# UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

## Fostering oral interaction in the EFL classroom

van Batenburg, E.S.L.

*Citation for published version (APA):*
van Batenburg, E. S. L. (2018). *Fostering oral interaction in the EFL classroom: Assessment and effects of experimental interventions*

# Chapter 6

Summary and general discussion

6

The concluding chapter of this dissertation briefly reviews the background to the research project, after which the set-up and results of each study are summarized. This is followed by a discussion of the results, suggestions for future research and implications for educational practice.

## Background to the project

This research project explored ways to develop EFL learners' ability and affect in EFL oral interaction, defined as the ability to achieve communicative goals, and conveying and understanding communicative intent in interaction with others in real time (cf. Celce-Murcia, 2007). Oral interaction is generally considered to depend on speakers' linguistic knowledge, their ability to use this knowledge in real time, their ability to do so appropriately in specific contexts and their ability to employ strategies aimed at addressing potential communication problems (e.g. Canale, 1983a; 1983b; Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1995; Celce-Murcia, 2007). The project focused specifically on Dutch pre-vocational learners enrolled in the advanced Business & Administration track. Developing strong ability in EFL oral interaction is indispensable for this group of learners, who need to interact in English with non-Dutch customers in their future jobs. EFL teachers in the vocational programmes, however, reported that pre-vocational learners' accuracy, fluency and confidence levels lag behind upon entry in vocational education (Jansma & Pennewaard, 2014). EFL teachers, meanwhile, indicated that they lacked the methodological tools both for developing and assessing their learners' oral skills when faced with large classes and limited contact time (Fasoglio, 2015; Jansma & Pennewaard, 2014).

Prior to the start of this project, no substantial research into the effects of specific instructional programmes on improving EFL learners' oral skills had been conducted, and research on the assessment of interactional ability had mainly focused on obstacles in testing individual ability. Thus, our understanding of ways to develop learners' ability and affect in EFL oral interaction through instruction was limited at the start of this project, and there were no set methods for assessing individual interactional abilities. This research project aimed to address these issues by evaluating the opportunities for developing pre-vocational learners' oral interactional ability in Dutch EFL coursebooks, investigating what instructional approaches would best foster both the development of pre-vocational learners' oral interactional ability and affect, and exploring ways to assess individual ability in EFL oral interaction.

# Summary of results

## *Study 1: Evaluating opportunities for developing pre-vocational learners' oral interactional ability in Dutch EFL coursebooks*

The starting point of this dissertation was an analysis of the curricula currently used in the advanced pre-vocational track. Research that analyzes activities that foster learners' interactional ability in course materials had been scarce. Some more general materials analyses (e.g. Burns & Hill, 2013; Tomlinson, 2012; 2013) had demonstrated that course materials tend to focus mainly on developing language knowledge, and favour the use of form-focused tasks (e.g. pre-scripted dialogues in which speech is prepared beforehand and speakers' roles are prescribed and known to the learners). Practicing the use of language knowledge in meaning-focused tasks (e.g. information gap tasks that engage learners in interaction in order to exchange the information required for successful task completion) are typically underrepresented, as is the instruction and practice of interactional strategies (Bueno-Alastuey & Luque Agulló, 2015a; Dörnyei & Thurrell,1994; Faucette, 2001). No research was available that sheds light on the contexts of use in which oral interaction practice is situated in course materials, i.e., in the personal, public, occupational and educational contexts identified by the Council of Europe (2001).

For the purpose of this study, three coursebooks from Dutch publishing houses were selected that were most commonly used with third-year pre-vocational learners, namely *Stepping Stones, New Interface* and *All Right!.* A coding scheme was developed and used to analyse the coursebooks. This scheme operationalised the requirements for developing interactional ability, i.e., developing language knowledge, developing the ability to use this knowledge appropriately in specific (occupational) contexts, and developing a set of interactional strategies that help speakers address communicative problems (cf. Celce-Murcia, 2007).

The results showed that ca. 10-15% of the coursebook curriculum is reserved for oral interaction practice, that oral instruction and practice in Dutch coursebooks largely focus on developing language knowledge, but hardly on learning how to use this knowledge in real-time interaction. Learners are exposed to models of language use, and are offered controlled practice activities that develop language knowledge, but are not often provided with the opportunity to practice using this knowledge in real-time interaction. Learners are rarely exposed to or engaged in unprepared discourse that is concerned with a genuine exchange of meaning between speech partners and that is aimed at achieving a clear communicative goal. Post-interaction activities (e.g. reflection, feedback and additional instruction or practice) are largely absent. Interaction strategies that help speakers

6

address problems in communication are typically not modelled, introduced or practiced. Furthermore, interactional practice is situated mainly in personal and public contexts. Opportunities to practice interaction in professional contexts, for which pre-vocational learners are being prepared, are lacking.

This study made apparent the hiatuses in the practice opportunities for EFL interaction offered to pre-vocational learners. For improving existing EFL curricula directed at developing oral interaction skills, an alternative programme was therefore designed that included activities practicing real-time interaction set in the learners' occupational context, interactional strategies practice and formative feedback. In addition, we tested the effects of these programmes on learners' ability and affect in EFL oral interaction.

### Study 2: Measuring L2 speakers' interactional ability using interactive speech tasks

To ensure that we would be able to measure the effects of our newly designed programmes, we first considered ways to measure individual differences in learners' interactional ability reliably. So far, the literature on assessment of oral interaction had mainly focused on the obstacles in testing individual ability. Because much of discourse is co-constructed (Kramsch, 1986), individual performance becomes vulnerable to interlocutor effects, which poses challenges to standardization in testing and complicates the assessment of individual interactional ability (Weir, 2005). Previous studies had not yet proposed an assessment format that could reliably disentangle individual contributions from a paired exchange for the assessment of individual ability, nor one that focused on assessing both speakers' linguistic ability *and* strategic ability.

Our study introduced a new test format: scripted speech tasks. This is an individual test in which one candidate's interactional performance is tested in interaction with an interlocutor and in which the interlocutor's contributions are controlled through the use of scripts. Six tasks, situated in two interactional contexts (professional and personal) and centering on three different language functions relevant to the type of service encounters that pre-vocational learners will engage in as part of their future jobs (instruction, advice and persuasion) were designed. Tasks were administered to learners from the pre-vocational Business & Administration track by research assistants who functioned as interlocutors. These assistants had been trained to deliver the script consistently and as naturally as possible. Video-recordings of these tasks were subsequently rated independently by trained raters on holistic measures of interactional performance (overall *Linguistic Accuracy* and *Interactional Ability)* and analytic measures of interactional performance

(the use of the strategies *Compensation, Meaning Negotiation* and *Correcting Misinterpretation* during individual episodes in the interaction).

The results indicated that this test format allows for reliable measurement of individual speakers' ability in oral interaction. The tasks differentiated between candidates, both on holistic and analytic measures. Measurements of *Linguistic Accuracy* and *Interactional Ability* were fairly stable across all six tasks, suggesting that both concepts can be measured as stand-alone aspects of EFL interaction. The interaction strategies *Compensation, Meaning Negotiation* and *Correcting Misinterpretation* all formed internally consistent subscales, indicating that they have the potential to be used in testing interactional ability at a more detailed level. Correlations between analytic ratings of specific interactional strategies and holistic ratings of *Interactional Ability* suggested that the interaction strategies operationalized in this study are part of the central construct: EFL interactional ability. We did, however, find that *Compensation* largely determined raters' perceptions of overall interactional ability. Testing this category analytically did not add extra information beyond holistic assessment. Analytic scores for *Meaning Negotiation* and *Correcting Misinterpretation* did provide information about speakers' interactional ability that was not captured by holistic assessment alone. Evocation of the *Clarification* strategy was additionally attempted, but this strategy could not be operationalized in such a way that interlocutors could deliver the prompt consistently. Despite this, a reliable and valid instrument measuring effects of instruction on learners' ELF oral interaction in personal and in professional contexts was now in place.

### Study 3: The Effects of Instructional Focus and Task Type on Pre-Vocational Learners' Ability in EFL Oral Interaction

In this study, we evaluated the effects of newly developed instructional programmes on learners' ability in ELF oral interaction. These programmes were all situated in the Business & Administration context, and trained learners in the role of hotel receptionist during nine lessons. The programmes differed in instructional focus and type of task. With regards to instructional focus, prior research had shown that form-focused teaching positively affects the acquisition of linguistic forms. The effects of form-focused instruction specifically on ability in EFL oral interaction, however, were under-researched and therefore largely unknown (Ellis, 2006; Lightbown, 2000; Norris & Ortega, 2000). There was some indication that strategy-focused instruction positively affects both the acquisition of linguistic forms (Cohen, Weaver & Li, 1996), general proficiency (Lam, 2006), the quality of interaction (Nakatani, 2005; Lourdunathan & Menon, 2005) and

6

achievement in oral interaction (Lam, 2006). With respect to task type, form-focused tasks (e.g. pre-scripted dialogues) were known to play an important role in learners' automation of language forms when moving from declarative to proce-dural knowledge through repeated practice (Anderson, 1982). Studies into the effect of this task type on the development of oral interactional ability, however, were not available. Meaning-focused (information gap) tasks had been found to generate substantial and spontaneous L2 interaction (Pica, Kanagy & Falodun, 2009), which could potentially benefit the development of learners' interactional skills. However, although the negotiated interaction that results from information gap activities had generally been found to affect language acquisition positively (e.g. Doughty & Pica, 1986; Gass et al., 1998; Long, 2015), the effects of these tasks on ability in oral interaction had not yet been investigated. Furthermore, despite indications that oral performance is context-bound (e.g. Bygate, 1987), no research was available that had investigated the degree to which the effects of interaction instruction are dependent on the context of use in which this instruc-tion is situated.

We evaluated the effects of three programmes: *Form-Focused Interaction* instruc-tion (FFI) combined form-focused instruction and practice with form-focused (pre-scripted) interaction tasks. *Language-Directed Interaction* (LDI) combined form-focused instruction and practice with information gap tasks. *Strategies-Directed Interaction* (SDI) combined these information gap tasks with interac-tional strategies instruction and practice. We compared these programmes to the effects of business-as-usual EFL instruction in which learners were taught either with the use of *Stepping Stones* or *New Interface* (see study 1). Learners were randomly assigned within classes to one of the three experimental programmes. This resulted in dividing each class into three separate subgroups, each of which was taught in a separate classroom. Two intact classes were assigned to the 'busi-ness-as-usual' condition. Learners' oral interactional ability was measured after each block of three lessons with the use of two dialogic speech tasks that were aligned with the lessons during that block, i.e. instruction tasks, advice tasks and sales tasks (see study 2). One of these tasks was situated in the professional context, and the other in a personal context. As in study 2, video-recordings of these performances were rated independently by trained raters both on analytic *(Compensation, Meaning Negotiation* and *Correcting Misinterpretation)* and holistic measures of achievement in EFL oral interaction *(Linguistic Accuracy* and *Interactional Resourcefulness).* For the purpose of this study, we also wished to measure learners' overall ability to achieve the specific communicative goals set by the task. For this reason, *Task Achievement* was added as a holistic measure

and was found to be reliable. In addition, measures of learners' vocabulary and experience in EFL oral interaction had been obtained prior to the intervention.

The results of this study showed that explicit instruction in EFL interaction has substantial effects on pre-vocational learners' achievement in trained (professional) contexts, but that these gains do not transfer to untrained (personal) contexts. All three experimental groups outperformed the business-as-usual group on holistic measures of task achievement, linguistic accuracy and interactional resourcefulness. Furthermore, occasional effects of instruction on learners' use of meaning negotiation strategies, and sporadic effects on their use of compensation strategies and audience awareness strategies were found. Differential effects between the experimental conditions were not found, neither on holistic nor on analytic measures.

### Study 4: Oral Interaction in the EFL Classroom: The Effects of Instructional Focus and Task Type on Learner Affect

Language ability does not automatically lead to language use. Affective factors, such as speakers' willingness to communicate (WTC), self-confidence and enjoyment of oral interaction play an important role (e.g. Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Kang, 2005; MacIntyre, 2002; MacIntyre et al.,1998). For this reason, we wished to find out which of our newly developed EFL interaction programmes best fosters learners' willingness to communicate (WTC), self-confidence and enjoyment. Prior to this study, there was some indication that strategy-focused instruction positively affects self-confidence (Cohen, Weaver & Li, 1996; Forbes & Fisher, 2015; Lam, 2006), but no studies were available that had investigated how form-focused instruction impacts on self-confidence, nor how either form- or strategies-focused instruction affects learners' WTC and enjoyment of (E)FL oral interaction. Furthermore, no studies were available that had researched the effect of task type on learners' enjoyment, willingness to communicate and self-confidence, but there were some indications that favour the use of information gap tasks for this purpose, e.g. for boosting learner enjoyment (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), risk-taking (Leaver & Kaplan, 2004), dealing with the unpredictability of real-world interaction (Willis, 1996) and practicing solving interactional problems during interaction (Pica, Kanagy & Falodun, 2009).

Because affect plays an important role in language achievement (Dewaele et al., 2017; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012), we additionally wished to explore to what extent development in WTC, self-confidence and enjoyment explained learners' achievement in EFL oral interaction. MacIntyre et al. (2001) had argued that higher levels of WTC increase opportunity for language practice and usage and

6

as such facilitates the learning process, but the direct relation between increased WTC and achievement in EFL oral interaction has not been empirically tested, nor had studies investigated the relation between increased levels of self-confidence or enjoyment and achievement in EFL oral interaction.

Measures of learner affect were obtained by administering identical question-naires before and after the interventions. The questionnaires included scales selected and adapted from existing scales for measuring WTC (MacIntyre et al., 2001), self-confidence (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986) and enjoyment of EFL oral interaction (Wilschut, 2014). Each scale contained a general question (e.g. "I enjoy speaking English") and questions distinguishing interactions in different contexts (school and leisure time) and with different audiences (peers and adults). As covariates, we made use of the pre-test scores obtained for learners' vocabu-lary and experience in EFL oral interaction in Study 3. Finally, we used measures of task achievement in EFL oral interaction obtained with the two scripted speech tasks administered after lesson nine to determine relations between our affect variables and achievement in EFL oral interaction.

Results indicated significant growth of self-confidence for learners in the Strategies-Directed Interaction programme. Form-focused instruction and practice, whether combined with pre-scripted tasks (FFI) or with information gap tasks (LDI) did not generate significant development of self-confidence in EFL oral interaction. We furthermore found that growth in self-confidence is related to task achievement in trained (professional) contexts, but not in untrained (personal) contexts. In all three programmes, willingness to communicate decreased, while enjoyment of EFL oral interaction remained unchanged over time. Neither WTC nor enjoyment predicted achievement in EFL oral interaction.

## Discussion of the main results

This section discusses the outcomes of the four studies conducted as part of this project.

### *EFL course materials for pre-vocational learners*

The results obtained in study 1 suggest that oral instruction and practice in Dutch coursebooks largely focus on developing language knowledge, but much less on learning how to use this knowledge in real-time interaction. Additionally, instruction and practice of interactional strategies are lacking. These findings are in line with previous research conducted on EFL course materials in non-Dutch settings (e.g. Bueno-Alastuey & Luque Agulló, 2015a; Burns & Hill, 2013; Dörnyei

and Thurrell, 1994; Faucette, 2001; Tomlinson, 2012; 2013). This study furthermore demonstrated that opportunities to practice interaction in the professional context for which pre-vocational learners are prepared, are missing, even though previous research indicated that aligning practice contexts with the contexts in which learners will engage in (future) interactional encounters is likely to optimize the effects of interactional instruction and practice (cf. Lightbown, 2008).

Overall, the findings in this study show that of the four conditions that play a role in achieving oral interaction, i.e., linguistic knowledge, use of this knowledge in real time, use in specific contexts and use of interactional strategies, only the first is represented substantially in Dutch EFL coursebooks. Theoretical understanding of the oral skill and practical application of this in coursebooks thus seem to be weakly linked. These findings are reflective of the weak link between theory and practice in non-Dutch EFL materials reported by Masuhara et al. (2008), Sheldon (1988) and Tomlinson (2012; 2013).

### *Assessing interactional ability*

The speech tasks presented in study 2 allowed for a reliable measurement of EFL speakers' interactional ability, both at a global and at a more detailed level, and regardless of the language function that the task focused on or the context in which the task was situated. Furthermore, the speech tasks were robust against the influence of co-construction. As such, study 2 addressed an important issue in the literature on assessment of interactional ability, namely how to arrive at a reliable assessment of individual interactional ability from a discourse that is essentially co-constructed (Kramsch, 1986) and vulnerable to interlocutor effects (Weir, 2005). This poses challenges to standardization in the assessment of individual interactional ability in paired testing formats.

Previous suggestions for alternative assessment forms in the literature had included awarding pairs shared scores for interactional competence (May, 2009), and assessing the extent to which speakers achieve fluency *across* pairs (Ducasse & Brown (2009), but not an assessment format that could reliably disentangle individual contributions from a paired exchange for the assessment of individual ability, and that allowed for standardized testing both of speakers' linguistic ability *and* strategic ability. These findings bring to light an interesting paradox: although the paired format evokes a wide array of interactional functions reflective of real-life communication (ffrench, 1999), testing interactional ability in an individual format is more suited to providing a reliable assessment of achievement in oral interaction. As such, this study has added a new perspective to the discussion about suitable formats for assessing L2 speakers' interactional competence.

6

### *Effects of form-focused vs strategy-focused instruction on ability in EFL oral interaction*

The results obtained in study 3 show that explicit instruction in EFL interaction has a positive effect on pre-vocational learners' ability in EFL oral interaction in comparison to business-as-usual EFL instruction. The gains of instruction, however, only manifested itself in the Business & Administration contexts in which learners' training had been situated, but did not transfer to untrained, personal contexts, such as helping a relative plan a visit to the cinema. In these contexts, learners who received interaction practice integrated in a business-as-usual EFL curriculum, performed equally well as our experimental groups. This substantiates the notion that oral performance is context-bound (Bygate, 1987) and underscores Lightbown's (2008) position that transfer of learnt skills can only take place if the training context and the targeted language use situation are closely matched.

Against the backdrop of current models of interactional ability (e.g. Celce-Murcia, 2007) and the literature supporting the merits of information gap tasks (e.g. Doughty & Pica, 1986; Foster & Ohta, 2005), we had anticipated that learners' oral skills would develop better in programmes that allow for practice in negotiating interactional problems in unpredictable situations (Language-Directed or Strategies-Directed Interaction conditions) than in a solely form-focused programme (Form-Focused Interaction condition), but we did not find support for this hypothesis in study 3. Learners performed equally well in all three experimental groups on all holistic measures for interactional ability. Similarly, occasional effects of explicit instruction targeting professional EFL interaction were found on learners' use of interaction strategies in comparison to business-as-usual instruction, but learners in the different experimental groups did not perform differently from each other in the application of interaction strategies.

Previous studies have shown that effects of instruction are often indirect and delayed (Long, 2015; Skehan, 1996), that the effects of strategy training tend to be very small (cf. McDonough, 1999), and that positive gains of instruction on learners' strategic ability do not always lead to a significant increase of strategy use in post-test task performance, even if they do generate an increase in use during practice activities (Bejarano et al., 1997; Gallagher-Brett, 2001). It is possible that the strategies selected for the Strategies-Directed Interaction programme were cognitively and linguistically too complex for the low-proficiency pre-vocational learners participating in this study (cf. Green & Oxford, 1995; Lam, 2004), or that the intervention was too short for learners to internalize the strategies to such an extent that they were readily available for swift retrieval during task performance (cf. Lam, 2004; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Additionally, it is not certain whether study 3 fully captured the potential merits of the Language-Directed and Strategies-Directed programmes. Post-lesson reflection forms completed by the instructors indicated that the second interaction task (of two) and corresponding reflection task of the lesson were not always implemented in lessons delivered in the Language-Directed (89% and 86% implementation respectively) and Strategies-Directed (92% and 74% implementation respectively) conditions. To gain a more in-depth understanding of the potential merits of the Language-Directed and Strategies-Directed programmes, fully implemented programmes should be compared.

### *Effects of form-focused vs strategy-focused instruction on learner affect*

Study 4 showed a modest but significant effect of the Strategy-Directed Interaction programme on learners' growth in self-confidence. This is in line with the positive effects of strategy instruction on measures of self-confidence reported by Cohen, Weaver & Li (1996), Forbes & Fisher, (2015) and Lam (2006). The learners in the Language-Directed Interaction programme did not show significant growth in self-confidence. This might suggest that providing learners with information gap tasks and feedback on task achievement alone is not sufficient to spark growth in self-confidence, but that learners' self-confidence only benefits from information gap tasks if they have received interactional strategies instruction and practice. This is reflective of Foster's (1998) observation that a substantial need for meaning negotiation evoked through tasks does not necessarily leave learners feeling more competent.

In all three programmes, learners' willingness to communicate decreased. Because little research is available on developing WTC through teaching, it is not immediately apparent what explains this result. With the exception of MacIntyre et al.'s (2002) cross-sectional study on French immersion teaching, little is known about the timespan required for boosting levels of WTC, whether developing WTC is a linear process, whether it is conditional to the development of other affective factors, whether increasing WTC relates to individual factors such as age and proficiency level, and so on. It is possible that affecting positive change in WTC requires a lengthier intervention than the one conducted in this study, or that the development of WTC is dependent on the development of self-confidence (cf. MacInytre et al., 2002). If this is the case, it is conceivable that the gains of instruction on self-confidence in our study was not yet large enough yet to instigate an increase in WTC.

Dewaele et al. (2017) report that foreign language enjoyment significantly drops around the age of 14-15, and that low-intermediate learners' enjoyment levels

6

are significantly lower than those of high-intermediate or advanced learners. These facts are important in considering why learners' enjoyment of EFL oral interaction did not significantly change in our study. Therefore, a possible explanation is that the enjoyment of FL oral interaction is a relatively stable feature for low-proficiency adolescent learners and less malleable through brief instructional programmes, such as ours (cf. Gardner & Tremblay, 1994).

Finally, our findings regarding WTC and enjoyment might be explained as a result of conducting classroom-based research, in which both educational goals and research aims must be balanced. Aiming to control as many variables as possible in the study resulted in adopting an identical lesson structure for each of the nine lessons in each of the three experimental programmes. At task level, the design recognized the importance of unpredictability, autonomy, challenge and risk-taking to boost levels of enjoyment (Dewaele & MacIntyre; 2014; Dewaele et al., 2017) by juxtaposing pre-scripted interaction tasks with information gap tasks. The absence of variation in the overall lesson structure, however, may have rendered the lessons too predictable and monotonous. This may have led to boredom or demotivation on the part of the learners, which might have hampered their development of enjoyment and, in turn, WTC.

### The relation between development in affect and task achievement in EFL oral interaction

Further results obtained in study 4 showed that achievement in EFL oral interaction is related to changed levels of learners' self-confidence. Previous studies had already shown self-confidence to correlate both with the quantity (Phillips, 1992; Dörnyei & Kormos, 2002) and quality of speech production (MacIntyre, Noels & Clément, 1997), and with use of compensation strategies (Liu, 2012; Yang, 1999). Study 4 showed that growth in self-confidence also contributes positively to task achievement in EFL oral interaction. However, self-confidence only predicted achievement in the interaction task that matched the professional Business & Administration context in which learners had been trained, but not in interaction tasks that were situated in personal contexts. This substantiates the notion that self-confidence is situation-specific (MacIntyre et al., 1998), but also that gains of instruction do not automatically transfer from one context to another. As discussed above, we had found similar results in study 3. This suggests that not only the development of learner ability, but also the development and of learner affect is dependent on the extent to which the training context and targeted context of use are matched.

Combined, these findings shed new light on the results obtained in study 1. This study had demonstrated that interactional practice is mainly situated in personal and public contexts of use, and that opportunities to practice interaction in professional contexts, for which pre-vocational learners are being prepared, are lacking. The absence of interaction instruction targeting professional contexts may well explain why some pre-vocational learners are not equipped for, or too hesitant to, interact in vocational settings upon entry into the vocational programmes (Jansma & Pennewaard, 2014).

Learner enjoyment of EFL oral interaction did not predict achievement in oral interaction. Although previous research had reported positive correlations between enjoyment and perceived competence pertaining to all four language skills, including speaking (MacIntyre and Vincze, 2017), as well as reading comprehension (De Milliano, 2013; Dhanapala & Hirakawa, 2016), study 4 does not provide evidence of such an effect on task achievement in oral interaction.

Changed levels of WTC also did not predict achievement in EFL oral interaction. MacIntyre et al. (2001) had argued that higher levels of WTC increase opportunities for language practice and usage, which is likely to facilitate the learning process. The results obtained in study 4, however, do not support that role of WTC in relation to EFL oral interaction. In a laboratory study, MacIntyre, Babin & Clément's (1999) had found WTC to affect university students' decisions to engage in a difficult speech task, but not task achievement itself. Instead, task achievement was predicted by speakers' self-confidence. Our study, conducted with pre-vocational learners in classroom-based research, seems to underscore these findings.

## Suggestions for future research

This research project has produced a range of instruments for researching the teaching and testing of oral interactional ability, i.e., a reliable coding scheme to evaluate (E)FL course materials, assessment tasks that provide reliable measurement of individual interactional ability and programmes targeting professional contexts that include the instruction and practice both of language forms and interaction strategies in oral interaction tasks. This section discusses directions for future research related to these instruments, and to findings obtained in our study.

### *Coding scheme*

6

The agreement found between three independent raters suggests that the coding scheme developed for study 1 can usefully be employed to analyse oral interaction activities in (E)FL coursebooks. This enables wider application in a variety of educational contexts, e.g. different educational tracks, proficiency levels,

languages and countries. Such application does not only develop our insights into existing oral interaction curricula, but also contributes to further validation of this tool. This, in turn, would facilitate a systematic analysis of the oral interaction training presented in different coursebooks that is based on the requirements for developing interactional ability as proposed in SLA literature, i.e., developing linguistic knowledge, practising using this knowledge in real time and in specific contexts, and practising the use of interactional strategies.

### *Assessment tasks*

The speech tasks presented in this study address an important issue in the literature on assessment of interactional ability, because they are robust against the influence of co-construction. Our study thus contributes tasks that allow for a reliable measurement of individual EFL speakers' interactional ability reliably, regardless of the language function that the task focuses on or the context in which the task is situated. The tasks furthermore allow for standardized testing both of speakers' linguistic ability *and* strategic ability. However, although previous studies (e.g. Dörnyei & Scott, 1995) identified a plethora of interactional strategies that support L2 speakers' interactional ability, the tasks designed in study 2 operationalized only four: *Compensation, Clarification, Meaning Negotiation* and *Correcting Misinterpretation.* This limited set may not be sufficiently representative of strategic ability overall. Furthermore, we were not able to operationalize the *Clarification* strategy in such a way that interlocutors could deliver the prompt consistently. Future research can focus on optimising ways to operationalize use of the *Clarification* strategy in scripted speech task, and explore ways to include a wider set of strategies. This includes the operationalization of more pro-active strategies. In our study, other-supporting behaviour was evoked in reaction to a prompt delivered by the interlocutor, e.g. the interlocutor feigning misunderstanding. As such, pro-active interactional strategies, such as checking common ground between the speaker and speech partner (Bygate, 1987) remained untested.

This study was set in the developmental stage (Kane, 2012) of a new assessment form, and thus aimed at justifying the proposed interpretations and uses of scripted speech tasks. In this small-scale study, we were able to correlate task performance with independent measures of vocabulary size, but it was not possible to compare candidate's performance on the scripted test format with performance on another validated test format for oral interaction. Future research could provide evidence of additional convergent validity.

Finally, the assessment tasks introduced in our study were designed

exploration of the variables that predict learners' progress in oral interactional ability, i.e., the instructional programme employed, and potentially its interaction with individual learner differences, e.g. proficiency level, affective factors, prior experience, vocabulary size and gender.

Moreover, what underlies the design of a curriculum for oral interaction is the definition of successful task performance. In form-focused curricula successful performance is measured according to linguistic accuracy, whereas in meaning-focused curricula success is measured according to achievement of the communicative goal. As a result, the message that learners in the various experimental conditions received with regards to successful interaction differed greatly. Gilmore (2004) argues that focusing on accurate and problem-free discourse sets a standard for L2 interaction that is unattainable for EFL learners and might, as a result, demoralize them. This raises a question for future research, namely to establish whether a predominant focus on achieving linguistic accuracy negatively affects learners' self-confidence in spoken interaction, and conversely, whether defining interactional success along lines of goal achievement contributes more positively to learners' growth in self-confidence.

Additionally, the mixed results reported in the small body of research that currently exists on strategy instruction suggests that much is still unknown about effective ways to teach strategies. Future research could thus explore the effects of strategy-focused instruction further. First, to ensure that the form-focused and strategy-focused programmes were fully comparable in our study, lessons in each programme contained a modelling stage, an explicit presentation stage, a practice stage and an application stage. However, where control of language forms is needed at every stage of the interactional encounter, interactional strategies are only needed at points where communication breaks down. This means that the interaction tasks used during the lessons evoked target language forms at every turn, whereas the use of target strategies could only be evoked once or twice. As a result, repeated practice of strategies throughout each lesson was limited. This raises the question whether the time reserved for strategies practice should be distributed differently, in order to allow for a more effective development of pre-vocational learners' strategic ability.

The literature on time distribution in language learning is divided, reporting positive gains of distributed practice, e.g. on vocabulary learning (e.g. Bahrick et al., 1993; Bloom & Shuell, 1981) and syntax learning (Bird, 2010), as well as positive gains of massed practice, e.g. for listening, grammar, vocabulary, lexical complexity and oral production on intermediate learners (Serrano, 2011). The effect of time distribution on strategies learning has not been researched yet. However, instead of delivering more widely spaced and full-focused lessons, some

foreign language teachers are currently experimenting with integrating 5-10 minutes of strategies instruction and practice taken from the Strategies-Directed Interaction programme in their lessons, and report good results. Future research could explore ways to optimise a strategies-directed programme by comparing the effects of massed vs distributed practice.

As mentioned previously, effects of instruction are often indirect and delayed (Long, 2015; Skehan, 1996), and gains of instruction on learners' strategic ability do not always lead to a significant increase of strategy use in post-test task performance, even if they do generate an increase in use during practice activities (Bejarano et al., 1997; Gallagher-Brett, 2001). Detecting effects of strategy instruction may thus require a different type of data than collected in our study. Future research could focus on collecting recordings and transcriptions of learners' performance of interaction activities in class. Furthermore, coding transcripts of speech tasks would allow for a comparison of both type and frequency of strategies used by learners from different instructional programmes and facilitate an analysis of learner performance on both evoked and non-evoked turns, as well as their use of both targeted and non-targeted strategies. This would provide insight into the indirect effects that strategies instruction may have (cf. Lam, 2004). Finally, an analysis of strategies use in both professional and personal tasks could determine whether pre-vocational learners adapt their strategies use to the context of language use (cf. Kouwenhoven et al., 2016).

## Implications for educational practice

In this final section, we outline some important implications for educational practice that result from our study and make suggestions for the future development of EFL oral interaction programmes in the pre-vocational track.

### *Use the coding scheme to evaluate, supplement or design instructional programmes*

Study 1 has shown that the coding scheme developed for this study can usefully be employed to analyse oral interaction activities in (E)FL coursebooks. This provides practitioners with a useful tool to evaluate, adapt or supplement their current teaching programmes. Since the coding scheme operationalises the requirements for developing interactional ability as proposed in SLA literature (linguistic knowledge, use of this knowledge in real time, use in specific contexts and use of interactional strategies), the scheme can furthermore give curriculum developers and practitioners directions in designing instructional programmes for (E)FL oral

6

interaction. This may increase the availability of programmes that provide more rounded practice for (E)FL learners and may consequently aid bridging the gap between a theoretical understanding of the oral skill and the practical application of this in instructional programmes.

### Offer contextualised interaction instruction and practice

Strong oral interaction skills are indispensable for pre-vocational learners, who will need to interact with non-Dutch speakers as part of their job. It is thus of vital importance that these learners gain maximum benefit from the 10-15% of activities presently reserved for oral interaction in coursebooks. Coursebooks integrate interaction practice in other activities aimed at developing EFL proficiency in general contexts. Our study shows, however, that both the development of learners' interactional ability and self-confidence is related to receiving contextualised instruction. Complementing the general interaction activities found in coursebooks with occupation-specific activities that match the learners' future interactional situations may prepare learners better for (future) participation in occupation-specific EFL oral interaction. Some schools already complement their curricula with activities like the *Language Village,* where learners partake in simulated real-life interaction, e.g. by buying a loaf at the baker's or filing a complaint at the police station. Such an activity could easily be adapted to accommodate more occupation-specific practice. Instead of *visiting* the baker's, they could *play* the baker, the car mechanic, the hotel receptionist and so on. Complementing existing curricula with activities like these would allow pre-vocational learners to develop both the general language skills needed to function in personal and public encounters, and the professional language skills needed to function in occupation-specific encounters.

### Invest in developing learners' self-confidence

Study 4 has shown that growth in self-confidence is related to learners' achievement in interactional performance. Addressing the development of learners' self-confidence may thus be a worthwhile investment for practitioners who wish to produce learners capable of EFL oral interaction. One way of developing self-confidence is by adopting strategy-directed instruction that combines information gap tasks with strategies instruction. Some coursebooks already include information gap tasks, but this is certainly not commonplace. Increasing the number of information gap tasks automatically increases practice opportunities for learners in tasks that generate substantial, spontaneous L2 interaction during which they are likely to come across interactional problems (Pica, Kanagy & Falodun, 2009).

However, our study showed that learners' self-confidence only benefits from information gap tasks if these are combined with strategy instruction. Some coursebooks (e.g. Stepping Stones) include a survey of useful strategies. Such a survey provides learners with a useful tool, especially if it is referred to in the preparation stage of the interaction activity. Awareness of strategies could furthermore be raised by studying models of interaction in which strategies are employed (e.g. Dörnyei, 1995; Rossiter, 2003; Sayer, 2005), by reflecting and obtaining feedback on learners' own use of strategies during task performance (e.g. Bejarano et al., 1997; Nakatani, 2005; Yule and Powers, 1994) and by providing direct instruction (e.g. Lam, 2004; Nakatani, 2005) and conscious practice of strategies (e.g. Dörnyei, 1995; Rossiter, 2003).

### Provide formative and summative feedback using interactional speech tasks

Reflection and feedback activities are generally lacking from coursebooks. In line with the predominantly form-focused practice activities in the coursebooks, the few activities that are included allow for reflection on grammatically correct language use, but not on interactional success. This leaves teachers with little opportunity to support the development of learners' interactional ability. The interactive speech tasks described in Study 2 provide practitioners with a useful diagnostic tool in this regard. These tasks enable teachers to provide learners with feedback on all areas relevant to interactional performance, i.e. on task achievement, linguistic accuracy, interactional resourcefulness and strategic ability. The tasks are currently being used as a formative assessment tool by some practitioners in the field. This includes a French teacher, who asks her learners to audiotape their performance and self-reflect on their task achievement and strategic conduct, so that she can align her feedback to the learners' perceived success. She reports that her learners take pride in their ability to accomplish challenging tasks, and that prioritizing task achievement and strategic conduct in her feedback has given her learners the self-confidence to experiment more with the French language (Van Batenburg & Groeneveld, 2018).

The interactive speech tasks can also be used for summative assessment purposes. Fasoglio (2017) discusses the test formats that EFL teachers most commonly use to assess oral interaction in the Netherlands. Reading out loud a written conversation occurs in all educational tracks. In the pre-vocational track, both reading a text out loud and having a conversation with the teacher or a peer feature frequently. However, in view of interlocutor effects that arise in co-constructed discourse, it is difficult to arrive at a reliable assessment of individual learners' interactional ability in such a format. Unlike the test formats currently used by

6

EFL teachers, the assessment tasks presented in this study evoke discourse that is both spontaneous and interactive, and that are robust against the influence of both co-construction as well as interlocutor effects. This provides teachers with an instrument that allows for a more reliable and precise measurement of their individual learners' interactional ability.

## Final note

Prior to the start of this research project, our understanding of ways to develop learners' ability and affect in EFL oral interaction through instruction was limited. This thesis, then, offered a first exploration of possible approaches to training EFL oral skills. Against the backdrop of literature supporting the merits of information gap tasks, we had anticipated that learners' oral skills, WTC, self-confidence and enjoyment of oral interaction would develop better in the programmes that made use of these tasks (Language-Directed and Strategies-Directed instruction). Additionally, on the basis of the small body of literature discussing positive effects of strategy instruction on achievement in oral interaction and on self-confidence, we had expected learners in the Strategy-Directed group to become more confident interactors than learners participating in the other groups. However, with the exception of the positive effects we found of Strategies-Directed instruction on learners' self-confidence, we did not find support for these hypotheses. Future research will have to determine whether other operationalizations of (strategy-directed) oral interaction instruction are more effective for the positive development of ability and affect in interaction.

Furthermore, research into the role that affect plays in foreign language interaction instruction is a relative new field. To date, very few classroom-based studies have been executed that shed light on instructional factors that might affect learners' emotional states positively. Since affect is known to play an important role in all stages of the language learning process, it is essential that more research is conducted that focuses specifically on ways to foster positive affect in learners in real classrooms.

Finally, with this thesis we wished to raise awareness amongst language teachers and language teacher educators with regards to developing learners' (E)FL oral skills, in particular with regards to the potential gains of offering contextualized instruction, and to paying attention to interactional strategies instruction as a way to develop learners' self-confidence. We hope that this thesis sparks discussion amongst practitioners, that it motivates them to review their own curricula and, where desired, complement, supplement or adapt these curricula to match their learners' needs.