

Individual Paper Session 7
Social-cultural theory and Processing
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Talk about Language: A Fillip for Language Learning?

David Woodfield
University of Otago Language Centre
david.woodfield@uolc.ac.nz

Talk builds knowledge. Dialogue is a tool through which knowledge is co-constructed. The above statements reflect a socio-cognitive understanding of how we learn. From a socio-cognitive perspective, language may be learned through *talking about it*. This assertion has been made by Donato, Swain, Ohta and other researchers who have a socio-cognitive frame of reference. These researchers have carefully observed student talk about language. They have identified instances within it in which learners appear to come to realizations about their target language. They have then looked at later instances of language use to see whether this new knowledge about language has been maintained.

While researchers have been clearly able to show the co-construction of knowledge during talk about language, the findings regarding whether this knowledge is durable have not been so persuasive. This is the issue I address in this study.

In an ESL class which I met with for 90 hours, each day I noted down student questions and my responses to them. On a weekly basis I created written 'post-tests' to assess whether my students could identify the correct usage of the forms I had discussed with them. Each of the items in the tests was motivated by a particular exchange about a particular language issue with a particular student. In analysing the tests I was thus interested in a student's awareness of the specific forms he or she had queried me on.

In the tests from week three, I reintroduced some of the forms students had broached in earlier weeks. These items served as delayed post-tests. Through using post-tests and delayed post-tests I am able to reveal whether talk about language leads to a greater knowledge about language.