

Examining linguistic features of collaborative and noncollaborative peer interactions

What this research was about and why it is important

Although peer collaboration is considered beneficial for second language development, previous research assessing collaborative performance has not yet considered whether there are specific linguistic features associated with collaboration. This study identified lexical and grammatical features that differentiated paired oral tests with high and low collaborative scores. Through the use of corpus linguistic methods, the study reported that high-collaborative interactions shared more interpersonal linguistic features such as first- and second-person pronouns and *wh*-questions whereas low-collaborative interactions contained more nominal forms which are associated with informational language use such as nominalizations and compound nouns.

What the researchers did

- The peer interaction tasks used in this study were taken from the Corpus of Collaborative Oral Tasks (Crawford & McDonough) and consisted of 80 students (40 pairs) enrolled in an intensive English program at an English-medium university in the USA.
- The participants were audio-recorded while carrying out an information exchange task as part of the formative assessment procedures during a given semester. The task required the students to adopt the perspective of a nutritionist, discuss the characteristics of two potential patients, and reach a consensus about which patient should be admitted to a nutrition clinic.
- The task performances were evaluated on a scale of 0-4 on the sub-categories of task completion, style, and collaboration. The rubric category of collaboration included: 1) equally participating in the task, 2) encouraging each partner to suggest reasons for their assigned patient, 3) responding to each partner's ideas and 4) offering constructive feedback.
- The collaboration scores assigned to each paired oral test were then used to distinguish high- and low-collaborative interactions.
- The oral paired tests were automatically tagged for 146 lexical, phrasal and clausal features using a software program. After eliminating infrequent features, a list of 58 frequent lexico-grammatical features were identified and included in the analyses.

What the researchers found

- Of the 58 lexico-grammatical features, 14 were associated with collaborative and noncollaborative peer interactions and served as the basis for further analysis.
- First- and second-person pronouns, *wh*-questions, *that* deletion, and subordinate conjunctions were associated with high-collaboration interactions. The results also showed that nominal forms (compound nouns, definite articles, attributive adjectives, and nominalizations) were more frequent in low-collaboration interactions.
- The linguistic features associated with high-collaboration were shown to be markers of personal involvement that are characteristic of face-to-face interactions.
- The linguistic features that were found to be associated with low-collaboration interactions were related to more informational functions of language use.

Things to consider

- One of the major findings from this study was that low- and high-collaborative peer interactions can be distinguished by certain lexico-grammatical features. Linguistic features that were associated with collaborative peer interactions corresponded to rubric descriptors of collaborative functions such as engaging with each other's ideas and offering feedback.
- The information-exchange task used in this study was administered as a paired oral test. It is unclear whether the participants' uses of lexico-grammatical features would be different if the task was designed only for communicative practice. Therefore, future studies are needed to confirm whether the linguistic markers of low- and high- collaboration are distinctive across different tasks types, proficiency levels, and student populations.

How to cite this summary: Uludag, P., Crawford, W. J., & McDonough, K. (2019). Linguistic markers of collaborative and noncollaborative peer interactions. *OASIS Summary* of Crawford, W. J., McDonough, K., & Brun-Mercer, N. (2018) in *TESOL Quarterly*. <https://oasis-database.org>