

Redeveloping interactional practices in foreign language classrooms: teachers collaborating with L1 peer students in higher education

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Abstract

Foreign language (FL) teachers need to provide learners with diverse and meaningful learning situations that reflect today's increasingly complex real-life encounters. Building on socioculturally derived theories, this study examined how language teachers collaborated with L1 students (L1P = L1 peer) to expand meaning-making practices in FL learning in higher education. Individual interviews were conducted with ten Language Centre teachers from three universities, two in Finland and one in the Czech Republic. The qualitative content analysis of the data showed that teachers involved L1 peers across different levels of courses and activities in various ways to share their knowledge, views, and experiences in the classroom. The result was an increase in interactional variety and a positive effect on student participation, particularly when teachers gave space to the learning opportunities afforded by the interactions. By attuning to diverse perspectives, teachers also developed relational expertise. However, while collaborating with L1 peers helped teachers to better understand their students' needs and interests regarding essential learning content, their role in managing the complex and dynamic interactive situations grew significantly. Therefore, creating authentic FL learning experiences with L1 peers requires teachers to combine efficient management skills with flexibility and a willingness to learn.

Keywords: *foreign language learning, classroom interaction, relational expertise, mediation, affordance, higher education*

1. Introduction

Foreign language (FL) teachers are constantly challenged to consider the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required in the increasingly complex and diverse societies of the 21st century (Jackson, 2020; Lee, 2023). To succeed in rapidly changing global situations, FL learners must participate in diverse interaction contexts and explore new forms of communication that allow them to gain a rich linguistic and cultural repertoire (Douglas Fir Group, 2016). These challenges establish new requirements for teachers' skills and expertise (Hilden, 2020; Kantelinen et al., 2016). The unique nature of language

acquisition involves developing learners' intercultural and social skills, as well as attending to their holistic growth (Borg, 2006). An increasing emphasis on the learners' identity growth has led the language teacher's role to include being a creator of meaningful and authentic learning situations, providing opportunities that open new horizons to the learners (Hilden, 2020; Kantelinen et al., 2016). This expanded role requires "the ability to be able to reflect consciously and systematically on one's teaching experiences" (Richards, 2010, p. 119). Teachers are, therefore, not only teaching but also creating learning environments, methods, and content for their students (Kantelinen et al., 2016).

This study is situated in the growingly complex environment of higher education (HE). In Bovill's (2020) view, university teachers can efficiently address students' diverse needs by focusing on meaningful teacher-student collaboration in knowledge creation. As for FL learning in HE contexts, international students can be engaged as a meaning-making resource in supporting language teaching and learning in classrooms (Kotkavuori et al., 2022). This article set out to explore a collaborative practice initiated in two Finnish universities and one Czech university during the period between 2014 and 2015. In this practice, FL teachers engage international master's degree or exchange students in their language courses to act as first-language peers (L1 peer = L1P) for learners. Besides supporting their language learning process, L1Ps also diversify the learning environment both culturally and linguistically, in their own way (Sulonen, 2016). The aim of this article is to examine teachers' experiences of their collaboration with L1Ps in classrooms. Specifically, it explores how this collaboration affects interactional practices and their relation to knowledge creation, helping to embrace the diversity of language uses and cultures.

2. Theoretical framework

In today's multilingually and multiculturally complex world, "language use and learning are seen as emergent, dynamic, unpredictable, open ended, and intersubjectively negotiated" (Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p. 19). Learners are encouraged to use and develop "all their linguistic and cultural resources and experiences" (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 123). This requires redeveloping and expanding the meaning-making practices in the learning situations (Lee, 2023). An environment that provides a wide range of potential meanings – affordances – engages learners to actively participate in the negotiation of meaning (van Lier, 2004). As Larsen-Freeman (2014, p. 215) notes, the concept of affordance entails "that learners perceive their own learning opportunities". However, as Borg (2006) states, FL teachers may struggle with actualizing their knowledge effectively and in creating various real-life learning environments in the classroom. Borg argues that the reason for this challenge lies in the difficulty for teachers to keep up with the quickly evolving subject matter and to find regular opportunities to communicate in the foreign

language they teach. L1 peers can assist teachers in addressing this need, as they possess valuable cultural and linguistic resources. This entails a mediational role, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

2.1 L1 peers as mediators in language learning

Learning occurs through mediation of cultural and psychological tools in social activity (Vygotsky, 1978). As mediators, teachers direct learners to gain fluency in using these tools (van Compernelle, 2015; Wertsch, 2007). Regarding the L1P's mediational function, it is helpful to distinguish between implicit and explicit forms of mediation. Drawing on Vygotsky (1978), Wertsch (2007) argues that an implicit mediational form (or tool), such as spoken language, has become a natural part of communication through internalization. In contrast, an explicit form of mediation is overtly introduced into the flow of action, typically by another person. Purposefully introduced in the classroom by teachers, the L1Ps certainly represent one form of explicit mediation. Their role is different compared to the teacher, as no pedagogical or language studies are required of them. Nevertheless, as a "living mediational" element, they embody the language and culture and their relationship in complex ways. A recent study from a Finnish University Language Centre showed that L1Ps embraced a broad mediational role with the students (Kotkavuori et al., 2022); by attuning to the students' different standpoints and abilities, they contributed to building a safe environment (Council of Europe, 2020), which fostered communication in the target language.

2.2 The interrelation of interaction and participation

From a sociocultural perspective, interaction plays an essential role in the internalization process of any new mediational means (van Compernelle, 2015). Simply put, classroom interaction involves "interaction between the teachers and learners and amongst the learners, in the classroom" (Tsui, 2001, p. 120). However, as van Compernelle (2015) states, interaction involves a great variety of ways through which learners can participate in language learning. The need to increase learner participation is indeed a constant challenge in language classes (Seed & Jenkins, 2015). As a form of affordance leading to deeper learner engagement, Walsh (2013, p. 54) suggests "giving space for learning", which requires the teacher's careful attention to the features afforded by the interaction. Put differently, to gain more understanding about how teachers can mediate meaningful FL interaction (Donato & Herazo, 2012), emphasis should be given to the quality of their relationship with the learners. In the HE context, building meaningful relationships is strongly related to the quality of teacher-student interaction and positive learning outcomes (Bovill, 2020).

Any mediational means not only facilitates and shapes the interaction but also transforms the interactional processes (van Compernelle, 2015). When L1Ps participate in the learning process, new ways of interacting are likely to emerge and shape the teacher's relationship with the students. Moreover, a new interactional practice will generate new language knowledge and skills (Hall, 2009). Thus, examining the L1P's contribution to interaction can shed light on what teachers and students need, which in turn can encourage participation (Sert, 2019).

2.3 Towards relational expertise in language teaching

The FL teacher's growing role in providing learners with diverse learning situations and in supporting their growth requires co-teaching and co-designing between teachers of various subjects (Kantelinen et al., 2016). For HE teachers, Bovill (2020) suggests co-creating teaching and learning, which refers to engaging and valuing students' perspectives in negotiating the learning processes. Applying these ideas, this article looks at HE language teachers' growth of expertise by engaging in collaboration with L1Ps in classroom interaction.

According to Wertsch (1998), an individual develops new skills by using a new mediational means. Following this idea, teachers collaborating with L1Ps are encouraged to develop a new skill, or "an additional form of expertise", as described by Edwards (2010, p. 13). In her view, practitioners, such as teachers, need to be attuned to other interpretations and responses to complex questions. Edwards (2010, p. 22) sees relational expertise "in the capacity to read the environment and respond so that intentional action can be achieved". Accordingly, this study invites teachers to reflect on how their collaboration with L1Ps has shaped the interactional processes between teacher and students and what new learning outcomes it has produced. Finally, understanding classroom interaction and the complex relationship between language and learning is closely related to the teacher's professional development (Walsh, 2013; Sert, 2019). Therefore, teachers are called upon to reflect on the pedagogical implications of the practice for their roles. This study addresses the following research questions:

1. According to language teachers, what kind of interactions arise with L1 peers in classrooms?
2. In what areas have language teachers shared expertise with L1 peers in their interactions?
3. How has collaborating with L1 peers shaped the language teachers' roles?

3. Data and methods

As the purpose of the study was to explore teachers' experiences of collaborating with the L1Ps within a theoretical framework, a semi-structured individual interview with a blend of open-ended and theoretically guided questions proved to be the most suitable method. In preparing the interview themes, the researcher also relied on her seven years'

experience as a language teacher involved in the practice of collaborating with L1Ps in her classes. Thus, she had a double role as a practitioner-researcher that the participants were aware of. In autumn 2021, an inquiry was sent to three Language Centres, two of them in Finland and one in the Czech Republic, in which FL teacher colleagues were familiar with the practice of collaborating with L1Ps. The teachers selected for individual interviews included both native and non-native language teachers who used L1Ps in language courses at various levels and were at different stages in their practice (between 2.5 and 7 years). They were teachers of French, German, Italian, Russian, and Spanish, these language groups typically having the largest annual number of L1Ps. It is noteworthy that the interviewer and the interviewees were professional peers and some of them were from her workplace. Therefore, the interviewer strived to pay attention and ensure that close relationships would not affect the interactional situation (Mann, 2011). Table 1 below provides general information on the ten participants.

Table 1 Biographical information on participants

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	T10
Target language	German	Italian	German	Russian	French	Spanish	Spanish	Italian	Russian	French
Proficiency in the target language	Native	Non-native	Native	Non-native	Non-native	Non-native	Native	Native	Non-native	Non-native
Sex	Male	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female
Starting year in the programme	2014	2014	2015	2015	2019	2018	2015	2014	2016	2016
Number of L1Ps	3–4	1–3	3–4	3	1	3–4	3–4	2–4	1–2	1
CEFR level of courses with L1Ps	A1, A2, B1	A1, A2	A1, A2, B1, B2	A2, B1, B2	B1, B2	A1, A2, B1	A1, A2, B1	A2, B1	A1, A2, B1	B2

The interviews were held in autumn 2021 via Zoom, and they lasted 1–1.5 hours. They were held in English, Finnish, French, and Spanish. The participants received a set of questions in advance, where they were asked to reflect on the implications of the practice particularly for classroom interaction, expertise, and the teacher's roles. In line with the semi-structured interview method (Galletta, 2013), space was given to the participants to share their experiences over time.

Ethical questions (TENK, 2022) of confidentiality and privacy were considered. The participants were sent the Privacy Notice for Scientific Research, in line with the EU's general data protection regulations. With the participants' consent, the interviews were recorded, and when processing the data, the researcher used anonymization of the data subjects. Similarly, the Language Centres are not named. The excerpts of the interviews chosen here were translated by the interviewer and do not include personal information that could lead to identification of the interviewees. The interviews were transcribed and coded with the ATLAS.ti software program for qualitative content analysis. Both deductive and inductive approaches were applied in analysing the data (Silver & Lewins, 2014). The initial phases involved a deductive approach including descriptive analysis and coding in relation to the interview questions, resulting into three categories. This was followed by an iterative inductive recoding process to identify implicit patterns, which formed an additional category of student-L1P interaction. The four categories, along with their sub-categories are presented next.

4. Findings

This section begins with some general observations of the findings and then moves on to present the main categories: first, the major emerging patterns regarding the types of interaction and expertise in whole class situations are described in line with the first two research questions. Then, the focus shifts to the student-L1P interaction and its emerging features. The section ends in accordance with the third research question by presenting the main implications of the L1P's participation for the teacher's roles.

Most teachers usually had more than one L1P per lesson/course. For all teachers, the main reason to invite L1Ps to their courses was to strengthen the students' communication skills and to support conversation activities. Motivational aspects and authenticity were also mentioned by some. The teachers differed in how they selected the L1Ps for their courses: some invited all interested parties and allowed for more flexibility in participation, whereas others emphasized good chemistry and engagement in the lessons. Designing the course structure together proved challenging, as the semester had usually begun when the L1Ps were able to join the courses. It was instead done by keeping them in mind, which meant reserving space for their ideas and interventions. In general, feedback was mutually given and received during the course; the teachers guided the assistants in their role and asked for their feedback regarding the course material, contents, and activities.

4.1 Emerging types of interaction involving the whole class

The L1Ps transformed both teacher-student and student-student interactions in the classroom. This section includes description of the emerging types of interaction involving the whole class: the teacher, the L1P, and the students. The students' interaction with the L1Ps shall be described further. The teachers are quantitatively defined as follows: for example, T1N (N = native), T2NN (NN = non-native). The words native/non-native are used here for the sake of clarity to distinguish between the teachers and the L1Ps. The word "assistant" used in the interviews refers to the L1Ps.

Table 2 below presents the five types of whole class-interaction identified by the teachers.

Table 2. Interaction types in whole class with L1 peers

Initiating (topics)	Complementing		Receiving
Teacher	L1 peer		Whole class
L1 peer	Teacher		Whole class
Initiating (questions/comments)	Answering	Complementing	Receiving
Student	Teacher	L1 peer	Whole class
Student	L1 peer	Teacher	Whole class
Student	L1 peer	-	Whole class

The first type, identified by all the teachers, was the following: teacher-L1P-whole class. After initiating a topic, both native and non-native teachers asked the L1Ps to share their comments and views or to provide an example. Various topics were mentioned: current issues, studying and student life, and interests of young people. This kind of interaction was also common when working with coursebooks; the teachers engaged the L1Ps to discuss its topics by providing living examples. As a result, a teacher of Russian began thinking differently about the coursebook: "The goal is no longer to complete [its] exercises or to teach every single word [in it]" (T4NN). She instead guided the students to understand the topics with the L1Ps to link them to current situations. As for language, teachers (n = 8) asked the L1Ps questions concerning words and expressions related to spoken language used by young people. A teacher of German compared the interaction with the L1Ps to "a pingpong game; I ask the assistants, do you have something to add or is that correct, how would you say that?" (T1N). Encouraged by the teachers, the L1Ps provided other usable words or expressions and explained their use and nuances for the whole class.

The second interaction type commonly used by all the teachers was of a different order: L1P-teacher-whole class. The L1P introduced a given topic the teacher had asked him/her to prepare for the lesson. The L1P's region or hometown and a typical university day were among common topics. After the presentations, the teachers complemented the topic and/or initiated a conversation around it. A few interviewees emphasized the positive aspect of providing the students with authentic experiences of daily life expressed by other voices than that of the teacher.

The next two types of interaction with the whole class were initiated by the students' questions. These types were identified by all the teachers, and the order of answering the questions with the L1Ps varied in the following way: student-teacher-L1P-whole class or student-L1P-teacher-whole class. There was no exact agreement in answering the questions, but the findings indicate that the teachers were responsible for those related to grammar, such as clarifying a grammatical rule. However, concerning its application in practice, both native and non-native teachers asked the L1Ps to provide more acceptable answers. A Spanish teacher noted:

If we have a translation [in the workbook] and someone asks if it can be expressed in another way, I can say that it sounds okay and then I ask the assistant's opinion.
(T6NN)

Similarly, regarding the practical use of language, such as how to say things, a native teacher explained: "If an assistant knows it better, I say go ahead" (T1N). This teacher felt that by involving the L1Ps, he could help the students realize that "it's not so black and white, that you can only say it like this". As for the order of interaction, all the teachers noticed that it varied highly. "Sometimes I ask the assistant to answer, at other times we both answer, I start, and (s)he complements or the other way around," a native Spanish teacher (T7N) noted.

Finally, in the last interaction type – student-L1P(s)-whole class – questions were directly addressed to the L1Ps by students who were interested in learning more about the L1P's home region or a wide range of current issues. Travelling, studying, or applying for a job in the L1P's country were mentioned. Overall, students' questions increased when the topics and activities in the class encouraged communication and curiosity. Finally, the L1Ps also asked spontaneous questions during a whole class interaction, but the teachers did not consider them as a separate interaction type. Rather, they noticed that small group interactions with students provided L1Ps with the space to ask about various things related to culture and language, including practical issues.

4.2 Expertise: Complementing each other

It appears from the above-mentioned interaction types that the L1Ps contributed to the learning process by actively sharing their experiences and views. The teachers described the L1Ps in the following ways: a support, a great source of help, a resource, a sidekick, a back-up person, an expert, and an equal partner. They identified four areas of expertise in which they mostly utilized the L1Ps:

- (1) cultural and regional expertise (n = 8),
- (2) current topics (n = 8),
- (3) current language use (s) (n = 8),
- (4) field of study (n = 8).

Cultural and regional expertise included different customs, traditions, or habits of daily life. In terms of language, it included the variety of accents, vocabulary, and intonation that native (n = 2), and non-native (n = 4) teachers made use of, particularly at lower and intermediate levels. Instead of listening to coursebook recordings with a standard language, they trained the students' listening comprehension with the L1Ps to show diverse pronunciation and speaking styles within one country or between countries. The teachers considered that this practice raised the students' sensitivity to a larger variety of language uses. However, two non-native teachers reported on situations where questions about vocabulary or pronunciation led to a disagreement between the teacher and the L1P. For instance, in an advanced French class, the L1P expressed that *tandis que* should be pronounced with the [s]. The teacher described the situation:

The assistant corrected me [...] I was really surprised and said "Oh I thought it is pronounced without it." Then I asked my friends in France and heard that it's pronounced differently in different regions, and she [L1P] did not know that either, she was from Savoie. (T5NN)

The confusing situation led to a learning experience for the whole class. However, these kinds of surprising moments required knowledge of how to manage them (see section Teacher's evolving roles).

With current topics, the teachers referred particularly to young people's culture regarding studying, student life, and various areas of interest, such as music, food trends, and films. Several teachers mentioned the L1Ps as being "from another generation" with different experiences and interests, which led to discovering new perspectives. For instance, one teacher's eyes were opened to the way she had talked about cultural aspects:

“I guess I was kind of stuck in an old-fashioned idea of Spain, [...] my experiences are from my own generation” (T6NN). When speaking about studying, another teacher stated that “there might simply be a new field of study the name of which I don’t know in Italian, and the assistant might know it” (T8N). In this way, the teachers kept up with the latest cultural and linguistic developments.

Current language use mainly concerned words and expressions of spoken or colloquial language. Thus, a greater variety of language uses was brought to the classroom, as expressed by a Russian teacher: “New vocabulary comes to spoken language all the time, so it’s good that they bring the spoken language” (T9N). The teachers also encouraged the students to turn to the “dictionary on two legs”, as one of them (T3N) put it. One teacher described a situation where a student who instead trusted the dictionary questioned the existence of a particular word:

This expression “Es un choyo”, when something is a real good thing, like you get a super discount [...] I was explaining it, and there was this guy [...] he spoke out, like, “Can it be a real word because it’s not in the dictionary, does it even exist?” We couldn’t understand each other at all but the assistant explained that it’s very much used among young adults, and it turned out to be a good discussion. (T6NN)

The assistant supported the teacher in the situation to convince the student. Similarly, a native teacher explained that he could turn to the L1P for support: “Sometimes I feel unsure if this is acceptable anymore and I’m very thankful if the assistants say that they have a strong opinion that you should not say it like this” (T1N). This teacher acknowledged that the L1Ps “were experts in their language proficiency by nature”, and he could trust in their “feeling” for the language. For non-native teachers, communicating with the L1Ps naturally meant developing their own language skills, too. Nevertheless, two teachers mentioned that the presence of an L1P also caused feelings of uncertainty about their language competence. “Sometimes, I’m anxious about them evaluating my level of French” (T5NN), one of them explained. Both teachers were at a rather early stage in the practice. Despite such stressful moments, they valued its benefits and were eager to gain more experience.

Lastly, expertise regarding the field of study was related to thematic courses at advanced levels and to areas such as economics, politics, engineering, law, and working life. Here again, the L1Ps significantly contributed to learning by providing thematic vocabulary and current developments. For instance, a teacher in charge of a technical German course felt that collaborating with the L1Ps brought “somehow more equality in the courses” (T3N), as the lessons were not led by the teacher alone. However, another teacher working with L1Ps in her French courses for political and social matters noted that “they are not expert experts” (T10NN). She saw them as becoming experts whose

views did not necessarily represent the whole country or field. Overall, the teachers considered that the L1Ps complemented their own cultural and linguistic expertise. “It is not important that I as a teacher should bring expertise in all different areas, it is impossible”, an experienced Italian teacher (T2NN) explained.

4.3 Interaction between students and L1Ps

The L1Ps acted either as individual partners for the students in dialogues or as peers in conversations and collaborative tasks. These interaction types are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Interaction types between students and L1Ps

Interaction type	Initiating	Complementing / reacting
Small group / conversation	Student L1P	L1P Students
Pair work	L1P Student	Student L1P

Several observations were made about their interaction. Firstly, with the L1Ps, the conversation activities increased or became longer. Most teachers (n = 8) noticed that they included spontaneous off-topic discussions, especially when a group had finished with a given task. The teachers considered them as an opportunity for the students to further communicate and to bond with each other. One teacher described their importance as follows:

If you look at the learning process like a complex thing that doesn't only happen in the class, you see that it's necessary that there are a few things that are not planned because the learning process continues outside the class. (T3N)

Secondly, the conversations included L1P-initiated questions concerning the learners' language(s) and culture(s). Nearly all teachers (n = 9) observed situations in which the local students explained words or concepts in their language and culture to the L1Ps. In many cases, students and L1Ps formed groups with the purpose of learning each other's language after the class. Similarly with the off-topic discussions, the teachers found it valuable:

Especially in the beginner's courses [...] they [the L1Ps] were at the same level with their Finnish so they started to think what could that word be in Finnish [...] And we noticed on higher-level courses too that they started practising Finnish too [...] They understood some words, they asked what's this in Finnish, so they helped each other a lot with vocabulary. (T3N)

Another teacher described that the out-of-classroom visits around the city became an opportunity for the local students to show some expertise: "My students get into the role of an expert, they can show the L1Ps that this is a good bar, I usually go to this library, so it empowers them" (T6NN).

Thirdly, all teachers made a similar observation regarding the nature of the student-L1P relationship: as fellow students and being of the same age group, they interacted with each other at an equal level, as classmates. In the teachers' view, this equality helped the students to express themselves more freely and actively. As a Russian teacher expressed, "When someone of their age joins the discussion, it's different, they dare to tell more, talk more, they are more active" (T9N). As a result, the teachers chose to "let them talk" (TN1) instead of initiating the activity they had prepared for the lesson. During the L1P-student interaction, the teachers stayed "in the background", as a few interviewees described. Nevertheless, the following interaction type – student(s)-L1P-teacher – occurred, according to most teachers (n = 8), in relation to grammar-related questions. In these situations, the L1Ps were unable to answer the students' questions. The teachers' intervention helped them understand the structure of their own language.

4.4 Teacher's developing roles

In the last part of the interview, the teachers were invited to reflect on the implications of collaborating with the L1Ps for their roles. Overall, the practice was a learning process for all interviewees, particularly in terms of classroom management. Most teachers (n = 8) felt that their role in managing or orchestrating the learning process and classroom situations increased. This was expressed, for example, as "putting another part in the puzzle" (T3N) or understanding "where one should change the role in a way or give and divide responsibilities" (T1N).

The more L1Ps participated in the lesson, the more managing the lesson required. Several teachers (n = 7) noted the need to guide them in group work. This meant adapting the L1P's speech tempo to that of the students, giving the students enough space to communicate and time to react, and balancing their time between different groups. Sometimes teachers needed to intervene in the groups to refocus them on the task at hand. For beginners' courses, such managing was felt to be more challenging by some teachers

due to a tight course programme or the need to use the learners' language as a support. The L1Ps' presence caused teachers extra pressure when figuring out how to involve them efficiently in the learning process. Out of the seven teachers who taught beginners' courses, only two used L1Ps regularly and one for specific purposes only, such as pronunciation workshops.

While the teachers felt in charge of the lesson flow, including time management, not being the only actor on the floor implied giving the L1Ps space in interaction. Several skills were listed as important for a teacher to succeed in the practice: willingness to learn ($n = 5$), open-mindedness ($n = 4$), flexibility ($n = 3$), presence ($n = 2$), and a need to listen ($n = 2$). In the words of one teacher, "If I want others to listen to me, I myself need to listen and be ready for a dialogue with the assistants and the students" (T2NN). Another teacher stated that "where you position yourself, this is a floating concept" (T3N). The practice made her reflect on the shifting roles of expert and learner. The teacher's role was also compared to that of the L1P, both being like "waves who react to each other's impulses" (T10NN). The teacher with this view felt that she acted reciprocally in the class with the L1P.

Finally, the L1Ps seemingly mediated equality into the student-teacher relationship as their presence led many of the teachers ($n = 7$) to more equal collaboration with the students. One teacher explained: "I would argue that the presence of a L1P has made me strive for a rather equal relationship with everybody" (T2NN). Another teacher met weekly with her L1Ps to discuss the learning process with them: "We learn from each other [...] I want to have an equal situation and help each other to understand the language" (T4NN). As an example of equality, one teacher noticed that the L1P transformed the conversations with the whole class into relaxed chatting. She was able to temporarily leave her role as a leader of conversation:

I need the assistant in these situations, otherwise, I am too shy. So, then we are all equal in that situation with the students and assistants [...] and it becomes more like chatting. (T6NN)

Related to equality, some teachers ($n = 4$) found that the L1Ps created familiarity in the class, which positively affected the teacher-student relationship. This not only encouraged student participation but also led them to express themselves more with their personalities, as explained by one teacher: "I want every student to have a voice [...] and when I have assistants, the students have a more active role, and they are part of a community" (T8N).

5. Discussion

According to the results, the implications of collaborating with the L1Ps were more various than what the teachers had initially expected. Thus, openings emerged – partly unplanned – from new communicative situations with which the teachers had no prior experience. The L1Ps afforded opportunities for them to make use of, particularly regarding the dynamic aspects of language and culture, and their relation to learning (van Lier, 2004). These will be discussed by first considering the teacher-L1P interaction and expertise and then moving on to student-L1P interaction and the larger implications for classroom management and the teacher-student relationship.

Overall, the findings seem to indicate that the L1Ps contributed to understanding participation and interaction as multifaceted phenomena (van Compernelle, 2015), as their engagement in the negotiation of meaning shaped both the teachers' and students' understandings of what is important to learn (Hall, 2012). This was illustrated by the diversification of interaction in the learning situations, which shaped the interactional practices (van Compernelle, 2015) and led to new knowledge and skills (Hall, 2012; Wertsch, 1998).

Most importantly, the teacher-L1P interaction was closely related to the way in which expertise was displayed, as the purpose was to take turns in sharing and co-constructing knowledge to mediate the complex relationship of language and culture with the students. Through their own experiences and perspectives, the L1Ps complemented the teachers' cultural and linguistic knowledge, particularly by reflecting current developments regarding young people (Kotkavuori et al., 2022). In this collaboration, the teachers were developing relational expertise (Edwards, 2010); by recognizing and valuing the available resources, they allowed an expanded understanding of the dynamic and quickly evolving subject matter. Another noteworthy aspect is that teachers typically know the answers to the questions that they ask in classrooms (Walsh, 2013). However, in this setting, the teachers often asked the L1Ps authentic questions that they did not know the answer to. Put differently, the teacher's role temporarily changed to that of a learner, in front of the students. According to Hall (2012), student participation increases when the teacher shows interest by asking them genuine questions. Here, the teachers' openness to learn from the L1Ps may have encouraged student-initiated questions in the overall class interaction.

The above-mentioned results demonstrate the teacher's essential role in facilitating authenticity in the classroom (Gilmore, 2019). Indeed, the teachers utilized the L1Ps as "living examples" who embodied the language(s) and culture(s) in various ways (Kotkavuori et al., 2022). Besides asking the L1Ps genuine questions, they involved them in enlivening the materials. For instance, by letting them act out the dialogues of the coursebooks, by asking them to give up-to-date examples of the topics, and by providing alternative answers to workbook exercises, they used their potential to mediate real life

throughout the lesson. Nonetheless, authenticity does not happen automatically just by placing a L1P in the classroom; the teacher needs to use them wisely and guide them to adapt to the students' level and needs. Thus, some teachers struggled more than others to find ways to meaningfully engage the L1Ps, particularly at the beginner's level. In van Lier's (2004) words, what becomes an affordance depends on the needs and abilities of the user. More broadly, a social experience is authentic when it is lived together, co-constructed collaboratively, and contributes to the participants' sense of belonging (Gilmore, 2019). In this practice, teachers, students, and L1Ps all play a role in fostering an authentic learning experience (Kotkavuori et al., 2022).

Regarding the student-L1P interaction, the L1P's participation afforded several learning opportunities. The students and L1Ps were equal partners with similar situations and interests; accordingly, their conversations were motivated by a need to communicate efficiently with each other. The L1P's participation exposed the students to other models of language, which they were able to practise for their own purposes in real life (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). As a result, conversations increased and, whether as main activities or embedded in other tasks, they included plenty of off-task discussions. As unplanned and spontaneous yet central forms of language use in social life, conversations provide great potential for meaningful learning, which requires awareness from a learner-centred teacher (Bannink, 2002; van Lier, 2004). In terms of mediation, the student-L1P interaction afforded another learning opportunity, which they discovered themselves (Larsen-Freeman, 2014); explaining to each other concepts and words related to their language(s) and culture(s). In this way they engaged in using and enlarging their linguistic and cultural repertoire, thus facilitating each other's access to new knowledge and mutual understanding (Council of Europe, 2020).

Considering the above-mentioned discussion, the teacher's role in managing the more complex classroom situations is primary. Making efficient and constant interactive decisions with learning opportunities and student engagement in mind (Walsh, 2013; Sert, 2019) is at the heart of teacher-L1P collaboration. Besides considering a suitable number of L1Ps and the level of the course, teachers need to carefully consider how they can contribute to meaningful learning. In particular, the practice seems to require being responsive to each moment (Sert, 2019), that is, allowing space for any new learning opportunity that the interactions afford (Walsh, 2013). Moreover, the L1Ps seem to have embraced a mediator's role in the teacher-student relationship (Kotkavuori et al., 2022), as they were able to balance the power relations that this relationship naturally involves. Put differently, the L1P's understanding of the students' situation helped the teachers to recognize their interests and needs. Thus, participation involves bringing out the students' voices, and the teachers' flexibility to embrace other roles in interaction appears to foster it.

Importantly, while intergenerational collaboration helped the teachers to keep up with the latest linguistic and cultural trends and apply them in the interaction (Borg, 2006), it did

not diminish their own expertise. The teacher's solid understanding of the language and its structures, combined with pedagogical skills, was particularly key when the L1Ps expressed differing or incomplete views and interpretations. Good teacher-L1P collaboration is indeed the foundation for managing the practice. In Bovill's (2020) words, meaningful relationships built on mutual trust and respect lead to meaningful learning experiences. Being both a rewarding and humbling experience, the practice certainly touches on questions related to self-confidence and the performance of a language teacher. However, the findings appear to indicate that a shift towards a more relational pedagogy (Bovill, 2020) occurred when the teachers had gained more experience and fluency in the practice. Finally, these results would seem to resonate with the university teacher's evolving role, namely, engaging by supporting and guiding the students as they apply new knowledge in the various learning situations (Gonzalez et al., 2021).

6. Conclusion

This article explored foreign language teachers' experiences of collaborating with L1 students in their language courses in higher education. The research questions focused on the implications of the practice for classroom interaction, sharing of expertise, and the teachers' roles. The data come from a limited number of interviews, which concentrated on the teachers' experiences of the practice. Therefore, closer examination of the interactional features is required from various courses and levels. Moreover, while the researcher's prior knowledge of the practice facilitated understanding of the interviewees, making fully objective interpretations proved difficult. Nevertheless, the study showed that embracing the new mediational means led to interactional transformations (van Compernelle, 2015), which in turn shaped the learning outcomes (Gilmore, 2019). The L1Ps brought interactional variety, which increased participation both in the whole class and in peer interaction. The teacher-L1P interaction was closely connected to sharing expertise; the L1Ps contributed to learning through their own cultural and linguistic knowledge and experiences, including the latest developments, especially concerning young people, and through their field of study. Their various perspectives were beneficial for teaching and learning (Bovill, 2020). The teachers developed collaborative skills in the form of relational expertise, which allowed broader views on complex questions (Edwards, 2010) regarding the interplay of language and culture. The student-L1P interaction, characterized by equality, led to an increase in conversations with unplanned aspects: off-topic discussions to further communication and development of one's linguistic and cultural repertoire through mediation (Council of Europe, 2020). Overall, the L1P's mediation oriented the teacher-student relationship towards more equality (Walsh, 2013), as the teachers came to better understand the students' needs and interests. Aside from these benefits, however, the teacher's role in efficiently managing the complex and shifting interactive situations grew considerably. On one hand, embracing a

new dimension of authenticity challenged them to actively explore ways of applying it at different course levels, and to provide guidance in the activities. On the other hand, flexibility, and willingness to learn were needed to create authentic learning experiences with the L1Ps. When all these aspects intersect successfully in the classroom, teachers have a powerful resource for meaningful FL interaction (Donato & Herazo, 2012), which can encourage the students to continue their language journey beyond its walls.

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