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Impact of Interpersonal Relations and Positioning on the Resolution of Conflicts in the EFL Classroom

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Abstract

This article is based on the author's doctoral thesis on the dynamics of interpersonal relations in the onsite classroom. Drawing on positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1999; Harré, 2015), Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2007) and informed by the focus on interaction in Douglas Fir Group's seminal paper (Douglas Fir Group (DFG), 2016), the research investigates how students position themselves and their classmates, the explanations for their choices, and how the dynamics of positioning and interpersonal relations affect their opportunities for language learning in group discussions. In this article, the researcher highlights the resolution of conflicts in different scenarios. The fluidity and overlap of positioning found in those interactions not only confirms the impact of interpersonal relations and positioning on resolving conflicts but also the provision and hindrance of students' opportunities for language learning occurring across contexts and time.

Introduction

The significance of interpersonal relations on human development and learning has been addressed in both the social perspective and in language education. The development of human beings as well as individual maturation and “communal forms of remembering, deciding, problem solving and so on” are all involved in interpersonal relations (Harré, 2015, p. 2). Accordingly, relations between individuals impact all social activities that support development in several dimensions. While the concept of relations from this social psychological perspective is used to explain social activities, in language education, the word *relationships* is used to underline its connection to learning in the classroom context, as stated by Breen, “social relationships in the classroom orchestrate what is made available for learning, how learning is done and what we achieve” (Breen, 1998, p. 119). Relationships between teacher and students in the class play a part in the learning process. Many researchers recognise the significance of relationships (Sato & Ballinger, 2016; Philp & Iwashita, 2013) or acknowledge that relationships play a role while students are performing tasks or engaging in specific incidents such as student disputes (Taguchi, 2007; Sato & Viveros, 2016; Toohey, 2001). Those researchers focused on the identification of fixed relationships built among students (such as classmates, friends, or peers) but were not attentive to how students perceive themselves to be interpersonally connected. The resolution of conflicts, which is one of the key research findings of this study, will be highlighted as it shows how the dynamics affect student interaction and their opportunities for language learning.

Framing Interaction and Language Learning in a Social Perspective

Several experts in the field have established that learning occurs at a point of interaction. Interaction is fundamental to learning, and researching interaction is remarkably similar to studying learning (Ellis, 2000). Language learning is not just about possessing linguistic knowledge; it is also about "doing," which involves a series or activity in which learners participate (Larsen-freeman, 2010, p.177). This statement implies that language learning occurs during interaction. Interaction is also a useful unit of analysis for describing how learning opportunities are supplied. While we cannot conduct research on how learning occurs within the brain of a

learner, we can observe, analyse, and evaluate what occurs during interaction (Walsh, 2011, p.182). It is thus reasonable to place an emphasis on interaction in a study of students' interpersonal relations.

Interaction is also a solid unit of analysis to explain how opportunities for learning are provided. In this study, interaction is identified and associated with language learning in multilingual contexts within a transdisciplinary framework for research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (DFG, 2016). The sociocultural theory of Vygotsky (Vygotsky,1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), which theorizes learning through social contact, is then used to explain and emphasize social interaction in the EFL classroom. This is followed by an analysis of peer interaction research that is a) classroom-based and b) takes a social perspective on students' interactions and language learning opportunities. Finally, positioning, which is drawn from Rom Harré's positioning theory (Harré, 1999; Harré, 2015), is explained, and examined before being used as an analytic tool and component of the framework. While the first two viewpoints emphasize the strong relationship between interaction and language development, the third perspective, positioning from positioning theory, elaborates how interactions are constructed on the basis of people's rights and duties.

The sociocultural perspective illuminates the strong relationship between interaction with one's social environment and cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). This approach is employed to examine how students' backgrounds and reactions to group activities affect their learning opportunities. For instance, students interact through assisting one another during pair/group work. When students assist one another, whether by offering assistance or requesting assistance, relationships are established. By applying a sociocultural lens to the issue, the researcher gains a better understanding of students' connections in respect of the participants' status and the negotiated interaction within those relationships.

To emphasize the significance of interaction in multilingual environments and language learning in the seminal study by Douglas Fir Group (DFG, 2016), the author applied a transdisciplinary framework for SLA. In accordance with this theory, learning is a continual process that begins at the level of interaction (DFG, 2016, p. 24). While engaging with others, learners use both cognitive and emotional capacities to shape and be shaped by the specific multilingual contexts of their actions. As

interaction was studied in a Thai EFL classroom, in which Thai and non-Thai students collaborated in small groups to complete tasks and establish connections, it was discovered that English was not the only language utilized to formulate meaning, complete tasks, and build relationships. Students' relationships are mediated in a more complex way in a multilingual environment because of the additional facets negotiated through language(s).

Relationships of students in an EAL classroom are frequently addressed through peer interaction research, which demonstrates how peers' interactions influence language production when they discuss about language. Peer interaction researchers examine interactions between students as peers, but they mostly concentrate on student interaction that occurs outside of the teacher's oversight (Philp & Iwashita, 2013). This definition of peer relationships is unclear in details concerning how students develop interpersonal connections in order to become peers. In other respects, the process by which those connections are developed and how they affect students' interactions is not made explicit. Additionally, the importance of relationships that is implied by the word "peer" is not foregrounded.

Several studies on peer interaction have focused on students working in pairs or groups; however only some have highlighted the importance of relationships. Foster and Ohta (2005) discovered that when students struggle with a task, their negotiation of relationships becomes more significant in pair or group interaction. The researchers investigated how young adult native and non-native English speakers assisted one another in completing a task by self-correcting and encouraging one another to continue speaking when communication breaks down. Foster and Ohta assert that these shifting interactions between pupils facilitate language development and learning. Another instance involves student disagreements. Toohey (2001) examined disagreements between two young learners of different countries and found that while disagreements allowed possibilities for one student to negotiate meaning or position of power, they limited opportunities for the other student. The two learners demonstrated their power and competency through domination and subordination, which influenced their behaviours in English with one another. Participation in activities and conversation was decreased for the one who assumed a submissive manner. To elaborate on the resolution of conflicts, the investigation of the dynamics of the interpersonal relations

may provide more insight into the impact of students' relationships on the issue. This approach will help expand peer interaction research and widen the relationships dimension to encompass a more nuanced examination of peer interaction.

Many researchers have analysed peer interaction using predetermined categories, largely ignoring complicated interactions, power, proficiency, and personal alignment. Along with grouping students with different levels of proficiency, some researchers have examined the patterns of interaction between students in order to ascertain their language production when discussing language (Choi & Iwashita, 2016; Kim & MacDonough, 2008; Sato & Viveros, 2016; Watanabe & Swain, 2007; Young & Tedick, 2016). Researchers studying peer interaction who focused on non-language-related episodes also found that social discursive moves also contribute to production of language. Martin-Beltrán et al. (2016) discovered that students created an environment conducive to collaboration in order to finish the job as a group talking about language. As a group, those students generated non-language-related subjects or social discursive moves to work, demonstrating that students provide themselves with additional opportunities to use language. According to this peer interaction research, interactions between students are inextricably linked to language output. Additionally, it is an invitation to shift the focus from describing what students accomplish to describing how students interact interpersonally in order to provide opportunities for language learning.

Positioning concepts and the dynamics of interpersonal relations

Positioning is used as a third perspective in this thesis to elaborate how and why students' relations are negotiated in group work by (re)distributing students demands or requests of others for action and what others must do. In addition, it highlights the dynamic nature of interpersonal relations. In positioning theory, individuals do not have equal rights and duties (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & Van Langenhove, 2010; Van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). Certain individuals are assigned a greater right to act or right to perform more duties than others. This unequal distribution implies a predetermined set of interpersonal relationships. Positioning theory is centred on the distribution of rights and duties (Herbel-Eisenmann et al., 2015). What other people must do

for someone is a *right*, whereas what someone must do for others is a *duty* (Moghaddam et al., 2008). Individuals do not have equal access to rights and duties, which explains why they act or behave differently toward others. Attempts to assert rights and obligations to speak and act can be accomplished by the individuals' actions and speech. Positioning then refers to the actions

Positioning theory (Harré and Van Langenhove, 1999; Harré, 2012, 2015) is used to examine how two or more people distribute rights and duties granted or ascribed by others across time. The (re) distribution indicates that individuals' interpersonal relations are negotiated and altered. This is known in this article as *the dynamics of interpersonal relations*. To illustrate this point in a workplace context, an individual who is assigned as the manager asserts the right to manage a meeting by allocating speaking time to others and listening while others speak. To regain control of the meeting, the individual must interrupt or change the subject or engage in repositioning. This illustration of (re)positioning demonstrates that positioning can take on both static and dynamic characteristics. While the manager's assigned position is fixed, the ascribed position is susceptible to change when rights and duties are redistributed. This dynamic feature of positioning is advantageous for tracking changes in student interaction during group work at various points in time, rather than as a single snapshot or episode of interaction.

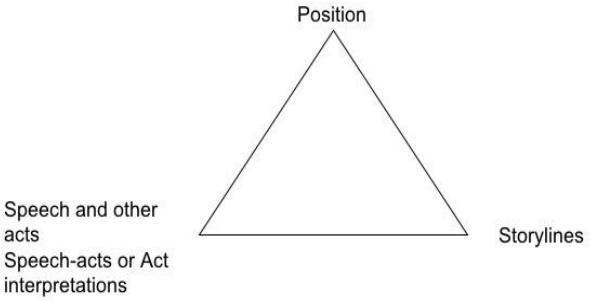
In addition to rights and duties, positioning theory provides several key concepts for comprehending positioning in a variety of situations. In the students' resolution of conflicts, the positioning triangle as the theory's foundation and positioning of self and others are explained. These concepts are critical for discussing how and why students' relations are formed and change to resolve conflicts.

Positioning Triangle

The investigation of positioning is centered on the dynamic nature of social action in a variety of contexts. To capture this dynamic nature, a positioning triangle (or triangles) is proposed (Harré and Moghaddam, 2003). The three components of the positioning triangle contribute to understanding how rights and duties are distributed (see Figure 1). The elements that are connected are referred to as *position(s), storyline(s)*, and *act interpretations*.

Figure 1

The Positioning Triangle



The three elements are inextricably linked. When one of the elements changes, the others also change. The interconnectedness of all the elements will be explored in the following section as it is this that makes positioning a dynamic and cyclical process.

A position is defined as "a cluster of short-term disputable rights, obligations and duties." (Harré, 2012, p. 193). The word 'disputable' implies that a position can be contested, accepted, or rejected through communication. Additionally, a position is ephemeral due to its dynamic character. It exists during a social episode, such as a debate or meeting, and changes as other components of positioning (storylines and act interpretations) alter. As a result, positioning is oriented on a given time and situation.

A storyline is defined as "a loose cluster of narrative conventions" (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). Individuals require storylines in order to position or reposition themselves in an ongoing conversation in order to assert their rights. Storylines are derived from speakers' histories and backgrounds, as well as reconstructed throughout continuing talks, bridging the past, present, and future (Hirvonen, 2016; Slocum & Langenhove, 2003). They are utilized to provide context or hints for positioning at a certain point in time and from that point forward. For instance, if one wishes to position oneself as an expert in a group in order to assert the right to speak, one must create a narrative or show one's background to the group in order to convince the others of their expertise.

Storylines provide context for positioning in this way (Slocum & Langanhove, 2004).

Positions and storylines are subject to be challenged or rejected (Moghaddam, Henley, and Harré, 2008). People express their acceptance or rejection of others' positioning through actions and acts in the process of act interpretation. An action is described as "a meaningful, intended performance, i.e., speech or gesture," but an act is defined as "the social meaning of an action" (Harré, 2015, pp. 196). The contrast between act and action helps to explain situations in which a speaker asserts that what he or she said was meaningful and meant, but what others 'interpreted' as inconsistent with her or his goal. For example, a person intending to position herself or himself as an expert may use narration to create a storyline that aids in expert positioning, but others may reject it because the storyline does not align with what they intended, or the language used in positioning does not align with an expert position at this point. This misalignment of action and act plays an important part in the acceptance or rejection of a position and/or storyline.

The positioning triangle, which explains the non-static nature of positioning, was used to investigate and explain the dynamics of relations in EFL classrooms in order to comprehend the variety of positions used to complete group work, the storylines that influence positioning, and the use of language to construct or maintain those positions. Descriptions of the positioning triangle's elements provide more insight into how those relations evolve over time and between contexts.

Positioning of Self and Others

Positioning is a social phenomenon that occurs in both directions. When individuals position themselves (reflexive positioning), others are simultaneously positioned (interactive positioning). Dichotomies of positioning exist between the self and others (Harré, 2012). Those dichotomies, such as expert/novice, experienced/inexperienced, or master/servant, can be accepted, rejected, or altered, shaping positioning dynamics. As previously mentioned, people do not always accept how others position them, and may reject one another's positioning and negotiate to reclaim their rights and duties. Harré & Van Langenhove (2010) classified a variety of modes of positioning, but in respect of

students' resolving conflicts, the intention of positioning offers a plausible explanation.

Although individuals conduct work in accordance with their rights and duties, they are more conscious of their intentional positioning of self and others in order to assert additional sets of rights and duties. There are four subcategories of intentional positioning. 1) deliberate self-positioning; 2) forced self-positioning; 3) deliberate positioning of others; and 4) forced positioning of others (Harré, 2012). During conscious positioning of oneself and others, individuals may assert the right to speak, referring to their point of view or experience to represent who they are to others. They may position themselves and others by using the organization's or authority's regulations in the forced positioning of the self and others. Individuals position themselves in an ongoing conversation (e.g., deliberation), relying on pre-given positions (e.g., group leader) which are assigned by the institution. The transition from given positions to intentional positions implies that positioning is dynamic and context-dependent. In the EFL classroom context, positioning can be investigated through words in group discussions, and intention can be examined through interview transcripts.

Positioning theorists assert that self and other positioning is a discursive practice influenced by two types of force: social forces and illocutionary forces. The actions necessary to carry out duties are social forces that are significant in a specific context (Harré & Moghaddam 2003, pp. 5–6). To be accepted by others, the language used to execute duties must conform to the rights associated with the position. Meaningful discursive practices are guided by illocutionary force and prelocutionary effect for individuals who position themselves or are positioned by others. Every action that individuals perform generates a variety of social meanings or positioning acts, and those acts have the potential to alter the storyline. Illocutionary force is a performative action, such as an inquiry, a command, or communication. The prelocutionary effect is a reaction to an illocutionary force, such as an answer, denial, or counter-argument. These forces influence storylines and positions, as well as being influenced by them. Act interpretations in the positioning triangle illustrate how using language unequally distributes rights and duties amongst people.

With extensive descriptions of students' backgrounds, the sociocultural perspective and interaction in the DFG framework were used

to analyse students' relations. Positioning changes were tracked in order to understand the dynamics of relations. This article attempts to illuminate students' resolution of conflicts through the analysis of positioning and interpersonal relations.

Research Methodology

An in-depth description of student interactions and group discussions is required to better understand student resolutions of conflicts in EFL classrooms. Context is the most essential variable in describing social phenomena (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013). A full explanation of how changing contexts affect individual or social experiences is essential when the contexts change over time (e.g., students participating in different group discussions). Hood's broad concept of context emphasised the importance of circumstances linked to changes in student relationships (Hood, 2009). In this case, detailed context descriptions illustrate the impact of student positioning and relations.

This classroom longitudinal case study helps to understand student positioning and relations over time. Case studies also provide an in-depth explanation of a social phenomenon through one instance across time (Nunan and Bailey, 2009; Yin, 2011). This strategy was used to fully grasp the changing dynamics of student relations. The data was collected over a 15-week period, with a focus on six focal students and eight consecutive 8-week group talks. Throughout the in-class observation and video-audio recording sessions, varied resolutions of conflicts emerged and expanded across contexts. The focus is on student interaction in unsupervised group discussions, i.e., without the teacher presence. Data for studying student-student interaction derived from group discussions.

Throughout this article, peers and non-peers are referred to; however, *peer* in this article is defined differently from the *peer* of peer interaction research as the focus is on negotiated relations and other dimensions of relationships including familiarity and group cohesion. Group interviews and classroom observations were used to determine who was a peer and who wasn't. Peers are people who knew each other before class commenced and socialized outside of it. Non-peers are students who did not know each other prior to the class and whose interactions with classmates were primarily course related. Although this study's definition of peers differs from that used in peer interaction

research, the distinction is critical in understanding the dynamics between peers and non-peers.

Research Contexts

The study was conducted at a university in Bangkok, Thailand, during a mandatory postgraduate course in an English Language Teaching (ELT) program. The MA in ELT is a part-time master's program with weekend classes. English is the language of instruction. Each class meets weekly for three hours over the course of a sixteen-week semester. Students in this curriculum consist of both Thai and non-Thai, working as office employees, teachers, and educators on weekdays. The class allowed the students to discuss subjects in small groups without teacher intervention, a scenario the researcher intended to observe.

The class included educators, office employees, and new graduates. Their ages ranged from 23 to 40 years. The class consisted of seven males and twenty-two females. Two of the males were non-Thai nationals.

Four Thai female students and two non-Thai male students were recruited as focal participants in Week 3, the first week of group discussion. This meant they would receive particular consideration throughout the in-depth data collection of their interactions. The following criteria were used to select these students: a) their consent to participate in the study; b) their interaction in class; and c) the manageable size of the data. All focal participants consented to sharing private information and experiences throughout the class. Each of the focal participants interacted differently in the classroom, which was an aspect of consideration. Additionally, the observed students were manageable in regard to number. The researcher was able to monitor interactions in detail throughout the 180 minutes of class. Observations were conducted and notes were taken on classroom activities, as well as students' interactions with their peers and the lecturer during the first two weeks of the session. These six students came from diverse social backgrounds and professional experiences, which aided in the analysis of the interpersonal resources they used in group discussion. Furthermore, these students maintained a variety of relationships with their peers and non-peers in class, adding depth and breadth to classroom interaction.

Data Collection methods

The main data source was student interaction in group discussion without the teacher's presence. This was later transcribed into texts. Group and individual interviews were then conducted and classroom observation notes analysed for further triangulation.

Group discussion

Topics in group discussions were aimed to aid students, especially those who worked full-time and had less time to prepare. These discussions were also meant to strengthen students' sense of ownership of their education. This was the main learning activity for the data collection.

The subjects discussed were from the eight-chapter course booklet. Each student conducted two group discussions, each on a different chapter. The chapter leader was the student who led the conversation. Each week, chapter leaders produced a quiz based on the topic. The course's first two weeks covered what and how to run a group discussion. Students formed their own groups, which remained constant from week to week. Because each group could only have one chapter leader, groups were disrupted and rearranged during the course.

Since it was an SLA course and not a language lesson, the lecturer allowed both English and Thai in discussion groups. Observations revealed that the group with non-Thai participant always used English throughout, while the others consisting only of Thai students either used English only or mixed between two languages.

While students could form a group with any chapter leader, they frequently chose to join with their peers. Peers established easily formed groupings. Students who arrived late eagerly joined these groups. Non-peers had no such advantages. All groups had at least two peers and no groups formed with only non-peers.

Data Analysis methods

Because positioning theory focuses on the ability and capacity to analyse social phenomena through positioning, the ability and capacity to employ language in positioning are not emphasized. To apply positioning

theory to the EFL classroom context, a study of positioning through language use was used to illustrate how positioning changes over time and contexts. The linguistic choices made to define interactions and classroom learning environments as contexts aided in identifying how positionings evolved. However, the investigation of language use must be broadened across contexts to capture the dynamics of positioning. The storyline, one of the positioning triangle's components, was reconstructed to expand the breadth of language use in context over time. Students' positionings and the language they used to place themselves within the same theme were examined over time, together with the major storyline of each focal student, to gain a better understanding of how positioning evolved.

While group discussion transcription is the initial component of the data analysis, student interviews are the starting point for analysing and triangulating the data sources. The classification of peers and non-peers was also derived from the group and individual interviews, including the relevant characteristics of how students were socially connected to each other in the group and in the class.

To advance the positioning theory in the fields of language education and applied linguistics, the allocation of rights and responsibilities were allocated among students, as well as the coding procedure used to investigate the obtained data, which is based on Saldaña's coding principles (Saldaña, 2016). Coding excerpts of the interview and group discussion transcripts for further analysis of language use and positioning is the core method of the analysis in this study. Rather than capturing a static set of novice/expert interactions, this data-driven coding for positioning captured the positioning of novice/expert, novice/novice, expert/expert, and novice to expert that emerged over time, implying the dynamics of students' positioning. These dynamics are evident not only in classroom group discussions, but also outside the classroom. As a result, investigating them from the researchers' standpoint alone is problematic. To provide a complete picture of such interactions from the students' perspective, storylines connecting students positioning are drawn and triangulated with the transcription of group discussions and observation notes. The descriptions of students' positioning and the dynamics are consistent with students' judgments and the aim of this study.

Results and Discussions

The collected data sources were classified into five distinct themes - *Task Solidarity, Individual Support, Expertise, Power,* and *Social Distance*. These themes emerged from the data and, with reference to the existing literature, aided in the comprehension of the positioning characteristics, namely fluidity, overlap, and multi-directionality. This article summarizes key topics and the ways in which students' group discussions characterize their positionings to the conflict resolutions.

Storylines were constructed from excerpts of the interview scripts of two focal students and their group members were used for overarching positioning of the focal students. The focal students were Grace, a female Thai student with her peers, and Cheng, a male non-Thai student. This storyline captured how Grace and Cheng positioned themselves in group discussions as well as the reasons why they did so. Grace's storyline addressed a *group cohesion* of peers, which promoted collaborative learning and provided opportunities for peers to help each other. Grace and her peers had known each other since the orientation session and sat next to each other in every course for which they enrolled. They formed a discussion group immediately following the instructor's assignment. They communicated with each other both inside and outside the classroom via instant messenger. With this cohesiveness of peers, they provided themselves with opportunities to speak in their peer group rather than in non-peer groups. They stated that peer assistance was necessary when they worked together on group or individual work. In the group discussion, this cohesion provided opportunities for Grace as a group leader and her peers as group members to help each other manage the discussion. Regarding Cheng's storyline, contributions to group discussions provided opportunities to act and speak for everyone whether they were peers or non-peers. Cheng rejected the instructor's distribution of the rights and duties of chapter leaders and re-distributed those rights and duties to classmates who participated in his discussion group and the group in which he participated. From the observation notes, he was the only focal student who both asked the most questions and had the longest conversations with the instructor and other classmates following the group discussion. These distinctive positionings of the two focal students shaped their talk group discussions and their resolutions of conflicts.

Mitigation and Elaboration as Conflict Resolutions between Peers

The two qualities of positioning, i.e., overlap and fluidity, are connected in how peers resolve conflicts between them. While overlapping positions refer to students simultaneously taking up two or more positions during group discussions, fluid positioning refers to students changing positions over time. Overlaps in positioning occur when the chapter leader's/group members' rights and duties do not conform to the current conversation. Thus, another position is taken up while the allotted position to speak or act is preserved. The chapter leader's positioning, which might overlap with emerging positions, can be accomplished through questions and statements. Extract 1 shows how students resolve conflicts by mitigating and elaborating the discussed topic with the overlapped positions.

Extract 1

Mitigation and elaboration of statements to resolve conflicts between peers

1. Jib:	So a LOT of schools in Thailand I think it's teacher-centred.
2. Grace:	And grammatical rules
3. Jib:	Right. (0.3) And how can we set the natural setting like that?
4. Grace:	Immersive programme มั้ง คิดว่า (Perhaps. I think.). It's one way to help. We can implement it at school, and everything is in English.
5. Jib:	I think it's for international schools.
6. Grace:	No. Even, even the cafeteria should be selling things in English, right?
7. Jib:	(h)
8. Grace:	So it should be a normal school to do something like that, otherwise you have to be at the theatre or you have to watch movies all the time and not leave the room, right? (0.8) But I suggest students should, should go abroad at least once or twice. They're gonna find something more because it's a. It's a
9. Jib:	I understand. Students will learn a lot from study abroad. Not many students have opportunities like that.

Overlap positioning provides opportunities for language use to all students in the group discussion, regardless of whether they've been assigned to speak. Jib's positioning of a follower overlapped with that of an information seeker (Turn 3) because she needed Grace, a chapter leader, to explain more about how to set up a learning environment for children. In fact, she did not have the right to do so because she was a follower whose duty was to listen to the chapter leader's statements. Grace assumed multiple positions simultaneously to answer Jib's question, which was beyond her assigned position, i.e. a task manager to lead the discussion for the completion of the task (Task Solidarity), and an expert to show her opinion and knowledge on the topic (Expertise) (Turn 4 and 8). The disagreement occurred when Jib stated that implementing English

only is for international schools (Turn 5), and Grace objected (Turn 6). Despite this, Jib mitigated the disagreement by laughing (Turn 7) and closing the social distance between them (Social Distance). Grace took another turn to elaborate on the idea of using English to reserve the right to speak as a chapter leader and expert on the topic (Turn 8). At this point, it was clearly seen that the conflict between them was ignored as Jib accepted Grace's positioning of expert but raised another point regarding the language learning setting (Turn 9). The two peers did not prolong the conflict but used language to mitigate and elaborate on the discussed topic through overlap positionings.

Interruption and Reinforcement as Conflict Resolution Between Peers and Non-peers

Overlap positioning in combination with fluidity of positioning played a major part in the resolutions of conflicts between peers and non-peers in the theme of Individual Support, in which students assist their peers in continuing to speak throughout group discussions. Extract 2 shows how the peers, i.e., Grace, Jib, and Lux, resolved conflict with a non-peer, i.e., Cheng, in a group discussion.

Extract 2

1. Grace:	I don't think that if we master something, we're going to have it forever, right? I don't think that. I don't think that.
2. Jib:	I agree with you Grace.
3. Cheng:	No no no it should.
4. Jib, Grace:	Really?
5. Cheng:	Yeah, memo memorize is one thing [or learning is one thing. Acquire is something really different.
6. Grace:	Buzz (loud, incomprehensible sound)
7. Jib:	NO.
8. Lux:	No, but I think English is like I think it's like memorize and like learning and everything uh so if some vocabulary, that we have it.
9. Grace:	You have to memorize first and then you understand it.

In Extract 2, Grace and her peers interrupted Cheng and reinforced her peers to resolve conflicts about the mastery of language in comparison with other skills. The positioning of group members overlapped with reinforcing peers when Jib agreed with Grace, and Grace recast Lux's statement (Turns 2 and 9 respectively). They also coordinated and changed their position from reinforcing peers to interrupters to disagree with Cheng's statement (Turns 4 and 7) and to allow Lux to take over as a reinforced peer and chapter leader by shifting the statement's aim to interruption and reinforcement. This fluid positioning is an example of reinforcement in the Individual Support theme, in which peers negotiate encouragement and reinforcement to assist peers in continuing to speak, disagreeing with non-peers, and resolving conflicts.

Interpersonal Dynamics across Contexts

The interpersonal relations expanded across contexts. The resolutions of conflicts between Grace, her peers and Cheng, which occurred in a small group (Extract 2) also recurred in the classroom presentation. This characteristic was traced by investigating the same positionings between Grace, her peers and Cheng three weeks after the first conflict (Extract 2). Extract 3 illustrates how those dynamics impacted how the conflicts were resolved.

Extract 3

Interpersonal dynamics across contexts

1. Grace:	But if you have nothing to say (quietly talks to Lux and Jib)
2. Jib:	Uh huh มั่ว (*mess up*)
3. Grace:	Uh. มั่ว (*mess up*)
4. Cheng:	And what else have you observed? She observed that instruction is complex. I observed that instruction is cognitive. So what else have you observed? (Looking away from Grace)
5. Jib:	Like we said earlier, the students who is ah attend this class have a very good background knowledge of the target language, so that's why they ah can can answer
6. Grace:	Yeah, say something from the the
7. Jib:	If you. If the students can erm don't have the background knowledge of the target language, they cannot [answer. And they will keep silent
8. Grace:	Uh participate in the
9. Cheng:	Right. Yeah. The students might keep silent. True.

Peers created a private space to coordinate and position themselves to disagree with non-peers and resolve conflicts during the classroom presentation. In Extract 3, a private space between Grace and her peers provided opportunities to disprove Cheng's statement on the topic of background knowledge and learning. In other words, they rejected Cheng's position as an expert. This private space was the moment when Grace talked to her peers in a soft voice, critiquing and evaluating Cheng's statement in Thai as มั่ว (*Mua* - translated as mess up), positioning themselves as disagreeing non-peers (Turns 1–3). When Cheng requested responses from other students in the class by asking questions, Jib interrupted him with new information about learner's background knowledge, agreed with by Grace in the private space (Turn 5) and took another turn to explain her point (Turn 7). Grace continued supporting Jib with statements (Turns 6 and 8). The use of the subject "we" (Turn 5) signalled coordination and a contribution to the disagreement from her peers. Cheng finally approved the statements made by Grace and her peers', and the conflict was resolved (Turn 9). The positioning acts of peers, coordinating peers, disagreeing non-peers, supporting peers and experts overlapped. As can be seen, peers have a private space to themselves. In that private space, they coordinate to disagree with non-peers, and in the public space they provided themselves with opportunities for using English to resolve conflicts.

The right and duties of peers and non-peers are even more unequally distributed over time. Students allowed their peers to take turns to explain their points with minimal disagreement between them (Extract 1). However, the dynamics changed when disagreement and conflict with non-peers occurred. Peers used more interruptions, negations, assertions and recasts to coordinate and resolve disagreements and conflicts with non-peers across contexts (Extracts 2 and 3). Both peers and non-peers gained more opportunities to participate in group discussions and converse.

The evolution of positioning was explored in group discussions through extended and longer conversational turns. These shifts were more pronounced when positions were contested, as in conflicts or struggles. Disagreements between students occurred when their respective positions and storylines were challenged or rejected. Students who have the ability to use language to reposition themselves make their points, coordinate with peers, and argue with non-peers. The challenge or

rejection of positioning changed the dynamic relations and provided unequal opportunities for using English.

Opportunities for Language Learning Through Resolutions of Conflicts

The interpersonal dynamics between peers and non-peers provided opportunities for using English across contexts. The dynamics between Grace, her peers, and Cheng, which influenced their English use, are in line with Storylines 1 and 2. Grace and her peers accommodated a group cohesion to negotiate disagreements and resolve conflicts with non-peers. Cheng also gained opportunities for using English as students who participated in his group used more English statements to explain and discuss the topic in group discussions, although he was a non-peer.

Prior to group discussions, students developed their positions and language. Two main types of language use were identified in this thesis that had an effect on the dynamics: frequent/elaborated turns and the use of Thai. Based on the interview data, a focal student prepared statements to provide additional explanations and to elaborate on their views with disagreeing non-peers with whom they had previously communicated. Throughout the discussion, the student aided or assisted other peers by interrupting, contradicting, or disagreeing with non-peers. Preparation for the classroom discussions provided them with more opportunities for using language and interaction.

Students' language use increased as a result of overlaps and fluid positioning in turn-taking and language choice. Students were given opportunities to use a variety of language options, including statement and question in a variety of functions such as recast (to repeat the idea of others), interrupt (limit the other's turn), support (provide the other's turn), and disagree (to disprove other's idea). Although the students' linguistic choices were limited, their flexible and overlapping positioning enabled them to employ language for a number of goals.

Implications to the EFL classroom

At a postgraduate level, students should be advised how positioning could affect their language use in the classroom, how they could utilize the language to provide opportunities to exchange opinions, and how they could choose the appropriate register in conversation to achieve effective

communication. At an undergraduate level or lower, the assignment of duties and positions in collaborative or cooperative learning could be more flexible. The students should be advised to assume various positions in different group activities rather than assume fixed roles. Shifting positions while conducting group discussions will provide more opportunities for language learning for everyone in the group.

Conclusion

The investigation of interpersonal relations and positioning between students in the EFL classroom illustrated the dynamics between peers and non-peers and their impact on student opportunities for learning English. The analysis of students' group discussions revealed that conflicts between peers and non-peers were resolved differently. Disagreement among peers was settled by mitigation and elaboration of the talk to resolve the conflict. Disagreements among peers and non-peers, however, were settled by discussion, argument, and disagreement. These conflict settlements indicated that students' shifting positions created the dynamic of interpersonal relations and provided more opportunities for using English through the (re)distribution of rights and duties than the fixed role assigned by the instructor.

About the Author

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