanding.

In other instances learners used co-construction as a mutual scaffold to jointly build long parts of speech which they could not produce individually. DeGuerrero and Villamil (2000) say that scaffolding helps learners progress from one stage of language learning to a higher level. The data of the current study show that scaffolding also enables learners to move from one stage of task completion to another because it enables them to surmount difficulties and build new knowledge about the tasks. When facing a difficulty that slowed down work on the task, learners co-constructed utterances, tried out diverse solutions, supplied and negotiated propositions until they resolved the problem and moved the task to a further stage.

It would be of great advantage if teachers implemented such tasks that offer learners with opportunities to scaffold each other. Such tasks may benefit learners' progress in L2 according to researchers. Donato (1994) found that scaffolding helped learners develop their linguistic skills in L2. This may be attributed to the fact that learners use different moves that activate their ZPDs according to Ohta (1995). As shown in the previous chapter, the data for this study add further support to this idea. The various steps that are included in scaffolding may be behind the activation of the learners' ZPDs. This in turn, according to Vygotsky (1978), facilitates growth from one stage to a higher stage of learning. This is also in line with the findings of researchers who work within a cognitive perspective who believe that the different moves involved in negotiation of meaning facilitate second language acquisition. Scaffolding includes such turns as rephrasing, repeating, and explaining that are thought to cause language learning (Long, 1996).
2.2.2. Repetition

The analyzed data for this study have revealed very interesting information about repetition. It is used notably to check comprehension, express hesitation, confirm comprehension, express disagreement, and to rehearse. The data have also shown that repetition helps learners to progress in task performance.

Several extracts from the data indicate that learners use repetition as a tool to check comprehension. The participants in my study sometimes repeated a word that was proposed by their partners in order to check comprehension. They wanted to attract their partners’ attention to what they just said to make sure they really meant it. The learners wanted their partners to think conscientiously about their own utterances and confirm them. Researchers found that repetition attracts learners’ attention to specific items and makes those salient (Storch, 2007), an aspect which is believed to be beneficial for L2 learning (Lantolf, 2006; Schmidt, 1990). According to this finding, repetition does not only help develop L2 but it also facilitates task completion. It enables learners to clear misunderstanding about task instructions or items related to task resolution.

Another finding of this study as far as repetition is concerned is that the latter serves as a tool to express hesitation and call for assistance. Repetition in such cases is usually combined with a low or interrogative tone. Foster and Ohta (2005) and Mondada and Peparek Doehler (2005) found that learners use hesitation in order to indirectly call for assistance. However, those researchers did not specify that repetition is another tool of calling for help. The use of repetition to express a need for help may be explained by Vygotsky’s concept of language used as a tool which affects people’s cognition. By repeating a word or a longer part of speech, learners express their incapacity to move forward and signify a need for help. This in turn confirms some researchers’ claims that task completion is a social behaviour (DeGuerrero and Villamil, 2000; Foster and
Humans tend to repeat utterances while looking for a word even when speaking in their native language. When faced with a difficulty, L2 learners use the same tools that all humans use, including repetition. And because the classroom is a social context (Littlewood, 1981), the learner who knows an answer naturally supplies it to his or her partner.

The analyzed data also indicate that repetition is sometimes used to achieve opposite purposes: confirming comprehension and disagreement. Sometimes a learner may repeat a suggestion, with an interrogative tone, to signify that he or she does not agree with it. On some other occasions, learners use repetition to express their agreement with an utterance. In such cases the repetition may be used as a way to memorize and internalize the new word. Repeating an utterance is proof that it has come to the listener's attention (Storch, 2007), which is likely to facilitate its learning (Schmidt, 1990). Repetition in both situations is believed to benefit L2 learning because in case it expresses disagreement repetition is followed by justifications, explanations and other moves involved in negotiation and those also are thought to help L2 learning (Storch, 2007). Repetition can also be explained by Vygotsky's concept of imitation. Learners repeat things and bring some transformations to them until they internalize and memorize them. So repetition not only contributes to task resolution because it allows learners to help each other and move the tasks forward but it also facilitates L2 learning.

On another scale, this suggests that teachers should not consider learners' false starts, repetitions and hesitations as weaknesses in the target language; rather, those moves should be viewed as natural moves in the learning process. Teachers have to give the necessary time to learners to go through those moves and complete the tasks because it is through such processes that learning takes place (Storch, 2007).
2.2.3. Use of L1

According to the collected data, the participants in this study did not make excessive use of their native language at any stage of task completion. I will attempt to explain what purposes L1 served when used and how it contributed to task completion.

The analyzed data have helped identify two main uses of L1: Confirming mutual understanding and catering for gaps in the target language. When they cannot reach understanding about an aspect of the target language, learners may resort to their first language to settle the problem and make sure there is no place for misunderstanding. L1 in these situations is used as a safe tool to confirm understanding. However, my data do not support the findings of Kobayashi (2003) and Alegria de la Colina and Garcia Mayo (2009) that L1 is used as the main means of communications specifically at the beginning of task completion to manage the tasks and better understand them. As mentioned before, the learners’ level in the target language may account for that. Moreover, that could be explained by the fact that the teacher was there and asked the learners to use English to communicate. In Kobayashi’s study, learners had to accomplish the task at home.

On occasions, when they did not know a word in English, the learners used its French equivalent in a hesitating tone to call for assistance. When their interlocutor had the right word he or she would supply it. But if the supplied word was a subject of disagreement, negotiation ensued. The learners then used other tools such as explanations, examples, a dictionary or the teacher’s help.

Use of their native language is not always synonymous with learners’ limited command of the target language. The analyzed data have shown that L1 is used as a tool to construct knowledge about L2. Sociocultural researchers such as Brooks and Donato (1994) and Alegria de la Colina and Garcia Mayo (2009)
believe that L 1 is used to affect learners' cognitive systems. Vygotsky (1978) contends that language is one of the most important tools that humans use to regulate their mental world. The data for my study indicate that learners used L1 only after all other tools were exhausted, and they used it to overcome a problematic situation. As soon as that was done they naturally switched to the target language. I may say that L1 is in the service of L2. It helps learners to construct knowledge about the second language. Hence, teachers may not encourage systematic use of L1 in the ESL classroom but I think that they should not ban it totally.

2.2.4. Self-correction

Self-correction, according to the analyzed data, was used by learners immediately after they realized an error in their utterances. Learners corrected lexical items, tenses, pronunciation or some other part of speech. This means that the learners' mind is always at work, thinking about both content and structures. In several extracts learners corrected their utterances without being prompted by their peers, thus corroborating Foster and Ohta's (2005) finding that self-corrections are not usually prompted. This also indicates that learners' minds during task resolution are not only focused on one aspect of language or the tasks. They are concerned with both form and content in an intricate way. This adds further support to Aline and Hosoda's (2009) finding that learners' focus on form and meaning are not predictable. On another scale, the data show that learners do not only correct their grammar mistakes; rather, they correct all aspects of the target language when they realize them.

Sometimes when the teacher prompted a learner to use a target structure, he or she would focus on form but the data have revealed that urging learners to focus on form does not have a great effect on learners' use of target language. In most cases the learners switched their focus to content as soon as the teacher left or shortly after. This again further supports the unpredictability of focus on form.
and content. Moreover, this suggests that task performance is a whole process where learners build knowledge about the target language while resolving the tasks. The learners' concern according to the data of my study was to answer task requirements and instructions. The corrections they brought to their utterances were just part of task completion.

2.2.5. Other correction

Unlike self-correction, other correction is initiated by the listener rather than the speaker. When a learner hears his or her partner make a mistake he or she corrects what he or she believes to be an incorrect item. The common aspect of self and other correction is that both are not prompted. If a proposed correction is rejected or is questioned by the one who receives it, both learners engage in a negotiation. The learners then explain, compare and provide examples until they reach a consensus. Researchers such as Storch (2007) believe that the moves that are involved in such negotiations are all beneficial for L2 development.

Moreover, the negotiations do not occur because of a breakdown in communication. Rather, the learners' concern with using correct language is the main cause of the negotiations. Foster and Ohta (2005) reported similar findings about meaning negotiation. They explain that negotiations show learners' natural willingness to collaborate and assist each other. This corroborates the claim that task resolution is a social behaviour where learners exchange information, assist each other, share work and build knowledge about the second language (Foster and Ohta, 2005; Mondada and Peparek Doehler, 2005).

2.2.6. Asking for peer assistance

When a learner faces difficulties with a word or a longer part of speech, he or she either asks overtly for help or indirectly expresses his need for assistance. Learners use various tools to call for assistance. The data have
revealed a number of recurring tools, such as directly asking for help or use of hesitation to signify need for assistance.

One of the most recurring tools that participants in this study made use of to ask for help was hesitation. This is in line with the findings of many researchers (Foster and Ohta, 2005; Mondada and Peparek Doehler, 2005; Pinter, 2007). Different strategies were used to express hesitation, including repetition, interrogative intonation, pauses, or low voice. A learner may repeat a word with an interrogative tone to signify he or she is not sure about the item and cannot finish his or her idea. Low voice and pauses are also used to call for assistance. By adopting a low voice or a pause learners show that they are not sure about the correct utterance and their partners come to the rescue. Similar tools are used by all humans even in their native language when they have difficulties expressing their ideas.

Some learners prefer to ask overtly for assistance. They use the interrogative form and ask such questions as “what is...?” or “how do you say...?” This type of questioning offers the benefit of clarity and straightforwardness. Whereas a hesitation may not tell exactly what the speaker needs, direct questioning refers explicitly to the problem and thus facilitates the answer (Foster and Ohta, 2005).

It is not easy to determine clearly why some learners prefer overt calls for assistance while others opt for indirect requests. Even though the purpose of this study does not allow me to give definite answers to this question, the data suggest that personality may be one of the factors that affect learners’ tendency to choose one or another strategy. Learners who used explicit calls for assistance seemed to be more self-confident and extraverted. Maybe the learners who adopted hesitation and other indirect requests for help were shy and introverted.
2.2.7. Asking the teacher for assistance

The data for the present study have shown a number of instances where learners asked for the teacher's assistance when they faced a difficulty. Sometimes that happened at the beginning of a task and some other times at more advanced stages. At the beginning of task performance learners sometimes asked the teacher to clarify task instructions and requirements and teacher expectations. That helped the learners better understand the tasks before beginning to resolve them. The teacher gave explanations and examples to reassure the learners. The teacher in such instances was a tool like others that learners used in their effort to understand and complete the tasks. The findings of the present study do not support Kobayashi's (2003) who found that learners relied exclusively on themselves to understand the task. That could be attributed to the fact that the teacher was not available while the learners had to carry out the task. They were given instructions to prepare a powerpoint at home.

On other occasions learners asked for teacher assistance at other stages of task performance. That happened especially when learners could not overcome a difficulty or reach agreement. The teacher being the highest authority in the target language according to the learners, they only resorted to her as the ultimate tool. This may explain the existence of only few instances of asking the teacher for help in the data. Asking the teacher for help was a way to clear all doubt about a problematic item or utterance. On some occasions the learners asked the teacher about task requirements in the middle of task performance, which confirms the idea that learners use all means to restructure and reconstruct the tasks. This also suggests that teachers have to make themselves available all along task completion to provide help when learners need it.
3. **Task completion and construction of knowledge about the L2**

   It is not the purpose of this study to examine the effect of task resolution on L2 development but I deem it relevant to say a word about that in this discussion. The aim of using tasks and other activities in the L2 classroom is to facilitate L2 learning (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). The moves that are involved in task completion are thought to help learners construct knowledge about the target language (Lantolf, 2006; Long, 1996; Storch, 2007). Repetition, explaining, rephrasing and other moves facilitate L2 development because they bring target structures to learners’ awareness, a factor that is essential to learning (Schmidt, 1990). Moreover, tasks engage learners in negotiations and scaffolding that are believed to activate their ZPDs, which, in Vygotskian theory, is the symbolic space where learning takes place (Foster and Ohta, 2005; Lantolf, 2006; Ohta, 1995).

   Therefore, all the ingredients of second language learning identified by the above researchers are present in the analyzed data. Repetition and imitation are believed to facilitate the internalization of L2 structures and vocabulary (Lantolf, 2006). According to Vygotsky (1978), people do not repeat and imitate just blindly. Rather, they bring several transformations to what they imitate until they internalize it. I would assume, therefore, that task accomplishment contributes to L2 development. However, that can only be proven by studies that verify whether learners increase their knowledge about L2 after resolving oral tasks such as the ones used in this study.

4. **Miscellaneous**

   The analyzed data have revealed many other aspects about task completion that I will present in this subsection. First, the findings of the current study corroborate those of Foster and Ohta (2005) concerning negotiation of meaning. Foster and Ohta (2005) found that learners do not negotiate meaning
because of breakdowns in communication but they “see the students assisting each other in building a conversation in [second language]” (p. 422). The data for the present study show learners collaborating and using different tools to construct knowledge about L2. When they did not agree about a word or a structure or any other aspect of the target language, they engaged in negotiations not in fear that communication might break down but because of their willingness to use correct English. Most of the time, the students engaged in negotiations without any signs of a communication breakdown. Foster and Ohta (2005, p. 426) say that “a learner in a successful interaction is able and willing to focus on form without having first to be shunted into a communication problem”. The negotiations in my view are just part of task resolution. The learners were not worried that communication might break down. They were rather concerned to use correct forms in the target language. This denotes that task completion is a whole process where learners are concerned about both the content of the task as well as its form.

Moreover, this double focus on form and meaning adds further support to my previous claim that task resolution is unpredictable. When completing a task, a great number of aspects enter into play (such as task requirements, learners’ focus on content and form, time, etc.) that shape task completion. Those and other aspects make the outcome of a task difficult to predict.

Another finding that has been revealed by the data is the use of language to create social ties. Learners make comments and jokes, and share experiences without totally getting away from task completion. This is in line with the findings of researchers who work within a sociocultural perspective, namely that task resolution is a social enterprise (Brooks and Donato, 1994; Foster and Ohta, 2005; Mondada and Peparek Doehler, 2005). Data analyzed for this study further support that claim. They show several examples where learners make funny comments, exchange personal information about their daily lives, the languages
they know, the places they have been to, etc. A group of learners even assigned names to characters in a task to personify them.

Finally, learners attempt to cope with the situations of the tasks and identify themselves with them just as if they were resolving tasks in real life. They assist each other, negotiate and use all the tools at their disposal to resolve the tasks. The information they use to complete a task is akin to that in real-world situations. For example, they talk about building materials, prototypes of cars of the future, and other such information that one can talk about in a routine discussion. The tasks served as a context for learners to build knowledge about the target language. Tasks, in my opinion, could be compared to the games children play. Vygotsky (1978) says that play is important for children because it provides them with opportunities to learn through imitation and simulations. I think that tasks play the same role for adult learners. Teachers, in this case, have to implement linguistic tasks more often in order to optimize learning opportunities. Furthermore, they should grant more freedom to learners to explore all paths and create scaffolds that will facilitate their learning.

5. **Implications for teachers and materials designers**

Researchers and pedagogy specialists agree that the use of tasks in the ESL classroom offers learners opportunities to practise and develop the target language (Brown, 2007; Richards and Rodgers, 2001; Skehan, 2003). However, Richards and Rodgers (2001) believe that there has been "little documentation concerning [task-based L2 teaching] implications or effectiveness as a basis for syllabus design, materials development, and classroom teaching" (p. 224). By understanding what facilitates task resolution, the findings of the current study will hopefully shed some more light on task-based second language instruction. The findings of this study may inspire teachers and materials developers in several ways. From what the data have revealed, I will now try to relate the findings of this study to second language teaching. Some of the
suggestions have already been made by specialists and some others have emerged from the above discussion.

The data suggest that learners use various tools to resolve tasks. This means that learners have to be granted sufficient time to perform the tasks, especially when we know that the moves involved in task resolution help learners activate several processes simultaneously. The teachers could also reassure learners and encourage them to use all the tools they could obtain to complete the tasks. That may help learners who do not dare to ask questions and get involved in interactions to take more risks and ask their peers or the teacher for assistance when needed.

Teachers need to be available and ready to help learners at different stages of task accomplishment. Clarifying an instruction or supplying a word in English should not be viewed as doing the task for the learners. Rather, as shown by the analyzed data, the teachers are used by learners just like other tools, to overcome difficulties, understand items and move the tasks forward and construct knowledge about the L2. Learners do not ask the teacher systematically for help. They only resort to the teacher after such tools as peers, gestures, writing and others are exhausted.

The use of L1 is another aspect of task completion that teachers have to tolerate in the L2 classroom. The data have shown that learners use their native language to construct knowledge about the second language. So, as long as the L1 is not used systematically as the main language of communication during task completion, teachers have to accept it because it contributes to task performance. This does not mean that teachers have to encourage the use of L1 all the time but they should not ban its use altogether in the L2 classroom.

As far as form is concerned, the data have revealed that urging learners to use a specific structure does not always bring the desired results. Learners may
obey the instruction for some time, but as soon as the teacher goes away they focus on what they think is more important to them. Since many researchers believe that focus on form is important (Spada, 2006), teachers and materials designers should think about tasks where learners have to focus on target structures as part of task resolution. Story editing tasks such as the one used by Swain and Lapkin (2002) is a good example of a task where learners have to make decisions about language form as part of task completion. Moreover, materials developers may design tasks that will require learners to make decisions about target structures, such as what tense is suitable in a specific context or decide on a list of items to take to a specific place. This kind of task will engage learners in interactions about language form. Giving examples of target structures as part of task instructions could be another alternative to attract learners’ attention to form or vocabulary. For example, in a task where learners need to write an ending to a story, the teacher may say that learners have to use past tenses, such as, “The man opened the door and...” Such prompts may encourage and inspire learners to focus on past tenses.

The data have revealed that learners create scaffolds to help each other build new knowledge about the target language. One way of fostering scaffolding in the L2 classroom would be by grouping students of different levels to resolve tasks together. According to researchers, weak and advanced learners benefit equally from such collaborative work (Swain and Watanabe, 2007; Watanabe, 2008). Those researchers found that even more advanced learners benefit from collaborating with low level learners because that offers them opportunities to explain, repeat, search for words, moves that are believed to consolidate learning. Teachers could invite learners of higher level classes to complete collaborative tasks with lower level learners. They may also group weak and more competent students in the same classroom to work together on linguistic tasks.
6. Limitations of this study

I will now present the limitations of my study and the main obstacles that I had to overcome while carrying it out. As I mentioned previously, I depended on the teacher for data collection, and I did not design the tasks personally. As a result, sometimes I attended lessons without being able to record either because the teacher had to correct previous work or because she prepared written activities that I could not record. On some other occasions I could not record because learners who signed the consent letter to participate in the study were paired or grouped with learners who did not sign. In that case, for ethical reasons I did not record. This explains the fact that I attended a total of five lessons but I only recorded learners' interactions in three. The data could have been larger otherwise.

Moreover, the data for this study were only collected in one classroom. Therefore, I could not compare and see if a difference in context would affect task completion. However, many researchers who studied processes rather than product used small numbers of participants (Alegria de la Colina and Garcia Mayo, 2009; Kobayashi, 2003; Ohta, 1995; Pinter, 2006, 2007). A different classroom, in my view, is not so different a context and that could not cause drastic changes in tasks performance processes.

Another limitation of this study is that some passages in the data were not intelligible enough because of background noise. I listened to the recordings several times but some words were just not clear. Fortunately those were just short passages. Moreover, those could not affect data analysis because only some passages were selected for that purpose.

Furthermore, the presence of a researcher in a classroom always creates what is called the observer's paradox. That is to say, the learners are aware of the presence of the researcher and their behaviour during data collection sessions is
not totally natural. This may have affected the results of this study. That could be the reason why the learners spoke English almost exclusively during data collection sessions.

Some information about the participants was missing. For example, I did not have their age, the number of years they had studied English before the course, and their expectations from the course. This resulted in insufficient knowledge about the participants' abilities in English on my behalf. This information is relevant for a better understanding of the participants' motives during task completion. Therefore, the results of the study may be taken with some caution.

Some passages in the data analysis were not verified empirically, such as the effect of task completion on L2 development. The result is that some of the interpretations I made of the data could be wrong or flawed. However, I used those rather speculative interpretations because previous research (Ellis, Tanaka, and Yamazaki, 1994; Mackey, 1999), found that interactions cause L2 development.

Finally, some guidelines of the methods of analysis that were implemented to analyze the data for my study were not followed with all the rigour they needed. Even though I used such guidelines as using a different colour of print, brackets and italics to underline specific aspects of the participants' interaction in the verbatim, I did not include those in the extracts that were analyzed in this study. Those transcription guidelines would have added strength to the results of this study.

7. Suggestions for further research

This study has revealed several aspects of task performance which need to be further explored by future research. For example, future research may examine
the factors that affect learners' behaviours during task accomplishment, such as what factors cause some learners to ask overtly for assistance while others prefer to signify their need for assistance through hesitation and other strategies.

Another aspect that future research may investigate is whether the language that recurs in tasks is retained by learners over a long term. Researchers have already studied the effect of interactions on L2 development on the short term (Ellis, Tanaka, and Yamazaki, 1994; Mackey, 1999). However, those studies used a similar design, namely, the use of pre-tests and post-tests to show the amount of L2 that is retained after interactions. While it informs us about the rate of L2 that is learned, that design does not allow the researcher to understand what specific moves trigger learning and whether learners will retain the learned items for longer periods of time.

In this chapter I discussed the analyzed data, explained the implications of this study for ESL classroom practices and presented the limitations of the current study as well as the paths that may be explored by further research. The discussion has allowed me to bring additional elements in answer to the two research questions that were asked earlier in this study.

I have notably found that learners use all the tools that their environment offers them (eg. peers, the teacher, L1, L2, etc.) to complete the tasks. The different moves involved in task accomplishment as well as their impact on task completion and on L2 learning have been discussed.

In the above discussion I also explained the implications of this study for practitioners and materials designers. Some recommendations have been formulated about task design and task use in the L2 classroom.
CONCLUSION

This study is about the role of learners' verbal interventions in task completion. The study was inspired by my years of experience as a teacher of English as a second language. Based on a Vygotskian perspective, I attempted to shed light on learners' use of interventions to accomplish linguistic tasks in an English as a second language classroom. I think that a Vygotskian sociocultural theoretical framework is the most appropriate for this study because it permits the researcher to understand processes rather than products. In order to get a clear idea of the subject of this study, I reviewed several studies on learner interactions and task resolution.

In order to carry out this study, I attended five lessons of three hours each and recorded learners' speech while they performed oral tasks. The data were then transcribed and coded. Reading the transcripts several times has allowed me to identify interventions and categorize them. The data were then analyzed in order to understand how those interventions were used by learners in order to successfully complete the tasks.

A discussion of the analyzed data has allowed me to explain how the different interventions are used and how they contribute to task completion. The discussion has revealed that learners use all affordable tools in order to better understand task instructions and requirements and to resolve them. Whenever a problem arises, they negotiate and try different paths in order to move the tasks forward. For example, they use co-construction to create scaffolds that enable them to overcome difficulties, they repeat utterances, use hesitation and overt questioning to check for comprehension, and use their native language when they do not know the equivalent of an item in English.

The discussion has helped me identify ways in which this study could impact teaching practices and materials design. Some suggestions have been
made about how teachers may optimize learning by improving some aspects while implementing tasks in ESL classes. For example, learners have to be granted much freedom and time during task performance in order to activate the necessary processes that lead to language learning.

Finally, I presented the main limitations of this study, such as recording difficulties, and made some recommendations for further research. I described some of the obstacles I faced while carrying out this study. Finally, I described some of the paths that could be explored by future research.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

READING GRID
I. **Task understanding in peer interaction**

1. Metatalk

2. Repetition

3. Co-construction

4. Discuss teacher expectations

5. Check comprehension

II. **Task Accomplishment in peer interaction**

A. negotiating task definition

B. negotiating teacher expectations

C. sharing experiences

D. collaborative dialogue

E. rehearsing

F. peer-coaching

G. using L1 in negotiation of meaning

H. co-construction of utterances

I. self-correction

J. other-correction

K. repetition
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<td>L. feedback</td>
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<td>M. concerns about peer understanding</td>
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<td>N. self repair</td>
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APPENDIX B

ETHICS PERMISSION
Comité d’éthique de la recherche
Éducation et sciences sociales

Attestation de conformité
Le comité d’éthique de la recherche Éducation et sciences sociales de l’Université de Sherbrooke certifie avoir examiné la proposition de recherche suivante :

Les interventions verbales et leur effet sur l’accomplissement des tâches dans les interactions de paires et de groupes dans des classes d’anglais langue seconde

Atmane Bedjou
Étudiant, Maîtrise en sciences de l’éducation, Faculté d’éducation
Le comité estime que la recherche proposée est conforme aux principes éthiques énoncés dans la Politique institutionnelle en matière d’éthique de la recherche avec les êtres humains.

Membres du comité
André Balleux, président du comité, professeur à la Faculté d’éducation, département de pédagogie.
France Beauregard, professeure à la Faculté d’éducation, département d’enseignement au préscolaire et primaire
France Jutras, professeure à la Faculté d’éducation, département de pédagogie
Myriam Laventure, professeure à la Faculté d’éducation, Département de psychoéducation
Julie Myre-Bisaillon, professeure à la Faculté d’éducation, Département d’adaptation scolaire et sociale
Carlo Spallanzani, professeur à la Faculté d’éducation physique et sportive
Serge Striganuk, professeur à la Faculté d’éducation, Département de gestion de l’éducation et de la formation
Eric Yergeau, professeur à la Faculté d’éducation, Département d’orientation professionnelle
Micheline Loignon, membre représentante du public
Le présent certificat est valide pour la durée de la recherche, à condition que la personne responsable du projet fournisse au comité un rapport de suivi annuel, faute de quoi le certificat peut être révoqué.
Le président du comité,

André Balleux, 30 septembre 2010
APPENDIX C

CONSENT LETTER
Lettre d'information et de consentement à participer dans un projet de recherche

Invitation à participer dans un projet de recherche intitulé « Verbal interventions and their effect on task understanding and task accomplishment in pair and group interactions in English as a second language classrooms » sous la responsabilité de Atmane Bedjou, candidat à une maîtrise à la faculté d'éducation à l'université de Sherbrooke, Québec, Canada. Le projet est dirigé par Mme Marilyn Steinbach, PhD.

Ce document décrit un projet de recherche auquel vous êtes sollicités de participer. Le projet a pour objectif général de comprendre les processus d'interaction entre apprenantes et apprenants dans une classe d'anglais langue seconde (ALS).

Les objectifs spécifiques de cette recherche sont :

- Recenser les interventions verbales qu'utilisent les apprenantes et apprenants de l'ALS.

- Comprendre comment ces interventions aident à résoudre des activités.

Le chercheur sollicite votre consentement à être enregistrés pendant votre processus d'apprentissage. Le chercheur n'interviendra à aucun moment de votre apprentissage. Les données obtenues de ces enregistrements resteront strictement confidentielles. L'accès à ces données sera réservé uniquement au chercheur. Les noms des participantes et participants n'apparaitront nulle part dans les transcriptions ni dans l'analyse de ces données. Seuls seront mentionnés les codes qu'attribuera le chercheur aux participants pour fin d'analyse. Les résultats de cette étude seront publiés dans un mémoire de maîtrise à la faculté d'éducation de l'université de Sherbrooke. Les données seront détruites immédiatement après la soutenance du chercheur.

Votre participation à cette recherche est à titre volontaire. Vous avez le choix de décliner la participation à cette recherche ou de vous retirer à n'importe quelle étape de la collecte de données, sans préavis et sans faire l'objet d'aucune sanction. Par ailleurs, cette recherche n'affectera votre apprentissage que de façon très restreinte. Le chercheur sera le plus discret possible afin de ne pas déranger votre apprentissage.

Si vous avez des questions sur le projet vous êtes priés de communiquer avec Mr Atmane Bedjou à atmane.bedjou@usherbrooke.ca ou avec Mme Marilyn Steinbach à marilyn.steinbach@usherbrooke.ca ou par téléphone aux 819-821-
8000 61356. Si vous avez des questions concernant l’aspect éthique de ce projet, veuillez contacter. André Balleux, responsable du comité éthique à Andre.Balleux @usherbroke.ca ou par téléphone au 819-821-8000 62439.

J’atteste avoir lu et compris ce document sur le projet de recherche de Atmane Bedjou. J’atteste avoir compris les conditions, les risques et les avantages de ma participation. J’ai eu des clarifications à toutes les questions que j’ai soulevées. J’accepte de mon plein gré de participer à ce projet.

Nom et signature des participantes et participants

Nom: -------------------
Signature: -------------------
Date: -------------------

Nom et signature du chercheur

Nom: Atmane Bedjou.
Signature: -------------------
Date: -------------------
APPENDIX D

TASKS
Task 1:

How will the world be in 20 years?

Make predictions about transportation, food supplies, communications, housing and clothing.
The reports had been on the radio all day, though she hadn’t paid much attention to them. Some crazy man had escaped from the state asylum. They were calling him the Hook Man since he had lost his right arm and had it replaced with a hook. He was a killer, and everyone in the region was warned to keep watch and report anything suspicious. But this didn’t interest her. She was more worried about what to wear on her date.

After several consultation calls with friends, she chose a blue outfit in the very latest style and was ready and waiting on the porch when her boyfriend came to pick her up in his car. They went to a drive-in movie with another couple, then dropped them off and went parking in the local lover’s lane. The blue outfit was a hit, and she cuddled close to her boyfriend as they kissed to the sound of romantic music on the radio.

Then the announcer came on and repeated the warning she had heard that afternoon. An insane killer with a hook in place of his right hand was loose in the area. Suddenly, the dark, moonless night didn’t seem so romantic to her. The lover’s lane was secluded and off the beaten track. A perfect spot for a deranged mad-man to lurk, she thought, pushing her amorous boyfriend away.

“Maybe we should get out of here,” she said. “That Hook Man sounds dangerous.”

“Aren’t, c’mon babe, it’s nothing,” her boyfriend said, trying to get in another kiss. She pushed him away again.

“No, really. We’re all alone out here. I’m scared,” she said.

They argued for a moment. Then the car shook a bit, as if something...or someone...had touched it. She gave a shriek and said: “Get us out of here now!”

“Jeez,” her boyfriend said in disgust, but he turned the key and went chugging out of the lover’s lane with a screeching of his tires.

They drove home in stony silence, and when they pulled into her driveway, he refused to help her out of the car. He was being so unreasonable, she fumed to herself. She opened the door indignantly and stepped into her driveway with her chin up and her lips set. Whirling around, she slammed the door as hard as she could. And then she screamed.

Her boyfriend leapt out of the car and caught her in his arms. “What is it? What’s wrong?” he shouted. Then he saw it. A bloody hook hung from the handle of the passenger-side door.
Task 3
Review Exercise with Jean-Jacques Sempé Illustration

1. Who are these two and what do they do in life?

2. What are they doing in the picture?

3. How long have these two people known each other, where and how did they meet for the first time?

4. What are each of these two people thinking about and why?

5. What had happened before this picture was taken and what created the problem?

6. What is going to happen immediately after this picture and what will happen later on?

7. What would you do if you were in this same situation?

8. You are reporters and you show up on the scene after the picture was taken. You conduct a live report on what has been seen (use some passive voice)

Task 3 (continued)
Activity 2

TALKING ABOUT THE FUTURE
Be Going To and Will

OPENING TASK
Telling Your Future

Some people believe that you can see your future in the lines of your palm. Palm reading is the art of telling your future by looking at your palm. What is your opinion of palm reading?

STEP 1
Read the meanings connected with each line on page 30.

STEP 2
Use the information to make predictions about each person’s future.

STEP 3
Look at your partner’s palm. Make predictions about your partner’s future.

ANSWER KEY
Opening Task: Answers will vary. Sample response: Stroke will be friends with many different people.

Life Line:
- Does a line cross your life line? You will have a big change in your life. You are going to move, change schools or jobs, or marry.
- Does your life line split into two branches? Your life will be full of adventure.
- Does it bend towards your little finger? You are going to have a pleasant and quiet life.

Head Line:
- Does it go straight across? You will be a lawyer, a doctor, or a scientist.
- Does it curve down? You will be an artist, a musician, or a dancer.

Heart Line:
- Is it close to your heart line? You will have a few close friends.
- Is there a wide space between your heart and head lines? You will be friends with many different people.

Fate Line:
- Is it a straight downward line? You will achieve all your goals.
- Does it bend towards your first finger? You are going to be successful.