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Title: A Student-Led Approach to Flagship Conversation-Based Tutoring

Abstract:

Conversation-based individual or small-group FL tutorials are generally perceived by educators to be an invaluable component of foreign language learning due to increased speaking opportunities for students in more naturalistic contexts (e.g. Back, 2016; McCafferty, 2002). Yet educators often lack an opportunity to have a closer look at how such tutorials unfold. In the present study, I examine the informal conversation in Russian between an L1 Russian tutor and four L1 English students, which had been characterized by its participants as a successful one. I use the sociocultural theory framework (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) to conceptualize the conversation-based tutorials as *collaborative conversations-for-learning*, or meaningful dialogues, in which students and tutors participate for the purposes of mutual knowledge co-construction and language learning within the student zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Micro-discourse analysis of three excerpts from a 50-minute tutoring session demonstrates the unfolding social dynamics of a tutorial oriented to by participants as a successful student-led informal session. In the analyzed fragments, participants demonstrate their mutual orientation toward each other's situated identities as a circle of friends with students initiating the majority of sequences. At the same time, their tutor minimizes her verbal involvement to non-existent promoting a student-led interaction through her non-verbal behavior. I argue that the frequent appearance of student-initiated events termed as "laughables," or "speech-laugh" (Ford & Fox, 2010), throughout the session ensures continued attention and thus contributes to student engagement and learning (van Lier, 1996). The findings of this analysis contribute to the overall understanding of interpersonal interactions within an institutional context and provide information on participants' experiences of foreign language tutoring. Consequently, the presentation offers specific practical insights for improved facilitation of conversation-based learning practices for educators in any language program that uses tutoring as a part of its curriculum.