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### Fostering oral interaction in the EFL classroom

*Assessment and effects of experimental interventions*

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## Chapter 4

The effects of instructional focus and task type on pre-vocational learners' ability in EFL oral interaction<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Based on: Van Batenburg, E. S. L., Oostdam, R. J., Van Gelderen, A. J. S., Fukkink, R. G. & De Jong, N. H. (submitted). The Effects of Instructional Focus and Task Type on Pre-Vocational Learners' EFL Oral Interaction Skills.

## **Abstract**

Little is known about how diverging pedagogies affect the development of EFL interactional oral skills. In a controlled experimental study, we evaluated the effects of newly developed instructional programmes for Dutch pre-vocational learners that were all situated in the Business & Administration context, but that differed in instructional focus (form-focused vs strategy-focused) and type of task (pre-scripted tasks vs information gap tasks). These were compared to the effects of business-as-usual EFL instruction. A multilevel analysis of the ratings of validated interactive speech tasks revealed that the three experimental groups outperformed the business-as-usual group on EFL oral interactional ability ( $N = 199$ ), with similar results for the programmes. Positive effects were found on interactional ability for trained (professional) contexts only. No transfer was found to tasks in other (personal) contexts. It is concluded that receiving contextualised and explicit oral interaction instruction is beneficial to the development of pre-vocational learners' ability in EFL interaction.

## Introduction

Communicatively competent speakers possess both linguistic knowledge, and the ability to use this knowledge in specific contexts (e.g. Canale, 1983a; 1983b; Kormos, 2006). They know how to make use of socio-cultural knowledge when selecting language and structuring speech events in ways appropriate to the particular context of language use, and possess a range of strategies that help them resolve problems in all areas of speech production (Bachman, & Palmer, 1996; Canale, 1983a; 1983b), including in the interactional domain, i.e., when conveying and understanding communicative intent (Celce-Murcia, 2007). Since oral interaction is mediated by time constraints, it is mostly unplanned. This requires speakers to conceptualise, formulate and articulate messages more or less in parallel (Levelt, 1999), which directly affects their capacity to interact effectively (Bygate, 1987). Furthermore, reciprocity conditions in dialogue require speakers to both produce *and* understand messages in real time, to adjust these messages to their speech partner's understanding, and to manage the interactional encounter itself.

Bygate argues that while oral encounters are largely steered by employing informational and interactional routines, improvisational skills are needed when such routines falter. These skills comprise of both *self-supporting strategies* and *other-supporting strategies*. Self-supporting strategies are used to overcome problems in speech production and reception, and include compensation strategies such as message reduction, -substitution and -reconceptualization and meaning negotiation strategies, such as checking and indicating understanding, uncertainty and incomprehension and asking for elaboration, clarification and repetition of the message (Bygate, 1987; Dörnyei & Scott, 1995; Færch & Kasper, 1983; Poulisse, 1993). To ensure mutual understanding, successful interaction also requires speakers to possess other-supporting strategies, i.e., attentive listening, aligning messages to the speech partner's need for information, topic knowledge and understanding, and responding to clarification requests, indications of incomprehension and erroneous interpretations of the message (cf. Bygate, 1987).

The multi-faceted and complex nature of oral interaction makes teaching it a difficult task. EFL teachers in The Netherlands indicate that they lack the methodological tools for developing their learners' oral skills when faced with large classes and limited contact time (Fasoglio, 2015; Jansma & Pennewaard, 2014). They struggle to make use of opportunities for life-like interaction, particularly for practising interaction strategies (Educational Inspectorate, 2004; Fasaglio et al., 2015).

At the same time, becoming competent in interaction is particularly relevant to learners in the lower pre-vocational tracks, who are headed for further vocational

education and employment at middle-management levels (cf. Liemberg & Van Kleunen, 1998). Here, they will use English for occupational purposes, i.e., in service encounters with non-Dutch customers as part of their job. At present, learners are reportedly too hesitant to engage in oral interaction, and at times fail to meet the required A2 level upon entering vocational programmes (Jansma & Pennewaard, 2014). Therefore, the main aim of this study is to find out what type of pedagogy best supports pre-vocational learners' development of EFL oral interaction.

### ***L2 interaction pedagogy***

For many years, foreign language oral interaction was thought to not require separate training, but to arise naturally from the study of language (Hughes, 2002). There are indications, however, that effects of training are mode-dependent, i.e., that interactional ability will improve when learners are actually required to interact (Lightbown, 2008), but it is not clear whether such improvement is dependent on the type of training that learners receive. Two instructional foci and task types are now discussed, along with their potential advantages and disadvantages for developing ability in (E)FL oral interaction.

### ***Form-focused tasks and instruction***

To date, the majority of commercially produced coursebooks for secondary education in the Netherlands adopt a form-focused approach to teaching EFL interaction, most commonly the PPP approach. This approach is based on the idea of information processing, i.e., that skills mastery entails moving from declarative to procedural knowledge, which becomes automatized through repeated practice (Anderson, 1982). Here, learners are typically guided from the presentation of language forms (P<sup>1</sup>) to practicing them in controlled activities (P<sup>2</sup>) to producing them in application activities (P<sup>3</sup>). Ellis (2009) labels such activities as 'exercises'. Exercises engage learners in producing correct linguistic forms (i.e., those studied in class) but lack a clear communicative goal to be achieved. Successful performance is measured according to learners' grammatical correctness. Exercises are thus decidedly form-focused and allow for the internalization of linguistic forms. A much-used exercise for practicing oral interaction is the pre-scripted role play. These provide learners with pre-structured interactional situations in which speakers' roles are prescribed and known to both learners, and furthermore supply learners with language instructions (e.g. grammatical or lexical encoding, translation or responding to L1 content clues) which are prepared prior to interaction. These application tasks are

placed at the end of the activities sequence to allow learners to demonstrate their ability to use the targeted language forms accurately (Ellis, 2009).

While form-focused teaching is known to affect the acquisition of linguistic forms positively, its effect on learners' ability in L2 interaction is under-researched and thus largely unknown (Ellis, 2006; Lightbown, 2000; Norris & Ortega, 2000). There is some indication, however, that an explicit focus on developing accurate language use has a negative influence on developing fluency in interaction (Lightbown & Spada, 1989). Furthermore, information processing may not fully explain how skills are mastered. Johnson (1996) argues that knowledge is sometimes proceduralised directly, without the aid of explicit explanation or the acquisition of declarative rule knowledge. While applying a small set of language structures in pre-structured interaction tasks may lead to task success, it may also create an illusion of mastery that underprepares learners for dealing with the unpredictability of real-world interaction (cf. Willis, 1996), and leaves little room for the development of improvisational skills.

### ***Information gap tasks***

Ellis (2009) contrasts form-focused 'exercises' with 'tasks', which are meaning-focused. These tasks engage learners in communicating content (meaning) and have a distinct communicative goal which the learners work towards. Task performance is successful when the communicative goal is achieved. Such tasks have the potential to evoke unpredictable interaction between speakers. An example of a meaning-focused task is the information gap task. In these tasks, each speaker holds part of the information (e.g. on separate role cards) necessary to complete a shared goal. Learners must thus interact with each other in order to complete the task, or solve a problem together. This generates unpredictable, spontaneous L2 interaction, during which learners are likely to come across interactional problems (Pica, Kanagy & Falodun, 2009).

Information gap tasks thus provide relevant practice for actual real-life interaction. To address the issue of unpredictability in form-focused curricula outlined above, some coursebooks supplement form-focused teaching with information gap tasks. They are also frequently used in meaning-oriented approaches like task-based language teaching (TBLT), in which achieving specific interactional goals in real-world situations is prioritised over producing accurate forms (e.g. Ellis, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2009). Typical TBLT sequencing places task performance at the beginning of the activities sequence (often preceded by a task orientation phase, e.g. studying a model) and is followed by an evaluation of task achievement. This 'task first approach' helps raise learners' awareness of possible gaps in their

resources (Swain, 1985; Schmidt, 1990). The negotiated interaction that results from these gaps generally affects language acquisition positively (e.g. Doughty & Pica, 1986; Gass et al., 1998; Long, 2015), especially when this is combined with form-focused instruction (e.g. Lightbown, 2000). Repeating the same, or a similar task at the end of the sequence counters the transitory 'one-off' nature of speech and frees up attentional resources, which aids fluency practice and helps learners progress after their initial attempt (Bygate, 2001; Skehan, 1996).

As mentioned, learners are likely to come across interactional problems while aiming to accomplish information gap tasks (Pica, Kanagy & Falodun, 2009). This evokes the need for learners to safeguard mutual understanding, which requires not only the use of self-supporting strategies, such as meaning negotiation, but also the use of other-supporting strategies, such as providing assistance and reformulating misunderstood messages (Foster & Ohta, 2005; Yule & Powers, 1994). Foster (1998), however, reports that learners in a classroom setting sometimes engaged only in limited meaning negotiation, and suggests that encountering many interactional problems discourages learners to negotiate for meaning, especially if doing so slows down the interaction substantially. If interactional ability not only hinges on linguistic knowledge, but also on strategic conduct, teaching learners a set of self-supporting and other-supporting strategies may encourage them to persist in difficult interactional encounters (Dörnyei, 1995), such as those potentially provided by information gap tasks.

### ***Interactional strategies instruction***

Despite growing support for strategies-based pedagogies (DiPietro, 1987; Hughes, 2002; Thornbury, 2005), coursebooks rarely provide interactional strategy instruction (Bueno-Alastuey & Luque Agulló, 2015a; Faucette, 2001), and the teachability of interaction strategies has remained a point of dispute. Some have argued that strategic conduct varies from L1 to L2, and that receiving explicit instruction and practice is likely to benefit L2 speakers (e.g. Færch & Kasper, 1983; Konishi & Tarone, 1997). This has been confirmed to some extent in recent studies with advanced learners that focused on attentive listening (Sayer, 2005; Yule & Powers, 1994) and meaning negotiation (e.g. Bejarano et al., 1997; Nakatani, 2005, 2010), and, albeit to a lesser degree, on compensation strategies (Dörnyei, 1995; Nakatani, 2005; Rossiter, 2003), as well as in instruction that combined interactional strategy instruction with (meta-)cognitive, social and affective strategy instruction (Cohen, Weaver & Li, 1996).

Others have argued that the cognitive processes underlying strategic behaviour are the same in L1 and L2, and that strategic conduct is therefore not sensitive

to instruction (e.g. Kellerman, 1991; Poulisse, 1993). This is supported in studies reporting little to no effect of training on the use of strategies (e.g. Naughton, 2006; Scullen & Jourdain, 2000). In addition, the degree to which instruction is effective seems to correlate with learners' proficiency level. Lam (2004; 2006) reports that changes in meaning negotiation behaviour were limited in her study on low-proficiency speakers. Gallagher-Brett (2001) reports similar results on post-test performance, but notes that instruction did increase the amount of meaning negotiation that her low-proficiency speakers undertook during practice activities.

Finally, studies report on the effects of interaction strategy instruction on a wide range of outcomes measures, including vocabulary and grammar (Cohen, Weaver & Li, 1996), general proficiency (Lam, 2006), the degree of participation in interactional encounters (Bejarano et. al, 1997; Naughton, 2006), the quality and quantity of strategy use (e.g. Dörnyei, 1995; Bejarano et al., 1997; Lam & Wong, 2000) and the quality of the interaction itself (Nakatani, 2005; Lourdunathan & Menon, 2005). Much less is known about the effects of instruction on actual task achievement i.e., on learners' ability to convey and understand communicative intent. Rossiter (2003) reports little overall impact on task achievement, while Dörnyei (1995) and Lam (2006) report more positive results. However, Rossiter and Dörnyei's studies both made use of monologic tasks. The tasks used in Lam's study are the only ones that produced two-way communication.

### ***Context-dependency of instruction***

An additional issue is the degree to which interaction instruction is context-dependent.

Segalowitz & Lightbown (1999) argue that learners must practice using language in interactive contexts in order to become better at mobilizing language in such contexts in real life, and Lightbown (2008) posits that a sustainable transfer of learnt skills can only take place if the training context and the eventual interactional situation are closely matched. Furthermore, Long (2015) suggests that language learning operates differentially in different discourse domains. To date, no research is available that discusses whether oral interaction skills developed in one context transfers to other contexts of use. In a laboratory study on controlled listening tasks, however, Benson (2016) reports some evidence of transfer across tasks situated in different domains, but only for the group of lowest proficiency learners.

Following Lightbown's (2008) position that training context and eventual context of use must be matched, pre-vocational learners may benefit from oral interaction instruction that makes use of their future professional context during



interactional practice. Job analysis (McNamara, 1997) demonstrated that service encounters in the area of instruction, advice and sales should be included in such instruction for pre-vocational learners enrolled in a Business & Administration programme. In turn, this approach raises the question whether the potential benefits of instruction in a specialized professional context will transfer to personal interactional contexts, e.g., interactions in which learners set out to achieve the same goal (e.g. to advise someone) and that require the same language function (e.g. modals of recommendation), but that differ in terms of content (e.g. choice of hotel room vs choice of film) and audience (e.g. customer vs acquaintance).

### ***The present study***

To date, little is known about the effects of explicit L2 oral interaction instruction and practice on the development of interactional ability. There are some indications that improving interactional ability requires engaging in interaction (cf. Lightbown, 2008) but it is not clear to what extent improvement is dependent on the type of instruction and practice that learners receive. At present, pre-vocational EFL learners in the Netherlands are predominantly taught EFL oral interaction in coursebook-based, form-focused curricula, where instruction and practice are aimed at learning language structures, and pre-scripted interaction tasks are used to demonstrate accurate application of these. Some coursebooks (e.g. *Stepping Stones*) supplement such pre-scripted tasks with information gap tasks, aimed at generating spontaneous, unpredictable interaction between learners, but these are certainly not commonplace. Instruction and practice of interactional strategies that can support such interaction, is missing from coursebooks.

To our knowledge, no studies have investigated how form-focused instruction, strategy-focused instruction and task type impact on learners' development of EFL oral interaction. In this study, we therefore compared the effects of three instructional EFL programmes that are reflective of the above-mentioned approaches, i.e., 1) a programme that combined form-focused instruction and practice with pre-scripted interaction tasks (Form-Focused Interaction), 2) a programme that replaced the traditional pre-scripted interaction tasks with information gap tasks (Language-Directed Interaction), and 3) one that combined these information gap tasks with interactional strategies instruction and practice (Strategies-Directed Interaction). Since the study focused specifically on pre-vocational learners, these programmes were all situated in a training context suited to the professional track that they were enrolled in (Business & Administration studies). We posed the following research questions:

1. Does receiving explicit instruction and practice in EFL oral interaction improve pre-vocational learners' ability to interact in dialogic speech tasks, compared to business-as-usual EFL instruction?
2. If receiving explicit instruction and practice is beneficial, what type of programme is most effective: a form-focused programme, a language-directed programme or a strategies-directed programme?
3. To what extent does receiving instruction in EFL oral interaction affect pre-vocational learners' use of self- and other-supporting interaction strategies in dialogic speech tasks?
4. Does the effect of EFL oral interaction instruction received in a professional context transfer to performance in personal contexts?

With regards to RQ1, we hypothesised that receiving explicit instruction and practice would positively affect learners' oral interaction skills (cf. Lightbown, 2008). Against the backdrop of current models (e.g. Celce-Murcia, 2007) and the literature supporting the merits of information gap tasks (e.g. Doughty & Pica, 1986; Foster & Ohta, 2005), we theorised that learners' oral skills would develop better in programmes that allow for practice in negotiating interactional problems in unpredictable situations than in a solely form-focused programme that makes use of pre-scripted interaction tasks (RQ2). In view of the mixed results reported in studies on interactional strategies development and instruction, no hypothesis was formulated for RQ3. Regarding RQ4, we suspected that transfer from a professional to a personal interactional context might be limited (Benson, 2016; Lightbown, 2008).

## Method

### *Participants*

Sixteen secondary schools were asked to participate in this research. Eight of the ten responding schools expressed an interest in participation, three of which eventually accommodated the project, providing a total of 10 classes. One of the three participating schools was situated in a small town in the north of the country, and two were situated in a city near Amsterdam. Participants (aged 14-15) were pre-vocational learners ( $N = 199$ ), 57.1% male, in their third year of a four-year pre-vocational Business & Administration programme in The Netherlands (grade 9). They were enrolled in the two lowest levels of pre-vocational education, roughly equivalent to level 2 in the Interactional Standard Classification of Education

(UNESCO, 2012). Of these participants, 63.4% were monolingual and 26.7% were multilingual speakers of Dutch, 3.2% of whom reported English as one of the home languages. 9.9% had a non-Dutch language background. In accordance with local educational research guidelines and in close collaboration with the schools, all parents were informed about the study and the possibility of non-participation. One parent objected and their child was subsequently withdrawn from the sample.

All participants had received ca. 3 years of compulsory EFL instruction prior to this study. During this time, the participating schools timetabled an average of 120–135 minutes of English per week. All schools made use of course materials produced commercially in The Netherlands (*New Interface* and *Stepping Stones*), and the main language of instruction during lessons was Dutch. Teaching teams at all schools consisted of teachers trained to teach in the pre-vocational tracks, with of at least one member of staff with a minimum of 10 years' experience.

### **Design**

Between January and April 2016, an experimental design was implemented to assess the effects of three approaches to teaching EFL oral interaction. Participants were randomly assigned within classes to one of three experimental conditions: Form-Focused Interaction ( $n=52$ ), Language-Directed Interaction ( $n=50$ ), and Strategies-Directed Interaction ( $n=53$ ). This led to the formation of three new groups per class, each of which was taught as a separate group, in a separate classroom. At two of the participating schools, an intact class was assigned to the 'business-as-usual' condition ( $n=44$ ). This complete partitioning of experimental- and non-experimental classes aimed to prevent diffusion of the experimental programmes into the regular school curriculum, and to safeguard the 'business-as-usual' implementation of the standard curriculum in a way that would not be possible with only a quarter of the class attending.

Table 1 summarises the effect of randomisation on the composition of the four conditions. Conditions were highly comparable with regards to gender ( $\chi^2(3) = .097, n = 199, p = .992$ ) and home language ratios ( $\chi^2(9) = 6.83, n = 199, p = .654$ ). ANOVA analyses indicated that learners within conditions did not differ significantly on vocabulary knowledge<sup>7</sup> ( $F(3, 187) = 1.53, p = .206$ ), but that there was a difference for prior experience<sup>7</sup> in interacting in English ( $F(3, 186) = 4.09, p = .008$ ). The 'business-as-usual' group was significantly less experienced than the

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<sup>7</sup> See the description of Vocabulary and Experience under 'Measures' below.

Form-Focused Interaction group (Mean Difference =  $-.392$  (CI =  $-.717$  to  $-.067$ )) and the Language-Directed Interaction group (Mean Difference =  $-.566$  (CI  $-.891$  to  $-.241$ )). For this reason, both vocabulary and experience were added as covariates in our analyses.

**TABLE 1**

***Background information of the sample (n = 199)***

	n	Gender		Home Language			Vocabulary	Experience
		M	F	Mono-lingual Dutch	Multi-lingual Dutch	Non-Dutch	M (SD)	M (SD)
Business-as-usual	44	25	19	33	8	3	34.0 (6.4)	2.09 (.69)
FFI <sup>a</sup>	52	29	23	30	17	5	36.3 (5.1)	2.48 (.93)
LDI <sup>b</sup>	50	28	22	29	13	8	34.8 (5.3)	2.66 (.75)
SDI <sup>c</sup>	53	31	22	34	14	5	36.0 (6.0)	2.39 (.68)

<sup>a</sup> Form-Focused Interaction

<sup>b</sup> Language-Directed Interaction

<sup>c</sup> Strategies-Directed Interaction

## ***Interventions***

Each intervention consisted of nine 40–45 minute lessons that were taught during normal school hours within a twelve-week time span. During this time, the business-as-usual group followed its regular EFL curriculum that focused on developing EFL proficiency in general, and in which circa 15 interaction activities were integrated. These learners were taught in two intact classes of 19 and 25 learners.

In contrast, the experimental groups received explicit practice and instruction in a professional domain, i.e., in the role of hotel receptionist. A job analysis (McNamara, 1997) was carried out to establish what task types, task settings and professional interactional routines (Bygate, 1987) are relevant to the Business & Administration sector. From this, three types of service encounter were distilled for the lessons, i.e. instruction, advice and sales encounters.

Learners were taught in groups of 5–8 learners. In each of the three groups, identical sample dialogues were studied that modelled both the use of the targeted language structures and the use of target interaction strategies. Depending on the programme's focus, these dialogues were accompanied by noticing and

awareness activities aimed at either language structures or interaction strategies. To control time on task, the programmes contained similar numbers and types of activities, including two speech tasks (on identical topics) per lesson, i.e., a total of 18 speech tasks over the course of the nine lessons. The programmes differed in terms of the context in which oral interaction practice was situated, the lessons' instructional focus and type of task (Figure 1).

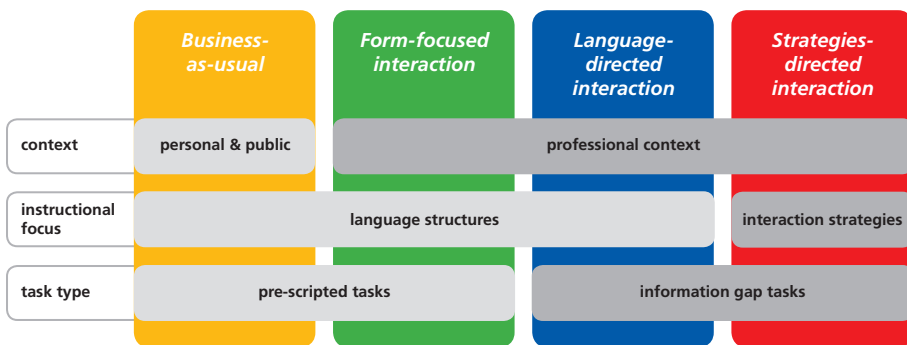


Figure 1. Differences and similarities between conditions

#### BUSINESS-AS-USUAL CONDITION

In this condition, learners followed their regular, coursebook-based curriculum aimed at developing accurate language use, i.e., either chapters 3, 4 and 5 from *Stepping Stones 3 B/K* or chapters 4 and 5 from *New Interface Yellow Label* (textbook) and *Orange Label* (workbook). This curriculum consisted of explicit language study (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling) and skills practice in personal or public interactional contexts. Dialogic interaction activities were typically placed at the end of an activities sequence. Most of these activities were controlled and provided learners with language instructions, e.g. translating sentences from L1 to L2, grammatical transformation or lexical encoding in gap-fill tasks or responding to L1 content cues (see Appendix 3A for an example). As such, these activities allowed learners to demonstrate proficient use of the taught language forms. Lessons did not contain systematic post-task reflection activities.

#### FORM-FOCUSED INTERACTION (FFI) CONDITION

##### (WITH PRE-SCRIPTED TASKS)

Lessons focused on learning the language structures necessary to fulfil specific language functions in the professional domain (hotel receptionist). These included modals of necessity, connectives and adverbs of time (instruction tasks), modals of recommendation, asking for preferences, and comparatives (advice tasks), intensifying adjectives, comparatives, superlatives and modals of obligation (sales tasks). Activities included studying sample dialogues, noticing target language structures in these dialogues, explicit rule presentation and controlled practice activities, e.g. matching clauses or conjugation activities. Application tasks were pre-scripted, form-focused tasks that guided participants through professional dialogues modelling the interactional encounter, and that provided language instructions, i.e., grammatical encoding (see Appendix 3B for an example). Post-task reflection focused on the accurate application of the taught language structures.

#### LANGUAGE-DIRECTED INTERACTION (LDI) CONDITION

##### (WITH INFORMATION GAP TASKS)

Participants received exactly the same form-focused instruction and practice as the FFI group (see above), except that these were combined with information gap tasks (Appendix 3C.1, 3C.2 and 3C.3), designed to encounter a number of interactional problems in conversation, e.g. needing to explain a concept for which they lacked the vocabulary. No instruction on interaction strategies was provided. Post-task reflection on the application tasks focused on the extent to which the communicative goal had been achieved.

#### STRATEGIES-DIRECTED INTERACTION (SDI) CONDITION

##### (WITH INFORMATION GAP TASKS)

This condition explicitly taught interaction strategies considered helpful in addressing problems and maintaining mutual understanding in interactional encounters. These included compensation strategies (e.g. approximation, circumlocution and exemplification), meaning negotiation strategies (e.g. indicating incomprehension and asking for elaboration, clarification, tempo adjustment and repetition of the message) and audience awareness strategies (e.g. attentive listening, avoiding and addressing misunderstanding and message alignment). Activities included studying sample dialogues, noticing target strategies in these dialogues, and explicit presentation and practice of said strategies. Application tasks were the same information gap tasks used in the LDI condition (see above). Post-task reflection focused on the extent to which the communicative goal had been achieved.

### Procedure

In the experimental conditions, the nine lessons were divided into three blocks of three. After each block, participants' oral performance was measured with two dialogic speech tasks (Figure 2). The experimental groups were taught by twelve research assistants who had been recruited and trained specifically for this purpose. All assistants were university educated, with a background in Education Studies, Pedagogy or Psychology. Assistants were allocated to specific schools in groups of three, where they each taught lessons in one specific condition to prevent cross-conditional contamination. Lessons were taught in three separate classrooms, in parallel.

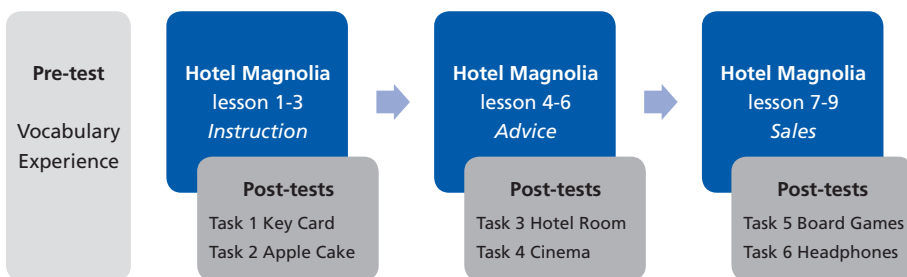


Figure 2. Procedure

For improving treatment fidelity, we trained assistants in their roles as teachers, using teacher's guides that comprised an explanation of the methodological approach, instructions for organisational and pedagogical conduct, and lesson plans containing lesson phasing, time limits and protocols for instructions and explanations. Unannounced treatment fidelity checks were carried out by the first author and reflection forms were filled out by the assistants after each lesson. No anomalies were detected. Reflection forms completed by the research assistants indicated that planned activities were delivered in all conditions, *except that* the second interaction task and corresponding reflection task were not always implemented in lessons delivered in the LDI (89% and 86% implementation respectively) and SDI (92% and 74% implementation respectively) conditions. This likely occurred because the content preparation required for information gap tasks takes longer than the linguistic preparation required for pre-scripted tasks.

Participants in the business-as-usual group followed the regular curriculum. They were taught by their regular teachers of English, who had been asked to

teach their standard programme without alteration, and who had been informed that their learners would partake in assessment tasks every three weeks. Teachers did not have access to the lesson materials used in the experimental groups. The learners were assessed using the same tasks as in the experimental groups, at the same points in time.

### **Measures**

#### **EFL INTERACTIONAL ABILITY**

Participants' performance in EFL oral interaction was measured after lessons 3, 6 and 9 with the use of two dialogic speech tasks that were aligned with the lesson focus, i.e. instruction tasks, advice tasks and sales tasks. For each task type, two dialogic tasks in which authentic interaction is simulated were developed. The tasks within one task type – or task set – required the candidates to achieve the same goal (e.g. to explain a procedure) and tapped similar language functions, but differed in terms of content, audience and domain. Within a task set, one task was situated in the professional domain in which the learners had been trained, with the candidate assuming the role of a hotel receptionist and the interlocutor the role of hotel guest, and one task was situated in the personal domain, with both candidate and interlocutor assuming the role of acquaintances (Table 2). See chapter 3 for a full discussion of task design, administration and validation.

**TABLE 2**

#### ***Six speech tasks***

Task type	Task	Goal	Domain
Instruction	(1) Key Card	Explain to a customer how to open the door using a hotel key card.	Professional
	(2) Apple Cake	Explain to a family friend how to bake apple cake.	Personal
Advice	(3) Hotel Room	Advise a guest which hotel room to choose.	Professional
	(4) Cinema	Advise a family member which film to see.	Personal
Sales	(5) Board Games	Persuade a guest to buy a gift from the hotel gift shop.	Professional
	(6) Headphones	Persuade your sibling's friend to buy your second-hand headphones	Personal



During each of the three test sessions, participants carried out two tasks individually with a trained research assistant acting as interlocutor. Interlocutors made use of scripts that fully prescribed their textual and interactional contribution, standardising both linguistic (complexity, register, style) and interactional (set points requiring the use of interactional strategies) challenges posed to candidates.

Performances were video-taped and subsequently assessed by trained raters blind to condition on a Likert scale of 1–5 for the degree to which participants achieved the communicative goals set by the task (*Task Achievement*), the extent to which participants expressed themselves in lexically and grammatically correct English (*Linguistic Accuracy*) and the extent to which participants managed to overcome potential communication problems (*Interactional Resourcefulness*).<sup>8</sup>

#### INTERACTIONAL STRATEGIES

The same tasks were used to measure participants' use of interaction strategies. In addition to eliciting functional language use at a global level, the interlocutor scripts described above evoked self-supporting compensation and meaning negotiation strategies by asking candidates to handle language beyond their current ability (cf. Dörnyei & Scott, 1995) and other-supporting strategies by the interlocutor misinterpreting information provided by the candidate (cf. Weir, 2005). This produced two analytic measures of self-supporting strategies (*Compensation* and *Meaning Negotiation*) and one analytic measure of other-supporting strategies (*Correcting Misinterpretation*).

As described above, videotaped performances were measured by trained raters. Ratings of *Compensation*, *Meaning Negotiation* and *Correcting Misinterpretation* focused on the adequacy and appropriateness of participants' responses during individual episodes in the interaction, and were rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (very weak) to 5 (very strong).

For each task, different teams provided ratings for global achievement (*Task Achievement*, *Linguistic Accuracy* and *Interactional Resourcefulness*), and for the

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<sup>8</sup> In study 2, participants' interactional performance was rated with the use of two measures: Linguistic Accuracy and Interactional Ability. In this study, we also wished to measure learners' overall ability to achieve the specific communicative goals set by the task, i.e., the degree to which task execution was complete, the candidates' response was socio-culturally appropriate and the message was conveyed successfully. For this reason, Task Achievement was added as a holistic measure, and was found to be reliable (.76 to .85). To avoid confusion, the original term Interactional Ability has been replaced in this study with the term Interactional Resourcefulness, which refers to the extent to which candidates manage to overcome potential communication problems. This scale is reliable at .74 to .86.

quality of the specific interaction strategies (*Compensation, Meaning Negotiation* and *Correcting Misinterpretation*). Each team consisted of two raters, who rated a set of fifty tasks randomly selected from the sample to establish inter-rater reliability. These four raters subsequently rated a set of ca. sixty tasks (50% of the remaining total) individually. Intra-class correlation coefficients (two-way random model, absolute agreement) ranged from .70 to .94. Raters did not participate as teachers or interlocutors in this study.

#### EXPERIENCE

In order to control for individual differences between learners that relate to ability in FL oral interaction, we obtained measures on learners' prior experience and vocabulary knowledge. On a Likert scale of 1–5, participants indicated how experienced they were in interacting in English both inside and outside of the classroom, both with adults and with peers, e.g. 'We often practice speaking in class.'; 'In my free time, I often speak English with my friends' (Appendix 4). This newly developed scale consists of six items and proved reliable ( $\alpha = .73$ ). Deleting any of the items would not improve internal consistency. These data were obtained prior to the start of the intervention.

#### VOCABULARY

Productive and receptive vocabulary are known to correlate highly. Meara & Fitzpatrick (2000), for instance, report a correlation of .841 between productive and receptive measures of vocabulary. We therefore we chose to measure participants' vocabulary knowledge using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Dunn & Dunn, 2007), adapted for use in an EFL setting. Taking coverage in pre-vocational EFL coursebooks as a selection criterion for determining item familiarity, 46 items were selected from sets 1 to 12 of the original test. The test covered different content areas (e.g. actions, sports, animals) and parts of speech (nouns, verbs and adjectives). In a whole class setting, participants matched orally delivered vocabulary items with one of four pictures projected on a smart board by circling the correct number of the picture on their answer sheets ( $\alpha = .85$ ). The test was administered before the intervention commenced.

#### **Analysis**

The variables were examined for accuracy of data entry, distributions and missing values. 8,3% of items were missing, with missingness varying from 0 to 14,7%, and one variable reaching 20,9%. Little's MCAR test indicated that data were missing at random ( $\chi^2 (1123) = 1155,01 p = .247$ ). Eight participants who did not partake

in the interaction tests, and / or had attended less than 50% of the lessons were deleted prior to imputing data (using Expectation Maximization in SPSS version 22). The imputation model included all test information (vocabulary, experience and interaction scores), as well as information about gender, home language and group size. Comparisons of results from analyses of the original data and the imputed data showed no substantial differences. We therefore report on the results from the imputed data set ( $N = 191$ ).

With participants in this study being drawn from different classes, the data were structured hierarchically. Since independency between class and measures of interaction could not be assumed under these circumstances, linear multilevel analyses were applied, with *Class* added as random factor. Analyses of the global measures revealed that *Class* contributed to the model on the measure *Interactional Resourcefulness*. It was therefore decided to analyse all global measures (*Task Achievement*, *Linguistic Accuracy* and *Interactional Resourcefulness*) using a mixed model (SPSS version 22). *Vocabulary* and *Experience* were added as covariates to these statistical models.

Mean scores for tasks 1, 3 and 5 were calculated to obtain measures of EFL oral interaction in a professional setting, i.e., *Professional Task Achievement* (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .76$ ), *Professional Linguistic Accuracy* (.81) and *Professional Interactional Resourcefulness* (.69), and mean scores for tasks 2, 4 and 6 were calculated to obtain measures of performance in the personal domain, i.e., *Personal Task Achievement* (.79), *Personal Linguistic Accuracy* (.83) and *Personal Interactional Resourcefulness* (.77). Cronbach alpha statistics for strategic performance in either professional (tasks 1, 3 and 5) or personal (tasks 2, 5 and 6) contexts for these measures ranged between .40 and .61, suggesting that task effects played a role. For this reason, interactional strategies were analysed at task level.

No variation at class level was found for the analytic measures *Compensation*, *Meaning Negotiation* and *Correcting Misinterpretation*, indicating that the assumption of independence relevant to AN(C)OVA analysis was met. However, Levene's test for equality of variance showed that variability of scores were dissimilar for *Compensation* in Task 3 ( $F(1, 188) = 3.243, p = .023$ ) and Task 6 ( $F(1, 188) = 3.260, p = .023$ ), and for *Correcting Misinterpretation* in Task 2 ( $F(1, 188) = 2.926, p = .035$ ). Furthermore, histograms revealed that the analytic measures were not always normally distributed. For this reason, all analytic measures were analysed using the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis Test as an alternative to a one-way between group AN(C)OVA.<sup>9</sup> To reduce the risk of a Type 1 error, a Bonferroni correction was applied. Consequently, all effects are reported at .008 significance level.

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<sup>9</sup> ANCOVA analysis that controlled for Vocabulary and Experience produced the same results as the Kruskal-Wallis Test.

## Results

### *Effect of the intervention on EFL oral interaction*

To establish whether receiving explicit, contextualised instruction in EFL interaction improved learners' ability to interact in dialogic speech tasks, all experimental groups were first compared to the business-as-usual group. Table 3 shows the means, standard deviations and effect sizes for the global measures, resulting from the post-tests. Multilevel analyses revealed an effect of the intervention on experimental versus business-as-usual groups in the professional context, i.e., *Professional Task Achievement*, ( $F(1, 9) = 10.650, p = .010$ ), *Professional Linguistic Accuracy* ( $F(1, 9) = 8.985, p = .015$ ) and *Professional Interactional Resourcefulness* ( $F(1, 7) = 7.748, p = .026$ ). Effect sizes were large ( $ES = 0.74 - 0.83$ ).

No overall effect of instruction was found on interactional performance in the personal domain, *Personal Task Achievement* ( $F(1, 10) = 2.107, p = .178$ ), *Personal Linguistic Accuracy* ( $F(1, 9) = .673, p = .434$ ) and *Personal Interactional Resourcefulness* ( $F(1, 9) = 3.460, p = .095$ ).

TABLE 3

*Means, standard deviations and effect sizes for interactional ability (controlled for vocabulary and experience)*

	Business-as-usual group ( $n=41$ )	Experimental group ( $n=150$ )	ES <sup>1</sup>
	M (SD)	M (SD)	
<b>Task Achievement</b>			
Professional	2.58 (.89)	3.26 (.79)	.83
Personal	2.60 (.91)	3.12 (.91)	
<b>Linguistic Accuracy</b>			
Professional	2.51 (.90)	3.13 (.81)	.74
Personal	2.63 (.90)	2.99 (.85)	
<b>Interactional Resourcefulness</b>			
Professional	2.34 (.80)	2.99 (.89)	.74
Personal	2.44 (1.05)	3.08 (.93)	

<sup>1</sup>Hedges'  $g$

To determine which type of instruction was most effective, further analyses to establish differential effects between different types of treatment were conducted on measures where significant overall effects had been found. Table 4 displays the means and standard deviations for the three experimental groups on the global measures. No differences between the three experimental groups were found on *Professional Task Achievement*, ( $F(2, 140) = .577, p = .563$ ), *Professional Linguistic Accuracy* ( $F(2, 149) = .639, p = .529$ ) and *Professional Interactional Ability* ( $F(2, 139) = .910, p = .405$ ). These results indicate that form-focused, language-directed and strategies-directed lessons are equally effective for pre-vocational learners.

**TABLE 4**

***Means and standard deviations for the three experimental groups on interactional ability (controlled for vocabulary and experience)***

	FFI <sup>a</sup> (n=49)	LDI <sup>b</sup> (n=48)	SDI <sup>c</sup> (n=53)
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
<b>Task Achievement</b>			
Professional	3.27 (.71)	3.19 (.91)	3.32 (.76)
Personal	3.29 (.81)	3.10 (.87)	2.95 (1.03)
<b>Linguistic Accuracy</b>			
Professional	3.10 (.77)	3.11 (.88)	3.18 (.79)
Personal	3.15 (.78)	2.80 (.92)	3.00 (.83)
<b>Interactional Resourcefulness</b>			
Professional	2.95 (.70)	2.94 (.99)	3.07 (.95)
Personal	3.15 (.85)	3.16 (.94)	2.93 (1.00)

<sup>a</sup> Form-Focused Interaction

<sup>b</sup> Language-Directed Interaction

<sup>c</sup> Strategies-Directed Interaction

***Effect of the intervention on interaction strategies***

To determine whether receiving instruction in EFL oral interaction affects pre-vocational learners' use of self- and other-supporting interaction strategies, all experimental groups were first compared to the business-as-usual group. Where relevant, further analyses were conducted to establish whether differential effects between

different types of treatment had occurred. Means, standard deviations and effect sizes for the measures are presented per task (Tables 5 and 6). Kruskal-Wallis analyses revealed effects of instruction for the experimental versus business-as-usual groups on *Compensation* in Task 3,  $H(1) = 11.640, p = .001$ , *Meaning Negotiation* in Task 2,  $H(1) = 10.247, p = .001$ , Task 3  $H(1) = 8.481, p = .004$  and in Task 6,  $H(1) = 8.598, p = .003$  and on *Misinterpretation* in Task 2,  $H(1) = 12.792, p = .000$ . Effect sizes for these measures were moderate ( $ES = 0.44-0.70$ ). These results show that positive effects of treatment are limited to a relatively small number of tasks.

**TABLE 5**

***Means, standard deviations and effect sizes for the analytic measures (controlled for vocabulary and experience)***

		Business-as-usual group ( $n=41$ )	Experimental group ( $n=150$ )	
	Task	M (SD)	M (SD)	ES <sup>1</sup>
<b>Compensation</b>				
Professional	1	2.07 (1.11)	2.16 (1.29)	.57
	3	1.32 (.84)	2.12 (1.52)	
	5	3.17 (1.67)	3.42 (1.80)	
Personal	2	2.44 (1.31)	2.65 (1.24)	
	4	2.05 (1.15)	2.31 (1.24)	
	6	1.82 (1.04)	2.27 (1.34)	
<b>Meaning Negotiation</b>				
Professional	1	2.30 (1.36)	2.55 (1.24)	.52
	3	2.49 (1.40)	3.17 (1.29)	
	5	3.03 (1.28)	3.33 (1.14)	
Personal	2	2.28 (1.20)	3.04 (1.35)	.57
	4	2.79 (1.49)	2.86 (1.31)	
	6	2.73 (1.18)	3.24 (1.15)	
<b>Correcting Misinterpretation</b>				
Professional	1	1.87 (1.29)	2.38 (1.49)	
	3	3.46 (1.17)	3.75 (1.12)	
	5	2.82 (1.25)	2.84 (1.24)	
Personal	2	1.81 (1.34)	2.91 (1.62)	.70
	4	2.70 (1.35)	3.24 (1.33)	
	6	3.36 (1.30)	3.66 (1.51)	

<sup>1</sup> Hedges'  $g$

Further analyses did not indicate differences between the three experimental groups on *Compensation* in Task 3,  $H(2) = 1.124, p = .570$ , *Meaning Negotiation* in Task 2,  $H(2) = .859, p = .651$ , Task 3  $H(2) = 1.917, p = .383$  or Task 6,  $H(2) = .865, p = .649$ , nor on *Correcting Misinterpretation* in Task 2,  $H(2) = 1.285, p = .526$ . In other words, learners who received either form-focused, language-directed or strategies-directed instruction did not perform differently from each other in the application of interaction strategies.

**TABLE 6**

***Means and standard deviations for the three experimental groups on analytic measures (controlled for vocabulary and experience)***

		FFI <sup>a</sup> (n=49)	LDI <sup>b</sup> (n=48)	SDI <sup>c</sup> (n=53)
	Task	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
<b>Compensation</b>				
Professional	1	2.36 (1.37)	2.07 (1.29)	2.07 (1.22)
	3	1.90 (1.38)	2.24 (1.59)	2.20 (1.59)
	5	3.84 (1.69)	2.81 (1.80)	3.59 (1.80)
Personal	2	2.81 (1.20)	2.27 (1.23)	2.84 (1.24)
	4	2.19 (1.25)	2.37 (1.23)	2.36 (1.27)
	6	2.15 (1.42)	2.28 (1.31)	2.37 (1.30)
<b>Meaning Negotiation</b>				
Professional	1	2.28 (1.13)	2.73 (1.23)	2.62 (1.33)
	3	3.04 (1.15)	3.13 (1.36)	3.34 (1.34)
	5	3.50 (.95)	3.13 (1.22)	3.35 (1.22)
Personal	2	2.99 (1.38)	2.97 (1.18)	3.16 (1.47)
	4	2.87 (1.25)	2.70 (1.44)	2.99 (1.25)
	6	3.39 (1.14)	3.22 (1.17)	3.14 (1.14)
<b>Correcting Misinterpretation</b>				
Professional	1	2.45 (1.47)	2.41 (1.53)	2.28 (1.51)
	3	3.78 (1.28)	3.83 (.98)	3.65 (1.10)
	5	2.91 (1.32)	2.78 (1.25)	2.83 (1.18)
Personal	2	2.79 (1.59)	3.11 (1.61)	2.82 (1.67)
	4	3.27 (1.41)	3.31 (1.18)	3.15 (1.41)
	6	3.92 (1.47)	3.47 (1.61)	3.60 (1.45)

<sup>a</sup> Form-Focused Interaction

<sup>b</sup> Language-Directed Interaction

<sup>c</sup> Strategies-Directed Interaction

in use during practice activities (Bejarano et al., 1997; Gallagher-Brett, 2001). Interactional problems encountered during interaction effectively create a 'flight-or-fight situation', i.e., one that catches the speaker off guard, and demands a response swift enough to meet the demands of real-time conversation. Under such pressure, speakers are likely to resign themselves to insufficiently resolved interactional problems, because addressing these problems takes time that also needs to be spent on satisfying other task demands (Foster, 1998; Sayer, 2005). Since strategies use was new territory for learners, it is possible that the taught interaction strategies were not yet fully internalised, and so not readily available for swift retrieval during task performance (cf. Lam, 2004; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

The modest effects of instruction on the use of strategies may also be due to the limited cognitive and linguistic abilities of the pre-vocational learners. Most of the distributions for *Compensation* and a third of the distributions for *Correcting Misinterpretation* were positively skewed, with most participants receiving 1 or 2 on scale of 1-5. This suggests that the majority of participants struggled to use these strategies, which seems consistent with Lam (2004), who found limited effects of instruction on the use of compensation and meaning negotiation strategies by low-proficiency learners, and suggested that low-proficient speakers favour simpler 'bedrock' strategies (e.g. making use of task input) over the use of strategies that are more cognitively and linguistically demanding (cf. Green & Oxford, 1995).

### ***Limitations and suggestions for future research***

This study has shown that explicit, contextualised EFL oral interaction in the classroom positively affected linguistic accuracy, interactional resourcefulness and overall task achievement, but it did not show differential effects between the experimental conditions. A possible explanation may have been that the last speech task and its corresponding reflection task were not always implemented in the Language-Directed and Strategies-Directed lessons where information gap tasks were used. This suggests that the content preparation required for information gap tasks is more effortful, and thus takes longer, than the linguistic preparation required for pre-scripted role plays. To gain a more in-depth understanding of the potential merits of strategies-inclusive teaching, future studies should compare fully implemented programmes.

Learners in the business-as-usual condition were taught in intact classes consisting of 19-25 learners, whereas learners in the experimental conditions were taught in groups of 5-8 learners. Although the results obtained in this study are



not indicative of this, it is possible that the discrepancy in group size disadvantaged learners in the business-as-usual condition. Conducting the study with more comparable group sizes would help demonstrate whether the obtained results are retained under such circumstances.

Detectable effects of instruction on learners' use of strategies in this study were limited. Previous studies, however, have shown that effects of instruction are often indirect and delayed (Long, 2015; Skehan, 1996), and that the effects of strategies training tend to be very small (cf. McDonough, 1999). Coding transcripts of speech tasks for strategies use may provide additional information on the effects of instruction, i.e., it would allow for a comparison of both type and frequency of strategies used by learners from different experimental groups. Furthermore, Lam (2004) found that instruction had not only affected the use of targeted, but also non-targeted strategies. An analysis of learner performance on both evoked and non-evoked turns could thus provide insight in the indirect effects that strategies instruction may have had.

Since the use of interaction strategies is sensitive to task effects, it was not possible to establish whether participants' strategic conduct is different in professional and personal language use situations. However, since Kouwenhoven et al. (2016) found L2 users to make more use of effortful strategies (such as compensation) in formal settings, and less effortful strategies in informal settings, this remains a relevant question for future research. Analysis of strategies use in both professional and personal tasks could determine whether the pre-vocational learners adapted their strategies use to the context of language use.

### ***Implications for practice***

Currently, oral interaction instruction offered to pre-vocational learners is integrated in coursebook-based curricula that aim to develop EFL proficiency in general contexts. This study suggests, however, that the development of learners' interactional ability in specific contexts benefits from receiving explicit, contextualised instruction. Since pre-vocational learners are being prepared for vocational studies within specific vocational contexts, practitioners could capitalise on contextualised skills development by selecting vocation-specific activities that match their learners' future interactional situations. Furthermore, this study does not provide any indication that the widely adopted form-focused approach yields better results than other approaches. This gives practitioners curricular flexibility; within the context of overall curricular demands, they can equally make use of form-focused, pre-scripted role plays and meaning-focused information gap tasks.