Eğitimde Kuram ve Uygulama *2009, 5 (1): 33-52*
Journal of Theory and Practice in Education *Articles /Makaleler*
ISSN: 1304-9496 *http://eku.comu.edu.tr/index/5/1/iherten_maltay.pdf*

THE EFFECTS OF TASK-BASED GROUP ACTIVITIES ON STUDENTS' COLLABORATIVE BEHAVIOURS IN EFL SPEAKING CLASSES

(İNGİLİZCE KONUŞMA SINIFLARINDA YÜRÜTÜLEN GÖREV TEMELLİ GRUP ÇALIŞMALARININ ÖĞRENCİLERİN KUBAŞIK DAVRANIŞLARINA ETKİLERİ)

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on an investigation that compared the effects of task-based and topic-based speaking activities on student interaction and collaboration in EFL speaking classes. A quasi-experimental study was conducted in a classroom setting, with trainee teachers of English (n=25) with an average upper-intermediate level of English proficiency. The participants were instructed to carry out either a task-based or a topic-based speaking activity during which their performance was recorded. A qualitative analysis of the data revealed that the task-based activity led to more real life-like language use, characterised by a larger number of short turns and questions, compared to the greater quantity of long turns observed during the topic-based activity. Furthermore, the task-based activity yielded more collaborative behaviours. The study concludes that task-based speaking activities may be more conducive to creating a more collaborative learning environment and also providing opportunities for real life-like language use.

Keywords: task-based activities, topic-based activities, collaboration, collaborative behaviours

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, İngilizce konuşma sınıflarında kullanılan görev temelli ve konu temelli konuşma etkinliklerinin öğrenci etkileşimi ve işbirliği üzerindeki etkilerini incelemektedir. Orta üstü İngilizce dil yeterlilik seviyesine sahip aday İngilizce öğretmenleri (n=25) ile yarı deneysel bir çalışma yapılmıştır. Farklı gruplarda görev temelli ya da konu temelli konuşma etkinlikleri yürütülmüş, etkinlikler boyunca ses kaydı alınmıştır. Nitel veri analizi; görev temelli etkinliğin -gerçek hayattakine benzer olarak- daha çok *kısa söz hakkı* almaya ve *soru sormaya*, bununla birlikte konu temelli etkinliğin daha fazla *uzun söz hakkı* almaya ortam hazırladığını göstermiştir. Ayrıca görev temelli etkinlik, öğrencilerin daha fazla işbirlikçi davranış sergilemesine olanak sağlamıştır. Bu çalışmanın sonuçları; görev temelli konuşma etkinliklerinin hem kubaşık öğrenme ortamı yaratmada daha faydalı olabileceğini hem de gerçek hayattakine yakın dil kullanım fırsatları yaratmaya daha elverişli olduğunu göstermiştir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: görev temelli etkinlikler, konu temelli etkinlikler, işbirliği, kubaşık davranış.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper reports the findings of a study into the use of task- and topic-based activities in small-group work during English speaking lessons and whether such activities promote collaborative interaction among group members. The setting is an ELT pre-service teacher training programme in western Turkey. Following a description of the contextual background to the study, brief reviews are given of theoretical concepts concerned with the development of speaking as a major language skill for teachers of English, pedagogical tasks and collaborative learning experiences. The purpose of the study was to try and discover whether these concepts combine neatly for pedagogical purposes, as they would appear to. A description of the study is followed by a section on the aims, methodology and analysis. Finally, the findings of the study are presented and discussed and some conclusions are drawn.

The Need to Develop Speaking Skills for Trainee Teachers

Speaking is one of the major language skills which need to be developed by non-native teachers of English and is often difficult to improve in EFL situations with limited access to other speakers of English. In most such contexts, either inside or outside the classroom, there are generally many more opportunities to experience the written language than the oral language (Gu, 2003). In cases where there is little chance for oral interaction outside the classroom, it is thus imperative to optimise the classroom time available and create opportunities for the development of learners' speaking skills.

The features exhibited by skilful speakers of a language are an ability to process language quickly, fluency, accuracy, complexity and the use of strategies, all of which contribute to the production of language with no apparent conscious effort on the part of the speaker.

How is this level of skill reached? General theories of skill development try to explain the progression from an early stage of having to expend a lot of effort and attention to a stage, after practice, where less effort and attention is required; this seems to be due to processes which lead to the skill becoming automatic (McLaughlin, 1987; Segalowitz, 2003). As an illustration, one such theory of skill development proposed by Anderson (1985) is his ACT (Adaptive Control of Thought) Model, which consists of three stages of cognitive development: the cognitive stage, associative stage and autonomous stage. Mitchell and Myles (1998) point out that, at the cognitive stage, a description of the procedure in question is learned, followed by working out a method of performing the skill and practicing it (associative stage). Finally, repetitive practice of the skill leads to a more rapid, automatic performance, which may no longer even be performed consciously (autonomous stage). Thus, once a high level of automaticity has been attained,

the skill is performed faster and in a different way to skills at a lower level of competence and there is a change in the way that processing is carried out (Segalowitz, 2003).

A parallel may be seen between the stages described by Anderson and the ELT context described by Ur (1996). The latter proposes three steps in the process of language acquisition, which she terms verbalisation, automatisation and autonomy. At the first stage, the learner is made aware of new items and, following controlled practice, learns to produce the items automatically. Finally, with more practice, the learner acquires the skill to perform independently and accurately. In order to reach this stage, however, a great deal of practice is needed. Ur concludes that practice is one of the most important components of learning a language. In short, only practice makes perfect!

Peer Collaboration as a Useful Means

The question then arises as to how the necessary practice in the L2 should best be effected in contexts where extra-curricular opportunities to speak the language are scarce. For a number of reasons, many authors assert that practice is most beneficial when carried out in collaboration with small groups of peers, rather than with the teacher or in a whole-class setting. The claims of some of these authors are summarised below:

- Open discussion in cooperative groups enables clarification of ideas and perspectives in a context free of the perpetual scrutiny of the teacher and the wider class group (Gillies, 2006).
- Learners do not have to rely on the teacher to be their only interlocutor and source of language input (Nunan, 1992). It is possible for peers to provide language models (Erten, 2000) and to interact with each other.
- Peers can act as natural interlocutors resulting in the availability of a much greater variety of models with whom to practise (Long and Porter, 1984).
- Peers are often more aware than teachers of misunderstanding (Gillies, 2006).
- Cooperation in groups also contributes to a more relaxed atmosphere in the classroom, lessening anxiety and inhibitions, and should thus lead to an increase in both the quantity and quality of practice (Ur, 1996; Altay and Öztürk, 2004).
- Collaborative work often exerts a beneficial effect on task performance (Storch, 2001).

It can thus be safely concluded that collaborative practice should facilitate language development, and that group or pair work appears to be an

ideal format for realising this objective, on both pedagogical and psycholinguistic grounds (Long and Porter, 1984).

Interaction in Group Work

It is not known exactly what happens during group work activities or the precise effect of small group interaction on learning or acquisition (Mercer, 2004). Although there are still many unexplored questions as to how group work operates and what students actually do in groups in language classrooms, what occurs is known to be complex (Chen and Hird, 2006). Little is known about how student interaction can facilitate learning (Gillies, 2004), but studies suggest that interaction and learning are related and student interaction and cooperation lead to second language acquisition (Lightbown and Spada, 1999; Gass, 2003). However, caution needs to be applied when considering whether group work results in a collaborative learning experience. Mercer (2004) warns that it should not be assumed that group-based learning is inevitably valuable per se as it does not always lead to collaborative talk and learning. In this sense, the need for group work activities to be well-planned and well-designed would appear to be of great significance (Gillies, 2004). The extent to which group work results in cooperative learning through collaborative interaction depends on the frequency of communicative interaction (Mercer, 2004) and the quality of that discourse (Ellis, 2003). Group learning seems to occur when participants are required to communicate and work together (i.e. cooperate) to solve a problem (Light and Glachan, 1985), as students have to discuss, make statements, and convince others in order to find a solution.

Wegerif, Mercer, and Dawes. (1999: 495) describe the conditions that are required for collaborative interaction as follows:

(1) All information is shared;
(2) The group seeks to reach agreement;
(3) The group takes responsibility for decisions;
(4) Reasons are expected;
(5) Challenges are expected;
(6) Alternatives are discussed before a decision is taken; and
(7) All in the group are encouraged to speak by other group members.

Negotiating Meaning

The above-mentioned conditions of collaborative interaction provide a setting conducive to the negotiation of meaning, an important feature of interaction (Skehan and Foster, 2001). If there are obstacles to comprehension, negotiational features are used to arrive at a common understanding. Speakers can modify the input or structure the interaction (Long, 1981) by using

interactional strategies to avoid conversational trouble or repair misunderstandings.

The discourse used to effect this is known as the negotiation of meaning and requires participants to collaborate in order to reach a consensus (Gillies, 2006). Among the most frequently used communication strategies used with regard to oral interaction are comprehension checks, clarification requests, confirmation checks and recasts (Ellis, 2003). Such behaviours represent ways in which participants in a conversation collaborate in order to communicate effectively (Dörnyei and Scott, 1997) and they also probably provide comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985).

Types of Activity

If we accept that collaborative interaction can lead to learning, how can we increase the quality and quantity of such discourse in the classroom? In this context, the most beneficial speaking activities would seem to be those that afford the most opportunity for students to collaborate and negotiate meaning during the interaction (Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001; Ellis, 2003).

Ur (1996) states that good speaking activities possess certain characteristics. During these activities, there is a large amount of learner talk, all have the opportunity to speak and participation is fairly evenly distributed amongst the students. Learners are also highly motivated and interested in the activity; they use language which is relevant, comprehensible and fairly accurate. The question then arises as to what kinds of activities tend to incorporate these characteristics and would seem to be useful in promoting collaborative group practice.

The kinds of activities used to encourage oral communication can be broadly divided into two groups: those which are topic-based and those which are task-based (Ur, 1996). Topic-based activities tend to be 'divergent' (Duff, 1986) or open-ended in nature, since the emphasis is on the discussion of a particular subject. There are generally no specific goals or outcomes to be achieved, and the purpose is for learners to converse relevantly on the topic in question. These activities include such things as discussions and debates. Such activities do not appear to support negotiation. With divergent goals and optionality in information supply, negotiation of meaning decreases (Pica, Kanagy, and Falodun, 1993).

Task-based activities, on the other hand, are 'convergent' (Duff, 1986) in nature, since learners are required to use the target language as a means to reach a specific outcome or consensus. This outcome may be open-ended, however, with no single "right" answer. During the activity, there is more emphasis on learners expressing the meaning using all the language they have at their disposal, thus ensuring comprehension, rather than on using particular linguistic features, say, or conversing on a specific topic. This category includes such things as role-play, problem solving and information-gap

activities. The main object is to engage in real communication, as Nunan states when defining a task as

> a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on meaning rather than form. (Nunan 1989:10)

When the task is open and discovery-based, with no correct answers or set solutions, and group members are interdependent, interaction is vital to productivity (Gillies, 2004). Cooperative group learning involves working together on a common group task; helping each other and facilitating each other's learning; and accepting responsibility for contributing to the group's task. Unless members of the group collaborate, they cannot successfully complete the activity (Wegerif et. al, 1999).

There is thus a difference of emphasis in the two types of activity. In topic-based activities, the emphasis is on the actual production of relevant speech. During such sessions, it is possible for learners to perform more independently of each other, as they do not necessarily need to exchange information during the activity. Learners may just express individual ideas without the need to engage in collaboration very much (Pica et. al, 1993). With task-based activities, however, learners need to communicate with and comprehend each other for successful performance of the task and to reach an outcome (Ellis, 2003; Skehan and Foster, 2001).

THE STUDY

Rationale for the Study

Since the main goal of the teaching context under consideration here was to enable learners to achieve maximum oral practice in a classroom setting, it seemed that task-based activities would result in more meaningful and active participation involving real communication through collaboration with peers. However, as asserted by several authors, we cannot assume collaboration will occur in all group work activities (Mercer, 2004; Gillies, 2004; 2006). It is not possible to claim that we can easily depict what happens when students are required to perform in groups (Chen and Hird, 2006). Therefore, a closer look at the conditions under which learners tend to create and become involved in collaborative behaviour to negotiate meaning in speaking classes would seem to be warranted. Uncovering the divergent influences of different types of group work activities on student interaction can be of assistance in the selection or creation of activities offering opportunities for becoming more fluent in the target language.

Aim of the Study

The purpose of undertaking this study was to examine the effect of two different categories of activity in speaking classes. The study aimed to investigate whether task-based activities and topic-based activities exert different influences on student interaction in speaking classes, and to explore the potential afforded by these activities for promoting collaboration among students.

Methodology

Setting

The study was conducted in the English Language Teaching Departments of Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University in Turkey. The programme accepts students with scores within the top 7% in the centrally administered English language module of the university entrance exam, which results in very close language scores by applicants in the English proficiency exam**.**

The programme operates on a 1+4 year basis, comprising a one-year preparatory class and a four-year mainstream teacher training programme. Students are, however, exempted from studying in the preparatory year upon successful performance in an advanced level multiskill exemption exam, which measures speaking, listening, writing, and reading skills, as well as knowledge of English grammar. Those who fail the exemption exam are expected to develop a wide range of language skills, including speaking, before being admitted to the mainstream teacher training programme. The corpus data was collected in speaking classes conducted during this mandatory preparatory programme.

Participants

The study was conducted with 25 prep class students in the English Language Teaching Departments. According to the results obtained by the students in the exemption exam administered before the start of the programme, their English language proficiency was on average at upper-intermediate level and receptive language skills were superior to productive skills. Prior to entering the university, many of our students participate in very intensive grammar and reading programmes and, therefore, usually experience relatively few problems in these areas. However, since the university entrance exam does not aim at measuring speaking, listening and writing skills, English teachers at high schools tend to invest little time in the development of these skills. In addition, the opportunities for students to improve their speaking, listening and writing skills outside the classroom are usually scarce in EFL settings like Turkey. Consequently, students often enrol in the teacher training programme with very inadequately developed speaking skills.

Procedures for Data Collection

The data for this study were elicited during regular scheduled classes by recording two sessions. During the first of these sessions, a task-based activity was carried out in two small groups whilst in the second students were involved in a topic-based activity in two small groups. After brainstorming session to help students focus on the content of the activity to be carried out, instructions were given for the activity and in the task-based session students were also provided with a handout (Appendix A). Once the activity was completed, a follow-up period gave the groups an opportunity to report back to the whole class.

Task-based Session **n: 13**	
Group A n: 7	Group B n: 6
Brainstorming & Instructions	
Students were asked to decorate their house with a limited budget. (RECORDED WITH CONSENT)	
Whole class follow-up	

Topic-based Session **n: 12**	
Group C n: 6	Group D n: 6
Brainstorming & Instructions	
Students were asked to discuss the differences between their ambitions and their parents' ambitions for them. (RECORDED WITH CONSENT)	
Whole class follow-up	

Figure 1. Procedures Followed in Data Collection Sessions

Procedures for Data Analysis

The recordings of the sessions were transcribed verbatim and the transcriptions then analysed to obtain descriptive statistics for the types of turn. The categories of turns tallied included *monosyllable (e.g. Yes, No, OK, Eh?), short turn (phrases, chunks, short simple sentences), long turn (compound and complex sentences and strings of simple sentences),* and *question (all types of questions).*

A content analysis was also undertaken to pinpoint collaboration markers which had been used by the students during the activities. For this purpose, some collaborative behaviours needed to be identified. Gillies (2006: 279) lists six categories of verbal interactions in group work: elaborations; questions; short responses; engages; interrupts; and directs. However, the categories provided by Gillies are not always potentially cooperative as interaction does not necessarily entail collaboration. Therefore, by referring to these categories and following grounded theory approach, the data was examined for collaboration markers for research purposes in this particular study.

The content analysis of the data suggested four distinct patterns of collaborative interactional behaviour occurring in the emergent data. These can be labelled as *consulting, clarification, completion* and *invitation* and are illustrated in Figure 2.

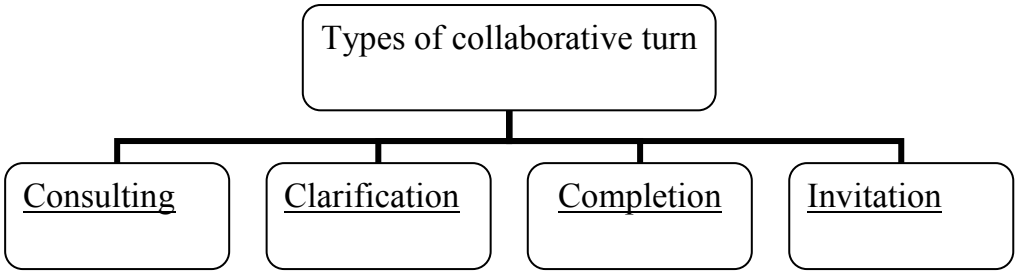

Figure 2. Categories of Collaborative Behaviour

Consulting: This category includes suggestions made or questioning the intention and/or the opinions of peers on the topic under discussion. This category was similar to that labelled by Gillies (2006) as *questions*, in that students tended to seek their peers' opinions about the task or the topic. An example is given in Figure 3.

Students are negotiating the colour of the walls
(Task-based session - Group A)

S. No	Utterance	Remark
S7	Light blue, living room…	S1 is ***consulting*** others in the group
S1	Light…	
S3	Living room? I don't think so	
S1	I don't like this idea. *What about you?*	

Figure 3. Example of Consulting

Clarification: Clarifications involved clarifying or extending suggestions or opinions made by peers and clarifications offered by another speaker. This category is similar to *engages* and *elaborations* suggested by Gillies (2006). Figure 4 displays an example of clarification.

Students are negotiating whether they can afford a TV
(Task-based session- Group B)

S. No	Utterance	Remark
S2	What?	S3 is ***clarifying*** why they cannot afford a TV.
S1	TV	
S5	We don't have a TV=	
S3	*=Necessary, but we haven't got enough money.*	
S1	I see	

Figure 4. Example of Clarification

Completion: Completion involved providing words/phrases that peers could not find or completing their utterances. Although completion sounds similar to what Gillies (2006) calls *interrupts*, this category may possibly be specific to foreign language learning environments, where peers tend to help

each other with their linguistic deficiencies or communicative failures by providing what is required for successful oral production. An example is given in Figure 5.

Students are discussing what parents expect from their children.
(Topic-based session - Group C)

S. No	Utterance	Remark
S1	The parents always want to er…	S2 is ***completing*** S1's utterance.
S2	*The best for their children*= I think =Yes, yes. And er they want to finish their err their, they finish their school as soon as possible.	

Figure 5. Example of Completion

Invitation: This category generally involved requesting peers to focus on the activity when they wandered away from the subject, which was compatible with *directs* that aim at disciplining other students (Gillies, 2006). This category is illustrated by the example in Figure 6.

Students are negotiating the colour of the walls.
(Task-based session: decorating a house - Group B)

S. No	Utterance	Remark
S1	I come from the centre of civilisation.	
Ss	Ya. Ya. (Eng.: Yeah, yeah, meaning "Tell us about it!")	
S1	Do you know which city is that?	S4 is ***inviting*** S1 & S2 back to the task.
S2	Errrm, Konya.	
S1	Antalya!	
S2	Konya. Konya!	
S1	Antalya!	
S4	*… Return our house, please.*	

Figure 6. Example of Invitation

An inter-coder reliability analysis was conducted. An independent expert who was experienced in SLA research was invited to code approximately 25% of the emergent qualitative data. She studied the collaborative behaviours observed by the researchers and coded the transcript for those behaviours independently. A comparison of the independent coder's codings and the researchers' codings indicated an 88% match, which was considered to be consistent enough for further analysis of the data.

FINDINGS and DISCUSSION

A descriptive statistical analysis was carried out in an attempt to determine how task-based and topic-based group work activities influenced two aspects of student interaction in speaking classes: length and type of turns and collaboration markers.

Types of Turn

An initial tallying process indicated considerable differences between groups of students performing different types of small group activities. Table 1 displays the total number of turns taken by the participants and also gives a breakdown of the types of turns which were used.

Table 1. Frequency of Turns Taken in Different Sessions

Session/ Group	Type of Activity	Type of turn ►	Monosyllable		Short Turn		Long Turn		Question	
		f	**F**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**
Group A	Task	404	52	*12.9*	261	*64.6*	41	*10.1*	50	*12.4*
Group B	Task	374	53	*14.2*	238	*63.6*	15	*4.01*	68	*18.2*
Task-based Total		**788**	**105**	***13.3***	**499**	***63.3***	**66**	***8.4***	**118**	***15***
Group C	Topic	129	24	*18.6*	65	*50.4*	37	*28.7*	3	*2.3*
Group D	Topic	65	6	*9.2*	38	*58.5*	19	*29.2*	2	*3.1*
Topic-based Total		**194**	**30**	***15.5***	**103**	***53.1***	**56**	***28.9***	**5**	***2.58***
TOTAL		**982**	**135**	***13.7***	**602**	***61.3***	**122**	***12.4***	**123**	***12.5***

A much larger number of turns were taken by both groups during the task-based activity (404 and 374 turns) than during the topic-based one (129 and 65 turns), pointing to a higher level of interaction in the task-based session. A higher level of interaction seems to indicate that learners are more engaged in conversation and gaining more practice which will possibly lead to the development of speaking skills (Ur, 1996). Such skills are required for fluent communication. Pica et al. (1993) state that competent speakers engage in management of the interaction, using a wide variety of skills and strategies to negotiate the meaning.

A consideration of the rate of use for types of turn indicates that groups used a much larger proportion of short turns (63.3% in total) than long turns (8.4% in total) during the task-based activity. During the topic-based activity, although the percentage of short turns (53.1% in total) was still higher than that of long turns (28.9% in total), the proportion of long turns was much greater than in the task-based session. The difference in the proportions of

such discourse features between task-based and topic-based groups is quite noticeable, with task-based groups employing a much larger proportion of short turns whereas topic-based groups tended to make use of a much larger proportion of long turns. The use of questions was also quite different in the two sessions, with 15% of total turns being questions asked in the task-based session. The proportion of questions asked in the topic-based session was much lower (2.5% in total). These varying proportions of different types of turns are illustrated in Figure 7 and Figure 8.

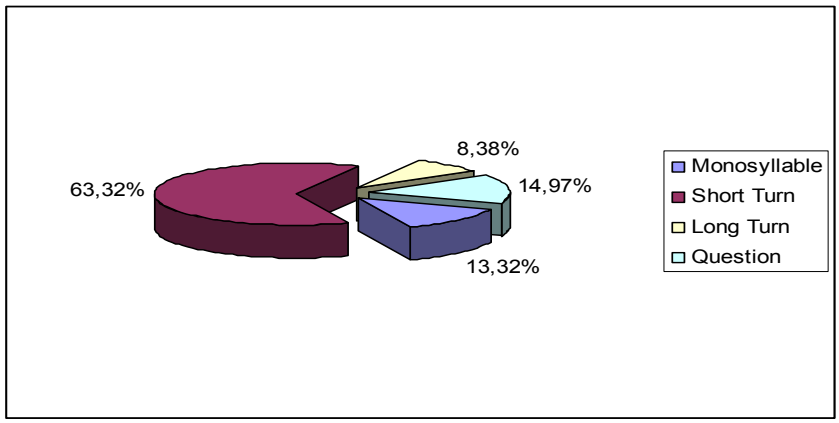

Figure 7. Proportion of Turns in Task-based Activity

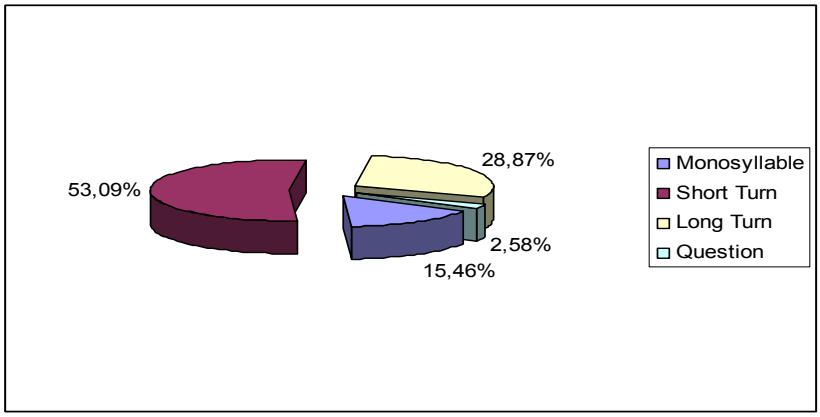

Figure 8. Proportion of Turns in Topic-based Activity

Further statistical analysis confirmed the impressions of differences between the activities with regard to the types of turn used. An independent samples t-test suggested that there are significant differences between the two activities in terms of the frequencies of turns taken by members of the groups. The results of the independent samples t-test are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Effects of Type of Activity on Turn Taking

	CONDITION	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean difference	t	df	Significance
MONO	TASK	13	8.0769	1.0377	5.58	10.574	23	p<.000
	TOPIC	12	2.5000	1.5667				
SHORT	TASK	13	38.3846	11.6300	29.80	8.085	23	p<.000
	TOPIC	12	8.5833	5.4516				
LONG	TASK	13	5.0769	2.7526	.41	.375	23	p<.711
	TOPIC	12	4.6667	2.7080				
QUESTION	TASK	13	9.0769	3.4991	8.66	8.476	23	p<.000
	TOPIC	12	.4167	.5149				
TOTAL TURNS	TASK	13	60.6154	13.6842	44.45	9.606	23	p<.000
	TOPIC	12	16.1667	8.6638				

As can clearly be seen in Table 2, participants in task-based groups used more monosyllabic expressions (p<.000). Task-based participants also took short turns more frequently (p<.000). There was no significant difference between the two types of activity in the use of long turns (p<.711). Participants in task-based groups took significantly more frequent turns than those in topic-based groups (p<.000). While the former took turns for a mean frequency of 60.61, the latter groups took turns for a mean frequency of 16.16.

Such a share of turns in participants' interaction could be a reflection of the requirements of different types of activities. Task-based activities requiring students to reach a specific goal involve more student participation (Duff, 1986; Ur, 1996; Wegerif et al., 1999; Gillies, 2004, 2006), thus creating an opportunity to engage in real communicative interaction. On the other hand, divergent topic-based activities, in which participants are not required to reach a consensus (Pica et. al., 1993; Skehan and Foster, 2001) seem to attract a larger number of longer turns. This is congruent with Brown and Yule's (1983) description of native-speaker interaction tending to be characterised by heavy reliance on phrases and chunks of language rather than communication consisting of complete sentences or strings of sentences. They state that in most real-life situations, long turns are much less frequent than short turns; the reason for this would seem to be that it is much more important to convey the meaning clearly than to produce linguistically complex utterances. The results of this analysis, therefore, indicate that, during task-based activities, learners produced speech more similar to that of native speakers in real-life situations than they did during topic-based activities, which is in keeping with the main tenets of communicative language teaching (Widdowson, 1990; Nunan, 1991).

Varying proportions of the use of questions also indicate the different nature of negotiation of meaning in task-based and topic-based activities. The task-based activity involving more negotiation en route to finding a solution (Skehan and Foster, 2001) may have necessitated more frequent use of questions by the participants. Topic-based participants may have felt content

with receiving and conveying the personal opinions of group members without asking questions unless necessary for comprehension.

Collaborative Interaction

The coding of the transcriptions of the emergent qualitative data revealed that students, as illustrated in Figure 2 above, tended to employ four distinct collaborative behaviours. In addition to affecting the types of turns taken by participants, the type of activity also appeared to influence the amount and type of collaborative behaviours produced by the different groups. Table 3 illustrates the frequency and the proportion of collaborative behaviour in each group in both types of activities.

Table 3: Proportion of Collaborative Interaction in Activities

Type of Collaboration		Total Turns	Completion		Consulting		Clarification		Invitation		Total Collaboration	
			f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Task Based	Group A	404	11	2.72	30	7.43	33	8.17	1	0.25	75	18.56
	Group B	374	12	3.21	61	16.3	31	8.29	2	0.53	106	28.34
	GROUP TOTAL	**788**	**23**	**2.92**	**91**	**11.5**	**64**	**8.12**	**3**	**0.38**	**181**	**22.97**
Topic Based	Group A	129	17	13.2	3	2.33	1	0.78	0	0	21	16.28
	Group B	65	8	12.3	1	1.54	2	3.08	1	1.54	12	18.46
	GROUP TOTAL	**194**	**25**	**12.9**	**4**	**2.06**	**3**	**1.55**	**1**	**0.52**	**33**	**17.01**
	TOTAL	**982**	**48**	**4.89**	**95**	**9.67**	**67**	**6.82**	**4**	**0.41**	**214**	**21.79**

As can be seen in Table 3, students made more use, both in frequency and proportion, of collaborative behaviours during the task-based activity (181 tokens of collaborative behaviour representing 23% of total turns) than in the topic-based activity (33 tokens of collaborative behaviour representing 17% of total turns). Although the proportional figures seem to be relatively close to each other (23% and 17%), it should be noted that the frequency of collaborative behaviour was much higher in task-based groups. However, the considerably larger total number of turns in the task-based activity naturally results in the proportion of collaborative behaviour being quite low. The figures were consistent across all four groups in the two different sessions, with task-based groups taking more turns and tending to become engaged in more collaborative speech during the activities than did the topic–based groups.

The figures for individual categories of collaboration indicate that the highest incidences of collaboration in the task-based session were for consulting (11.5%) and clarification (8.12%) while the proportions of these in the topic-based session were 2.06% and 1.55% respectively. The highest proportion (13%) of collaborative behaviour involved completion during the topic-based session, whereas completion accounted for a relatively smaller proportion in the task-based activity (2.9%). Invitation was negligibly small in proportion in both sessions.

Further statistical comparison of the group tendencies for different collaborative behaviours indicated highly significant differences between the two groups. Table 4 presents the results of the independent samples t-test analysis.

Table 4. Differences in Collaborative Behaviour in Task-Based and Topic-Based Activities

Collaborative behaviour	Group	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t	df	Significance
Consulting	TASK	13	7.0000	4.5461	6.6667	5.024	23	p<.000
	TOPIC	12	.3333	.6513				
Clarification	TASK	13	4.9231	2,2899	4.6731	6.935	23	p<.000
	TOPIC	12	.2500	.4523				
Completion	TASK	13	1.7692	1.6909	-.3141	-.459	23	p<.651
	TOPIC	12	2.0833	1.7299				
Invitation	TASK	13	.2308	.4385	.1474	.984	23	p<.336
	TOPIC	12	8.333E-02	.2887				
TOTAL	TASK	13	13.9231	6.7387	11.1731	5.353	23	p<.000
	TOPIC	12	2.7500	2.7010				

It can be seen in Table 4 that, in total, participants in task-based groups clearly collaborated more frequently than did those in the topic-based groups (p<.000). The task-based groups of students displayed more frequent consulting than did the topic-based groups (p<.000). Furthermore, they asked for or provided more clarification than during the topic-based activity (p<.000). Completion was the only category of collaborative behaviour that participants tended to resort to more frequently in the topic-based activity than in the task-based activity. This reflects the observed larger proportion (12.9% vs. 2.9%) of total turns taken in this category. However, task-based students, too, completed each other's utterances, with the result that this difference was only marginal (p<.651). Students in different sessions did not differ from each other in terms of their tendency towards making invitations and warnings (p<.336).

The distinctive proportions of collaborative behaviour that emerged in the two activities can be explained by the nature of these activities and requirements for completing them. Task-based activities are convergent (Duff,

1986) in nature and require students to reach a consensus in order for a reasonable solution to be produced (Wegeriff et al., 1999). Further, students are interdependent and need to interact and communicate (Skehan and Foster, 2001; Gillies, 2004) in a manner that necessitates more negotiation of meaning and interaction. On the contrary, topic-based activities are divergent (Duff, 1986) with no required outcome. Since it is not essential for group members to collaborate unless they are required to produce a specific outcome, learners are not dependent on each other, and it is easy for them to express their opinions without collaborating (Mercer, 2004) to discover a shared solution (Pica et al., 1993).

This is consistent with views expressed with regard to collaboration produced in group work activities. Task-based activities that set guidelines to reach a consensus display a more planned nature (Gillies, 2004), in which students are supposed to take responsibility to reach a goal (Wegerif et al., 1999). This was probably why students in this study tended to produce more collaborative behaviours in the task-based activities.

The task-based activity seemed to call for more consulting and clarification while the topic-based activity yielded more linguistic completions. The interdependence of learners imposed in the task-based activity (Gillies, 2004; 2006) probably triggered more consultation and the need for clarifying ideas, as such an activity involved more need to negotiate meaning (Skehan and Foster, 2001; Ellis, 2003) in order to reach a consensus. On the other hand, in the topic-based activity, in which expressing opinions was of prime importance, students might have felt the need to assist their peers and complete their utterances rather than to engage in the other types of collaborative behaviour observed in this particular study.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the qualitative data that emerged from a small-scale study with a limited number of students and two activities. It is not therefore warranted to generalize the findings of the study. However, distinct patterns of interactional behaviour observed in the data appear to allow us to draw some tentative conclusions.

The study sought to identify whether language use and collaborative behaviour among students tend to differ in different types of activity. From the findings obtained in this study, it can safely be concluded that the type of activity exerts an influence on both the type and the quality of interaction in speaking classes. Firstly, the task-based activity was characterised by more negotiation of meaning indicated by the greater frequency of short turns and questions, which revealed a greater volume of real life-like interaction taking place. The topic-based activity led to less negotiation but it can be concluded

that such activities are more likely to provide opportunities for self-expression in long turns.

Secondly and more importantly for this study, quantity, type and quality of collaborative behaviour can also vary in different types of tasks. Task-based activities are likely to involve more frequent use of collaborative behaviours than topic-based activities and can thus be more conducive to creating a collaborative learning experience.

This study offers some significant implications for practitioners teaching English as a foreign or second language. The results indicate the need for the implementation of task-based speaking activities in settings where the aim is to provide students with opportunities for real life-like language use. Students can create, through such activities, contexts that approximate natural use of the language. Inclusion of such activities in EFL settings similar to the one in which the study was conducted can benefit learners by providing them with plenty of suitable opportunities to practise the skills necessary to communicate fluently in real life-like interaction.

Topic-based activities, however, should not be relegated to a level of lesser importance in the promotion of collaboration in language classes. Although the findings of this study do not allow the authors to speculate, it is highly possible that different types of collaboration will be generated by the diverse requirements of different activities. Topic-based activities, though not as collaborative as task-based activities, can still create opportunities for different types of language practice by learners, such as developing an ability to take longer turns to express themselves.

This study was based on a descriptive analysis of the qualitative data from a small group of participants and attempted to discover what collaborative behaviours were exhibited by learners in a regular timetabled classroom session, rather than in a more artificial experimental setting. To be able to discover in more detail what really happens in small group work in speaking classes, it is recommended that such studies be replicated and expanded in more controlled settings utilising more advanced technological equipments and statistical procedures.

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APPENDIX A: Handout for Task-based Activity

DECORATING A HOUSE

The students in the group are all going to share a house. It contains the following rooms and furniture:

1 living room:	a table and chairs, bookcase, 2 settees
1 kitchen:	fridge, cooker, cupboards, saucepans, cutlery, crockery
3 bedrooms:	beds, a wardrobe and desk in each room
1 bathroom:	water heater

You have some money to spend on decorating your house. There is enough money to buy any colour paint plus $500 for other items. Other items available are priced as follows:

Washing machine	$300
Dishwasher	$300
Stereo system	$300
Television	$300
Curtains	$150
Set of floor and chair cushions	$150
Carpet	$150
Nest of small tables	$150
Table lamp	$50
Coffee table	$50
TV table	$50
Rug	$50
Bedside table	$50
Telephone	$50
Food processor	$50
Set of houseplants	$50
Shower curtain and rod	$50
Wall clock	$50

Discuss how you would like to decorate your house. You must ALL agree on which colour(s) to paint all the rooms and on which items you will buy with your money.