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The Implementation of Collaborative Dialogues in a Literary–Cultural Course

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Several researchers (e.g., Allen & Paesani, 2010; Maxim, 2009; MLA Report, 2007) argue that the language-literature divide limits language development in many foreign language departments and that the speaking skill is the most affected by this common two-tiered curriculum (Swender, 2003). This study investigates the implementation of the concept of collaborative dialogues in an upper-division Francophone literature and culture course to support the oral proficiency skills of the participants. It addresses research questions pertaining to how they constructed their group conversations in terms of language and content. Both whole-class discussions and weekly group dialogues, which took place outside of class, were video-recorded. The participants took an oral proficiency test at the beginning and at the end of the study and shared their opinions about the dialogues in two questionnaires. The analysis of the data sources shows that the majority of participants focused heavily on content during their conversations. This finding differs from previous research on collaborative dialogues, which fostered many interactions about language and supported language learning. Based on their analytical abilities and proficiency levels, the participants of this study either reviewed previous class discussions or extended them by exploring additional material and adding prior knowledge to their arguments.

INTRODUCTION

In 2007, the renowned MLA Report stated that "four-year language majors often graduate with disappointingly low levels of linguistic ability" (p. 7). In fact, only half of foreign language majors reach the Advanced level on the ACTFL speaking proficiency scale by the end of their university career (Swender, 2003). Many researchers (e.g., Allen & Paesani, 2010; Maxim, 2009) and the MLA Report itself (2007) point to the language–literature divide as the cause of an incoherent curriculum which limits the language development of their students. The speaking skill, which is the strongest for students enrolled in first year courses, becomes the weakest by their third year (Soneson & Tarone, 2019). This finding is not surprising when considering the majority of upper-division, literary–cultural classroom practices, such as: the prevalence of the IRE (Interaction, Response, Evaluation) pattern that limits the quantity and quality of the oral production of the learners (Donato & Brooks, 2004; Thoms, 2011), instructor questions which do not typically encourage students to elaborate at a proficiency level beyond Intermediate (Darhower, 2014), and the lack of focus on form and type of corrective feedback given which do not provide enough linguistic support for the language learners (Zyzik & Polio, 2008).

Winke et al. (2019) suggest that the proficiency skills of language learners in upper-division courses today are similar to those found in Carroll's (1967) seminal study, thus demonstrating the continued impact of the infamous language–literature divide. Lomicka and Lord (2018), who surveyed more than a hundred faculty members and administrators about

their familiarity with the MLA Report calling for an end to the divide (2007), found that 57% of the participants had read the report but only 39% had tried to adjust their curriculum.

The current study sheds light on a practice intended to bridge the gap between language-focused and content-focused courses through the implementation of collaborative dialogues in upper-division courses. As defined by Swain, collaborative dialogues are "the joint construction of language—or knowledge about language—by two or more individuals; it's what allows performance to outstrip competence; it's where language use and language learning can co-occur" (1997, p. 115). In other words, collaborative dialogue is both the process of learning and its product.

Previous research has demonstrated the benefits of these peer conversations for learners enrolled in language courses, but they have not yet been utilized in content courses. In content courses, these collaborative dialogues could give learners additional opportunities to speak in an environment that typically limits their oral production and allow students to help each other linguistically in a context where content usually takes precedence over language. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how groups of learners construct the task of discussing their course materials weekly and examine the features of talk about literary–cultural content and language forms during their weekly discussions. In addition, the study illustrates the role of oral discourse in the integration of language and literary–cultural content.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In 2006, Swain coined the term *languaging* to refer to the process of using language to mediate learning and make meaning. Language is used to transform thinking through its articulation (Smagorinsky, 1998; Vygotsky, 1987), either through speaking or writing (Tocalli-Beller & Swain, 2007). Languaging, or "talking it through" (Swain & Lapkin, 2002) with a peer (in a collaborative dialogue) or with oneself (in private speech) supports cognitive processing and learning. Swain and Suzuki (2008, p. 565) believe that "languaging about language is one of the ways we learn a second language". Most important for the purpose of the current study is the idea that "languaging about language is one of the ways we learn a second language *to an advanced level*" (Swain, 2006, p. 96).

Collaborative dialogues are therefore a place of learning through other-regulation, which is then internalized. As hypothesized by Swain (1997), there is evidence that co-construction of language and co-construction of knowledge do take place during interactions (e.g., Swain & Lapkin, 1998), and the learners notice gaps in their interlanguage (Kowal & Swain, 1994). Collaborative dialogues and verbalization sustain language learning (e.g., Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Ohta, 2000; Storch, 2008; Swain & Lapkin, 2001). The core participants in Choi and Iwashita (2016) recognized the development of their interlanguage. Additionally, weaker participants were able to perform alone what they could not have accomplished prior to the interactions (e.g., Ohta, 2000). Furthermore, interactions led to improved listening comprehension (e.g., García & Asención, 2001; Tocalli-Beller & Swain, 2007) and language production (e.g., Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Tocalli-Beller & Swain, 2007). Most importantly for the purpose of the current study, it was shown that language learners not only benefit from interacting with adult experts such as instructors (e.g., Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994) but also with other learners, even if the proficiency of their partner is lower than their own proficiency (Watanabe & Swain, 2007). As long as the mediation takes place within the Zone of Proximal Development of the learners, they can benefit from collaborative dialogues (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Choi & Iwashita, 2016).

Sociocultural studies have specifically shown that students enrolled in upper-division courses are capable of beneficial collaboration. Williams (2001) demonstrated that language-related episodes (LREs)[1] are more frequent in upper-level courses than in lower-level courses. More proficient learners are also able to focus on grammar rather than only on lexis during their LREs (e.g., Choi & Iwashita, 2016; Leeser, 2004; Storch & Aldosari, 2013). Finally, Williams (2001) asserts that these learners are more likely to help one another and are better capable of producing metatalk when offering corrective feedback to their peers. These factors show that language learners enrolled in upper-division, literary–cultural content courses are capable of, and would benefit from, discussing content through collaborative dialogues.

Another strand of research has shown that many instructors want their upper-division students to reflect on the course materials with others (Donato & Brooks, 2004) and that those students want and need to produce more language in their advanced courses (Polio & Zyzik, 2009; Thoms, 2011). It might therefore be beneficial to implement student discussions outside of the classroom to provide them with additional opportunities to engage with the material in the target language. Based on the analysis above, the research questions of the current study are as follows:

RQ1: How do groups of learners construct the task of meeting weekly to discuss topics related to their upper-level Francophone literary–cultural course?

RQ2: What are the features of talk about course literary–cultural content during the weekly discussions?

RQ3: What are the features of talk about language form during the weekly discussions?

METHODS

This study took place in an upper-level Francophone literature and culture course taught at a Midwestern university by a faculty member who was not part of the research team. Weekly peer conversations that took place outside of class were a required course component that contributed to students' participation grades. In order to receive a grade, students reported the completion of their dialogue on their weekly participation sheet to receive full credit. Class periods and weekly group discussions were video recorded for subsequent transcription and analysis. The nine participants took a speaking proficiency test, the SOPI,[2] at the beginning and at the end of the semester-long study and completed two questionnaires related to their background and their opinions about working with others.

The Course and the Instructor

The Francophone literature and culture course in which the research took place is the first upper-division content course that has another upper-division course as a prerequisite: an introductory course in reading literature and writing. Before or as they take this prerequisite course, students can optionally take Third-Year French, a bridge course that includes reading, writing, and speaking skill development. The course where data was collected was designed to introduce learners to a variety of cultures where French is spoken. The instructor used texts from a variety of genres and types: literary texts, cinema, music, and performing and visual arts. Students were evaluated based on participation, a midterm essay, an oral presentation,

and a take-home exam. All of the assessment measures were designed to show that the objectives of the course were content-focused.

The instructor of the course was a tenured faculty member with more than 20 years of post-secondary teaching experience. Experience teaching both undergraduate and graduate courses has helped her develop two main teaching practices. The first practice differentiates her courses from the typical upper-division courses described in the literature review; she is more interested in interacting with her students than in giving long lectures. She usually starts her courses with a short presentation during which she introduces key cultural concepts, after which she guides class discussion to check the learners' understanding and then leads them to analyze texts through the new cultural lenses she has given them. This instructor creates an environment where triadic IRES are quite uncommon since she responds to the students' comments with open-ended questions. The second practice of the instructor is to create a complete French immersion experience in her classroom. She frequently rephrases what her students do not understand and only uses translation into English when necessary. In terms of offering corrective feedback, the instructor believes that it can interfere with the flow of discussion. She recasts students' errors with the hope that the speaker and the other students will notice the correction.

Participants

Participants were between 18 and 21 years old, with the exception of Sarah (code name), who was 30 years old. Although all of the participants were either French majors or French minors, they were not at the same point in their undergraduate careers; there were two freshmen, four juniors, and three seniors. All of the participants were American, five of them claiming English as their native language, whereas the remaining four acknowledged having been raised either bilingually in Spanish and English or in a completely Spanish-speaking household. Even though all nine participants had taken several years of French courses during high school, the initial SOPI revealed that their oral proficiency levels ranged from Novice High to Advanced Low on the ACTFL scale (see Table 1 below).

Table 1
Demographic Information

Name	Major (Minor)	Proficiency Level
Abby	French; International studies (Translation for global literacy)	Intermediate Mid
Ben	Finance; French	Intermediate Low
Charlotte	English; Comparative literature (French)	Advanced Low
Megan	Psychology; French	Intermediate Mid
Evelyn	Chemical engineering (French)	Intermediate Mid
Hannah	French	Novice High
Kyle	English (French, philosophy)	Intermediate Low
Sarah	French	Novice High
Sophia	International studies; International business; French (Spanish, music)	Intermediate Mid

Weekly Discussions

To complete the weekly discussions, the participants had to work in pairs (because of the uneven number of students, there was one group of three students) and converse in French for at least 15 minutes. The instructor required all students to discuss course content in their weekly meetings from the beginning of the semester. Unfortunately, she did not always remember to give a specific discussion topic at the end of each class period, but when this was the case students knew they were to discuss anything related to course content, which translated into summarizing the previous class discussion, adding their own thoughts, and preparing for the next class period by discussing the texts. When the instructor did give a discussion prompt, she always used it as scaffolding for the next class period. For instance, she asked them to discuss specific characters or to compare the text being studied with a text studied earlier in the semester. The participants picked their own partners because social dynamics influence the amount of language learning (e.g., number of LREs, scores on posttests) during collaborative dialogues (e.g., Storch, 2002a, 2002b; Storch & Aldosari, 2013; Watanabe & Swain, 2007). The groups remained the same for the duration of the study. To facilitate filming their weekly group discussions, the participants met in a small recording studio in an on-campus computer lab.

Analyses

To prepare the data for analysis, each weekly group discussion was transcribed according to a rigorous system mostly informed by Hepburn and Bolden (2013). Then the data was coded, as outlined below, through repeated analyses of the same weekly group discussion and class discussion transcripts. Because of the distinctiveness of the data, attributed in large part because it was collected in an upper-division course and focused on course content, and the mostly qualitative nature of the analysis, only three consecutive weeks of data were analyzed.

To address RQ1, the discourse of the weekly group discussions was coded based on number of words to analyze how the groups of learners distributed their talk during their weekly meetings. The talk was first coded across three categories, namely talk about content, talk about language, and other talk. Then, the number of words for each category was added for each discussion. Talk about content, which was the stated purpose of the weekly group discussions, was defined as talk related to class discussion topics (see Excerpt 1).

Excerpt 1
Content-Related Talk

K	Et cet, cet stéréotype de heu de prendre le, ou ou cette hm cette idée de hm les, les Africains, les colonisés hm qui qui ne peut pas hm parler le, le correct version du français, hm nous avons le voir heu dans *Tintin*, en *Tintin* aussi.	K	And this, this stereotype of hm, of taking the, or or this hm this idea that hm Africans, the colonized hm who who cannot hm speak the, the correct version of French, hm we have seen it in *Tintin*, in *Tintin* too.

Talk about language was defined as talk about the language that the learners were creating or co-creating, as exemplified in Excerpt 2 with Abby and Charlotte.

Excerpt 2
Language-Related Talk

1	C	=Elle est hm, elle a visité des places, non des loisirs, heu=	1	C	=She had, um she visited some squares, no some leisures, um=
2	A	=Heu oui des lieux.	2	A	=Um yeah some places.
3	C	Lieux ! ((Abby laughs)) Oh je t'adore ! J'oublie tout mon français. Heu des lieux comme Sénégal par exemple c'est un lieu=	3	C	Places! ((Abby laughs)) Oh I love you! I'm forgetting all of my French. Um some places like Senegal for example, it's a place=

The remaining talk of the weekly group discussions, i.e., talk that was neither considered as content talk or language talk, was categorized as other talk. The continual refining of the codes allowed for a further division of other talk into four categories: opening and closing, orientation and planning (transitions during which the learners would decide their next topic of conversation), off-topic talk, and intersubjective talk (defined as talk which, although it was not talk about class content, was directly related to it and therefore not categorized as off-topic talk).

The distribution of talk was based on the number of words in the speech produced by the participants. To avoid the distortion of the data, six types of words were eliminated from the word count: backchannels, false starts, repetitions, self-corrections, filled pauses, and discourse markers.

To answer RQ2, the weekly group discussions were analyzed using Bloom's revised taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessment (Anderson & Krathwhohl, 2001). Each fact, idea, argument, or entire opinion brought up by the learners during group discussions was compared to a previous class discussion about the topic. The first category, remembering, involved recognizing or recalling what had been discussed in class. The next category, understanding, involved interpreting, exemplifying, classifying, summarizing, comparing, and explaining (Anderson & Krathwhohl, 2001, p. 31). However, when these actions were completed in class and then brought up without any addition to them during the dialogues, they were coded as remembering because there was no evidence that the learners really understood what they were recalling from class. The categories applying and analyzing, which were distinct in Bloom's Taxonomy (1956), were combined for this study due to the nature of the tasks performed by the learners. Since they were discussing readings, movies, and Francophone cultures, they did not have the opportunity to use scientific procedures per se, but they found that they could apply what they had learned in one context to another. Finally, evaluating and creating were also combined into one category. In the weekly group discussions, the category of evaluating and creating entailed generating hypotheses as well as building, defending or critiquing an argument.

To respond to RQ3 and evaluate the features of collaborative talk on language, the connections between the talk produced in the weekly discussions and the talk produced in previous class sessions were analyzed. As further discussed in the results section, the term language-related episodes was not used but the analysis focused on whether language-related talk was collaborative or not.

FINDINGS

Construction of the Task

Despite being based on the same class discussions, class materials, and group discussion instructions and prompts, the conversations between the learners were markedly diverse. Table 2 presents the mean distribution of words per category for the three weekly group discussions. Each column represents a group of participants. Ben did not participate in the third weekly discussion. Since Megan and Sophia's discussion was quite different from the two discussions in which Ben participated, the third column of the table presents the average number of words produced for each category of talk of Weekly Dialogue 1 (WD1) and WD2 whereas the fourth column presents the data for WD3 separately (for Megan and Sophia only).

Table 2
Mean Distribution of Words per Category for Weekly Discussions

Categories	A&C	B&M&S	M&S	K&E	H&S	Mean
Content Talk	1,149 (82.4%)	837 (86.6%)	481 (41.4%)	1,166 (89.6%)	230 (29.5%)	773 (65.9%)
Language Talk	73 (5.1%)	29 (3.0%)	106 (9.1%)	26 (2.0%)	36 (4.7%)	54 (4.8%)
Other Talk	183 (12.5%)	101 (10.4%)	575 (49.5%)	110 (8.4%)	511 (65.8%)	296 (29.3%)
Total Word #	1,405	967	1,162	1,302	777	1,122

Table 2 illustrates that the emphasis of weekly discussions differed among the groups. Content was the focus of the conversation for Kyle and Evelyn (M=89.6%), Ben, Megan, and Sophia (M=86.6%), and Abby and Charlotte (M=82.4%). On the contrary, other talk was the most prominent category of talk for Hannah and Sarah (M=65.8%) and for Megan and Sophia (M=49.5%). Language talk was the least frequently occurring category of talk for all groups, on average, only 4.8% of the total number of words were devoted to it in each discussion.

Differences in the foci of the conversations were also evident when comparing the distribution of words for each category of talk among the various groups. For content-related talk, the contribution amounts ranged from 29.5% (Hannah and Sarah) to 89.6% (Kyle and Evelyn). This range was smaller for language-related talk, fluctuating from 2.0% (Kyle and Evelyn) to 9.1% (Megan and Sophia). As for other talk, it varied between 8.4% (Kyle and Evelyn) and 65.8% (Hannah and Sarah).

Table 3 presents a more refined analysis of the category of other talk. The groups devoted similar amounts of their talk to opening and closing, planning, and to intersubjective talk. The occurrences of off-topic talk had the largest spread; they ranged from 0.0% (Kyle and Evelyn) to 51.2% (Hannah and Sarah). One can question the impact of the weekly group discussions on content learning for groups like Hannah and Sarah who consistently produced more words related to off-topic talk than to content talk.

Table 3
Mean Distribution of Words per Other Talk Activities for Weekly Discussions

Activities	A&C	B&M&S	M&S	K&E	H&S
Other Talk Total	183 (12.5%)	101 (10.4%)	575 (49.5%)	110 (8.4%)	511 (65.8%)
Open & Close	24 (1.8%)	10 (1.0%)	19 (1.6%)	4 (0.3%)	22 (2.9%)
Planning	84 (5.3%)	68 (6.9%)	6 (0.5%)	102 (7.8%)	50 (6.3%)
Intersubjective	64 (4.6%)	21 (2.3%)	88 (7.6%)	4 (0.3%)	37 (5.1%)
Off-Topic	11 (0.8%)	2 (0.2%)	462 (39.8%)	0 (0.0%)	402 (51.2%)

The purpose of RQ1 was to understand how the participants distributed their talk between the three different categories. First, the findings suggest that the majority of groups focused on discussing class topics. Only two pairs (Hannah and Sarah, Megan and Sophia) devoted most of their conversations to off-topic talk. Second, language-related talk was the least frequent category of talk in the 12 dialogues of the participants. This finding goes against what has been shown in previous research on collaborative dialogues and will be explored further. These two conclusions have their own limitations due to the quantitative aspect of the data analysis. To better understand what the participants discussed and how they discussed it, we now turn to a qualitative analysis of the weekly group discussions.

Features of Talk about Literary–Cultural Content

To evaluate content-related talk, four different cognitive processes were used when the participants were talking about a topic that had already been discussed in class. In Table 4, the numbers represent the total number of processes the participants engaged in. The information in parentheses indicates when the processes took place.

Table 4 shows that all of the participants went through the process of remembering content from their previous classes. All of the learners, except Megan,[3] also demonstrated that they understood some of the content that they were discussing, although they did not show that they understood the content as much as they could simply remember it without providing an explanation. The third process, analyzing and applying, was more challenging for the participants. Whereas Sarah did not show that she could engage in this type of reflection in French and/or about class topics, her classmates fell into two categories, those who could analyze and apply with ease (i.e., Charlotte, Kyle, and Evelyn) and those who did it only once throughout their three group discussions (i.e., Abby, Ben, Megan, Sophia, and Hannah). The fourth process—evaluation and creation—was only demonstrated by Charlotte and Kyle.

Table 4
Cognitive Processes in Weekly Group Discussions

Participant (Proficiency)	Remembering	Understanding	Applying & Analyzing	Evaluating & Creating
Abby (IH)	2 (WD1; WD2)	4 (all WD)	1 (WD2)	0
Charlotte (AL)	7 (WD1; WD2)	5 (all WD)	4 (WD1; WD2)	2 (WD2; WD3)
Ben (IL)	2 (WD1; WD2)	3 (WD1; WD2)	1 (WD2)	0
Megan (IM)	5 (WD1; WD2)	0	1 (WD2)	0
Sophia (IM)	7 (all WD)	2 (WD2)	1 (WD2)	0
Kyle (IL)	3 (WD1)	2 (WD1; WD3)	15 (all WD)	1 (WD1)
Evelyn (IM)	2 (WD1; WD2)	3 (WD1; WD2)	21 (all WD)	0
Hannah (NH)	2 (WD1; WD3)	4 (WD1)	1 (WD3)	0
Sarah (NH)	1 (WD3)	1 (WD3)	0	0

The findings suggest that when engaging in the two deepest cognitive processes (i.e., analyzing and applying; evaluating and creating), conversation partners speak for a longer period of time (see Appendix) while producing more words. The respective pairs of Kyle (paired with Evelyn) and Charlotte (paired with Abby), who were the only two learners to reach the deepest cognitive process, were the two groups who produced the highest number of words during the longest dialogues in terms of time. On the other hand, based on Hannah and Sarah's performance, the findings indicate that the less a group engages in the processes described above, the less time they devote to content-related talk and the more they discuss off-topic subjects. Finally, the data suggest that within a group, the speaker who engages in deeper cognitive processes contributes more to the conversation in the category of content-related talk than his or her partner(s). This is true of all groups with the exception of Megan and Sophia when they worked as a pair.[4] The relationships between cognitive processes, length of discussions, total number of words produced, focus on content, and individual contributions to content discussion are reasonably easy to understand. Typically, deeper, more abstract thought requires a longer explanation than a more concrete one, and it also takes more time to give a longer explanation.

Remembering and understanding

The processes of remembering and understanding were present in the majority of dialogues, although not to the same extent. The participants who could not analyze with ease used these processes to briefly recall what had happened in class, which did not necessarily constitute a productive contribution to the group dialogues. Typically, these participants referred to what had been said in class without adding any new information. The recalls were so short that they did not provide enough support for any type of analysis. Furthermore, the speakers did not attempt to report the analyses that had been done during class discussions.

The data suggest that these learners used their conversations to review class content, to keep track of the various class materials, and to know what they had missed in class when absent. As seen in Excerpt 3, the weekly group discussions typically started with the question "what did we talk about in class this week?" In many cases, the participants answered this question with a list of the main points made in class or with a few details that they remembered from class discussion. The participants also talked through the movies that they had to watch for class in a similar brief, factual manner. If their conversation partner had not watched the movie in question, the topic could immediately be switched to off-topic talk in order to

understand why the person had not had the time to do their homework. In some cases, the participants used their weekly dialogue to prepare for the next class session or to better understand a concept that they were assigned to talk about in class.

Excerpt 3
Remembering: Brief recalls

1	B	Qu'est-ce qu'on a parlé de jeudi, non lundi, mardi ?=	1	B	What did we talk about on Thursday, no Monday, Tuesday?=
2	M	=Mardi.=	2	M	=Tuesday.=
3	S	=Mardi. ((They laugh.))	3	S	=Tuesday. ((They laugh.))
4	M	Heu nous parlons, nous avons parlé de heu, M'man Tine, non de *Rue Cases-Nègres*.=	4	M	Hm we talked, we talked about hm, M'man Tine, no about *Rue Cases-Nègres*.=
5	S	=Oui.=	5	S	=Yes.=
6	B	=Hm hm.=	6	B	=Hm hm.=
7	M	Personnages, différences comme=	7	M	Characters, differences like=
8	S	=Les femmes.=	8	S	=The women.=
9	M	=Oui, spécifiquement comme M'man Tine, mais aussi Carmen.=	9	M	=Yes, specifically like M'man Tine, but also Carmen.=
10	S	=Carmen, oui.	10	S	=Carmen, yes.
11	M	Hm.=	11	M	Hm.=
12	B	Et qu'est-ce que c'est à propos de Carmen ?	12	B	What about Carmen?
13	M	Carmen, c'est comme, ((incomprehensible)), je sais pas.=	13	M	Carmen, it's like, ((incomprehensible)), I don't know.=
14	S	=Il est, il est, Sarah a fait son exposé et elle a dit qu'il représente le, le **stéréotype** ((airquotes)).	14	S	=He is, he is, Sarah did her presentation and she said that he represents the, the **stereotype** ((airquotes)).
15	M	Oh oui, africain.=	15	M	Oh yes, African.=
16	S	=Africain.	16	S	=African.

When engaged in the process of remembering, participants generally focused only on facts, small details, or the main points of the class discussion. Even when they were helping

their conversation partner know what had been done in class in their absence, they did not take the time or make the effort to go through the analysis that had taken place during the previous class discussion.

The content of discussion

Excerpt 3 demonstrates that the questions asked by the learners during their weekly group conversations were not only the means through which they oriented their discussion but also the determiner of the depth of their comments. For instance, Ben focused the discussion on the previous class period with his first question (turn 1). He extended the conversation about Carmen with his second question (turn 12). Later, after Megan and Sophia had started to summarize the movie excerpt shown during class, Ben asked a third question to refocus the discussion on Carmen. His question, which was more analytical, pushed Sophia and Megan to go into more depth in their answers.

During WD1, three of the four discussion groups referred to the same movie excerpt. It had been discussed for only eight minutes in the previous class session, but the reference to this excerpt was the best contribution to the weekly conversation from both Abby, who volunteered the information when Charlotte asked her to find a new topic of conversation, and Hannah, who rarely discussed content in her dialogues with Sarah, and then only superficially. This phenomenon was even more striking when taking into consideration the diversity of the topics of conversation in all of the weekly discussions. Furthermore, the instructor had not given a discussion prompt to the class.

During class that day, the instructor had asked a question that none of the students could answer, which prompted her to show the movie excerpt. The instructor then guided the reflection of her students through her follow-up questions and summarized on the board the argument that was being made (as shown in Figure 1).[5] She represented the significance of the family ring as a sign of wealth and the family name as the inheritance of a (white) identity.

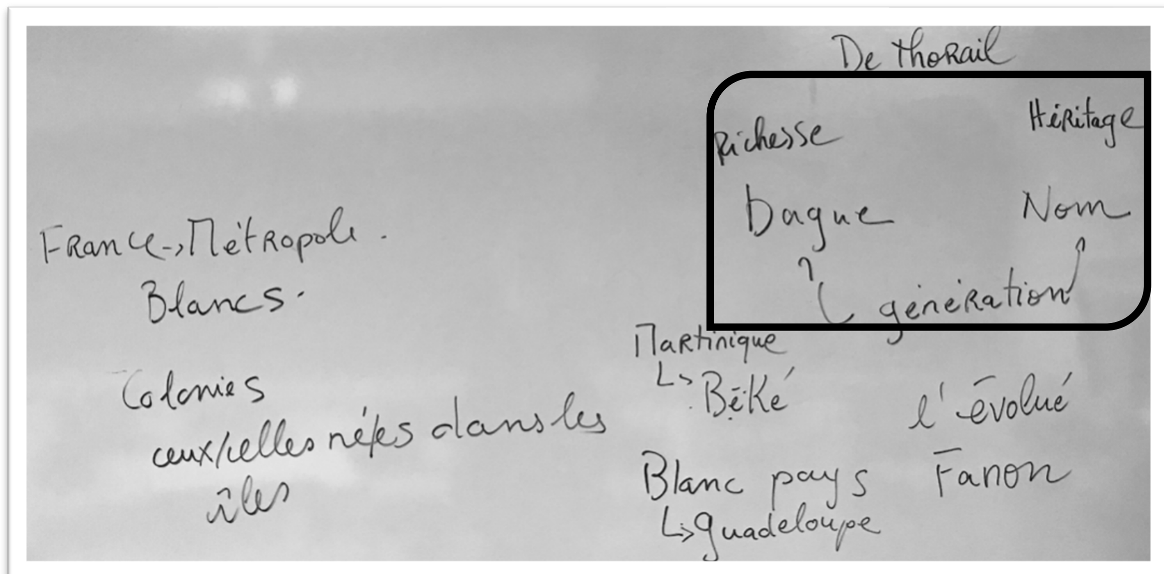

Figure 1. *Classroom Board*

The instructor seldom used the board to represent relationships and arguments; she typically used it to display single words, to reinforce vocabulary and/or to conduct semantic mapping activities, but when she did so it was powerful. In fact, most of the students referred to this particular moment of class discussion in their dialogues because the instructor organically led the discussion to this point in several ways: (1) with her questions; (2) by showing them a movie excerpt as additional support to answer her questions; and (3) by displaying the argument simply and concisely on the board. This combination enabled the participants to not only remember the various details of class discussion, but also to demonstrate that they had understood it.

Analyzing and creating, or "remembering" and "understanding" to build arguments

We will now focus on discussing the two ways that the strong analyzers engaged in the processes of remembering and understanding. First, Charlotte excelled at using what had been said in class to support her own arguments. By synthesizing a main point or by providing relevant details about a specific fact, she distinguished herself from the majority of her classmates. To illustrate this point, we can analyze a few turns from WD3, during which Charlotte oriented the dialogue to French Guiana, a French *département*. Not being satisfied with the instructor's answer to her question in class, Charlotte decided to find a better answer with Abby. To create her own answer, she briefly mentioned the fact that the economy of the *département* was based on the space center. When considering that the class had spent a little less than 10 minutes discussing it, Charlotte most likely had the ability to develop her thoughts about the space organization. However, her contribution was short and on point. Her purpose was to demonstrate the difference between the economic reality of the people of French Guiana and the economy of the *départment* as a whole because of the wealth and power associated with the international space center and its various organizations. She did so and then, in her following turn, proceeded to say that post-colonies are still colonized because of the use of their resources by the colonizing countries. Later, she added new arguments, still keeping her connections to previous class discussions short but meaningful, always keeping in mind the purposes of her argument.

Second, Charlotte, Kyle, and Evelyn used another strategy linked to remembering, although it did not involve remembering class discussions on the exact same topic of conversations. They displayed an ability to reference class sources and class concepts to their conversations in a way that had not been done in class. For instance, during one of the weekly discussions (see Excerpt 4), Kyle suggested that they start talking about Albert Memmi's work (1957). That reading had been assigned but had not yet been discussed in class.

Excerpt 4
Applying and Analyzing: The Use of Concrete Sources

1	K	OK, hm peut-être nous pouvons discuter un peu de hm le l'essai de Albert Memmi, heu, *Le, La bilinguisme colonial*, hm. Qu'est-ce que vous avez pensé de ça ?	1	K	Ok, um maybe we can speak a bit about um the essay by Albert Memmi, um *Le, La bilinguisme colonial,* um. What did you think of it?
2	E	Je pense que ça apprend première que l'héritage est transmitté par	2	E	I think that [the essay] claims first that [cultural] legacy is

		l'école mais quand hm les colonisés vont à l'école ils ne apprend pas ce culture, ils apprend la culture du colonisateur.=			taught at school but when um a colonized people go to school they don't learn [their own] culture, they learn the culture of the colonizers.
3	K	=Hm hm.=	3	K	=Um, um.=
4	E	=Et ça cas c'est une réalité à l'école, mais je n'avais attend pas que, qu'est-ce que ça signifié pour elle.	4	E	=And this was the reality [for her] at school, but I didn't expect what that would mean for her.
5	K	Hm hm. Nous avons voir cette heu c'est une dynamique peut- être heu dans heu l'autre film hum Ke, heu *Keïta*.=	5	K	Um um. We saw this same dynamic, maybe, um in the other film um Ke, um *Keïta*.=
6	E	=Hm hm.	6	E	=Um um.
7	K	Oui quand le, non, oui, oui.=	7	K	Yes when the, no, yes yes.=
8	E	=Et Soundiata.	8	E	=And Soundiata.
9	K	Oui dans Soundiata quand heu le film, quand hm=	9	K	Yes in Soundiata when um the film, when um=
10	E	=Le maître de l'école=	10	E	=The headmaster of the school=
11	K	[Oui.]	11	K	[Yes.]
12	E	[Parle] avec le griot.	12	E	[Speaks] with the griot.
13	K	Oui d'accord. Hm et ça c'est intéressant, et aussi nous nous avons, nous avez voir cet concept dans le, le hm dans *Tintin* aussi.	13	K	Yes, okay. Um and that is interesting, and also we, we have, we have also seen this concept in the, the um in *Tintin*.
14	E	Hm hm.	14	E	Uh huh.
15	K	Hm dans le scène à l'école hm quand Tintin hm, heu suivre le classe. Heu *lead. Hm lead. How do you say lead?* ((Evelyn shrugs her shoulders)). Hm oui.	15	K	Um in the scene at the school um when Tintin un, hm *follows* the class. Um *Lead. Um lead. How do you say lead?* ((Evelyn shrugs her shoulders)). Um yeah.

16	E	Enseigne ?=	16	E	Teaches?=
17	K	=Oui enseigne oui. Hm oui ça ce concept c'est intéressant aussi. Hm.	17	K	=Yes teaches yes. Um yes that concept is also interesting. Um.
18	E	Je pense que ça concept aussi hm fait un point intéressant dans le concept de la négritude=	18	E	I think that this concept also makes an interesting point regarding the concept of négritude=
19	K	=Hm hm.=	19	K	=Uh huh.=
20	E	=Parce que le négritude est je pense est plus un, un hm, il montre le *pride*.	20	E	=Because négritude is, I think is more a, a um, it shows *pride*.

After synthesizing the essay's main point (turn 2), Kyle and Evelyn shared a brief opinion about it (turn 4), made a parallelism with two characters from a movie discussed in the first weeks of the semester (turns 5–12), made another parallelism to the second reading of the semester (turns 13–17), and made a connection to négritude, a difficult concept that the instructor had not fully explained yet (turns 18–20). Kyle and Evelyn were able to use their weekly dialogues not only to keep track of all the sources studied in their course but to review them in a new way that expanded their understanding of post-colonialism.

The impact of questions

The ability to maintain the conversation on one topic and to ask multiple questions about this same topic was a characteristic of the groups whose discourse could be coded as analysis. For instance, in WD2, after discussing the concept of pigmentocracy (discrimination based on skin color) in the context of a movie they had been assigned to watch, Kyle asked his conversation partner if she could share other examples than the ones they had already discussed.

Kyle expected that he and Evelyn could continue their conversation about pigmentocracy by discussing other scenes from the film. He showed that he knew that he could rely on knowledge acquired in other courses to discuss a concept within the context of his Francophone literature and culture course. Moreover, by mentioning other courses in his question, he reminded Evelyn that she did not have to constrain her answer to the film but, on the contrary, she could share knowledge she had acquired from other sources. This open-mindedness, coupled with a striking confidence that he was able to pursue his discussion of pigmentocracy via relying on the knowledge that he had acquired in other ways, was an asset.

This confidence was also seen in Charlotte, who pushed herself, and pushed Abby, her conversation partner, to find additional examples to deepen their comprehension. Throughout the three weekly dialogues, Charlotte was admirable for several reasons. First, she took responsibility for her own learning and believed in her potential to find some answers, even if speculative, to difficult questions. Second, her behavior indicates that she thought it was valuable to contemplate the same question several times (i.e., in class and then in her pair dialogue) and for an extended period of time (i.e., for half of the dialogue). This type of behavior differed from

that adopted by the majority of the participants. They typically asked a general question (i.e., what did you think of the movie?), shared their opinion, and moved to another topic.

Another participant, Evelyn, had a unique capacity to apply concepts to other situations and showed both her interest and her curiosity through indirect questions. Once per weekly dialogue, at the end of the discussion of a particular topic, she asked a question to which neither she nor Kyle could provide a definite answer. She did not expect Kyle to say anything, although he did share his hypotheses twice.

Evelyn's indirect questions always started with the phrase "*je me demande*" ("I am wondering"). In WD1, she and her conversation partner discussed how the education of young children living in colonies was controlled by the imperial power and was conducted in the colonial language. Evelyn brought up the concept of pride (see Excerpt 5, which starts at turn 18 of the discussion reported in Excerpt 4), saying that the political movement of négritude was partially based on the pride the former colonies had concerning their own cultures.

Excerpt 5
Questions Promoting Analysis: Expressing Curiosity

18	E	Je pense que ça concept aussi hm fait un point intéressant dans le concept de la négritude=	18	E	I think that this concept also makes an interesting point regarding the concept of négritude=
19	K	=Hm hm.=	19	K	=Uh huh.=
20	E	=Parce que le négritude est je pense est plus un, un hm, il montre le ***pride.***	20	E	=Because négritude is, I think is more a, a um, it shows ***pride***.
21	K	=Hm hm. Oui, et la négritude c'est particulièrement intéressant parce que c'est peut-être un des premières hm moment que un, un, un groupe des intellectuels hm des académiques en, en France, heu en Occident, un groupe africain, qui ont vivre à l'Occident ont réalisé cette dualité, hm, cette cette, cette hm identité heu, frac, fracturée hm. Je, je ne=	21	K	=Un huh. Yes, and négritude is particularly interesting because it may be one of the first times that a, a, a group of intellectuals in, in France, umm in the West, a group of Africans who had lived in the West discovered this duality, um, this this, this um frac, fractured identity um. I, I, don't=
22	E	Je pense que sa priorité à sa culture est très, très intéressant que ça manifeste à un mouvement politique.	22	E	I think the priority given to culture is very, very interesting and that it evolved into a political movement.
23	K	Hm.	23	K	Hm.

24	E	Parce que ils ne sont pas le culture de majorité, ils sont le minorité.	24	E	Because they didn't belong to the main culture, they were in the minority.
25	K	Dans, au, au l'Occident.=	25	K	Inside, in, in the West.=
26	E	=Oui.=	26	E	=Yes.=
27	K	=Naturellement, en Afrique c'est c'est, c'est=	27	K	=Naturally, in Africa, it's, it's it's=
28	E	=Oui.=	28	E	=Yes.=
29	K	=C'est oui c'est très différent naturellement. Oui, c'est c'est intéressant et ((pause)) oui le, la **fierté**, la hm patriotisme comme une mouvement, un stratégie politique, c'est intéressant oui. Hm. ((pause)). Oui. Hm=	29	K	=Yes, it's naturally it's very different. Yes, it's, it's interesting and ((pause)) yes **pride**, um patriotism as a movement, a political strategy, yes it's interesting. Um ((pause)). Yes. Um=
30	E	=Comme j'ai beaucoup de **fierté** à mon, dans mon culture mais il ne se manifeste pas comme un=	30	E	=Like I have a lot of **pride** for, in my culture, but it doesn't manifest itself as a=
31	K	=Hm hm.=	31	K	=Um um.=
32	E	=Mouvement politique. Je me demande pourquoi est-ce que ça s'est manifesté comme ça.	32	E	=Political movement. I wonder why it manifested itself like that.
33	K	Hm hm. Je pense parce que c'est, *I mean*, hm, aujour, aujourd'hui en, aux États-Unis, nous, nous, nous entendons tous les jours du patriotisme, et de, de la **fierté** du pays et tout, mais pour des Africains qui, qui ont vivrer dans, dans des, dans un, un colonie, cet patriotisme ne correspond pas à leur propre pays.=	33	K	Um um. I think because, "*I mean*", um tod, today in, in the United States, we, we, we hear about patriotism nearly every day, and about, about **pride** for our country and everything, but for Africans who, who have lived in, in the, in a colony, this patriotism doesn't correspond to their own country.=

Kyle summarized their ideas during turn 29 by that saying that patriotism could be a political strategy. His double use of *intéressant*, accompanied by a pause, suggests that he was ready to discuss another topic. However, Evelyn interrupted him and started to ask her indirect question (turns 30 and 32). To do so, she applied the situation to herself, expressing that she did not see her pride in her culture ever manifesting itself through the creation of a political party.

The questions asked by the learners during their weekly group discussions demonstrated what kind of answer they were looking for but, in general, also showed what type of answers they were likely to give. Some questions allowed topics to be explored further and supported sound analyses whereas others prevented the discussion from staying focused.

The collaborative aspect of content-related talk

The previous exploration of the impact of questions on the type of cognitive process it triggered leads to a discussion on the collaborative aspect of content-related talk. First, it is worthy of note that although Charlotte was able to build long arguments expressed through extensive discourse completely on her own, she sometimes tried to give Abby opportunities to add to the discussion, regardless of whether she took them or not. In some cases, she included Abby because she was eager to get an answer to her questions. In other cases, she appeared to be genuinely interested in knowing what her conversation partner thought.

Excerpt 3, presented earlier, illustrates well how two participants helped each other in building content. Megan and Sophia benefitted from trying to remember the same class session at the same time within their group discussion. This is evident in turns 13–15 when Megan struggled to remember what had been said about Carmen and Sophia interrupted her to add the idea of “stereotype.” At that moment, Megan said “*oh oui, africain,*” showing that Sophia had in fact helped her remember at least one portion of the discussion about the movie character. Later, Megan helped Sophia better describe Carmen, the character whom they were discussing: in addition to being illiterate, he was also naive.

Kyle and Evelyn went a step further; they not only collaborated to add details to their conversations but built entire arguments together. Their conversation reported in Excerpt 4 exemplifies this phenomenon with Evelyn starting to discuss *Le bilinguisme colonial* in turns 1–4. She explained that school students had to learn the history of their colonizers. This reminded Kyle about the movie *Keïta* (turn 5), but as he struggled to remember the name of the characters, Evelyn anticipated what he wanted to say and, in three turns (turns 8, 10, and 12), restated what she believed Kyle meant to say. We see here an attention to detail. Kyle then provided another example demonstrating the truth of Memmi’s argument by mentioning Hergé’s work, *Tintin* (turn 13). This time, he asked Evelyn for language help. Eventually, Evelyn uses what she and Kyle had built to start a new argument about the aspect of pride in the context of négritude (turns 18-20). This illustrates how Kyle and Evelyn, as a pair, shared their individual ideas to build solid arguments supported by several examples coming from different sources or contexts. Together, they most likely developed arguments that they would not have developed on their own. For instance, it is unlikely that Evelyn would have thought about pride within the concept négritude without Kyle’s contribution to extend the main point she had made about Memmi’s essay.

The analyses of the participants’ discourse in this section have shown that the participants reached different levels of collaboration in terms of content creation. The learners who engaged mostly in remembering content from class without adding new information (e.g., Megan and Sophia) tended to help each other with small details. The learners who built on each other’s own thoughts (e.g., Kyle and Evelyn) were able to co-construct strong arguments and to expand or co-construct their knowledge about the content of the course (e.g., Charlotte and Abby).

Several factors explain the difference between the types of content-related talk produced throughout the dialogues. Superficial content-related talk was composed of brief references to class discussions focused on a main point or a detail. The connections were more likely to occur when the instructor based the class discussions on a movie excerpt and used

the board to represent an argument in a simple yet clear fashion. On the contrary, deeper content-related talk was created through the use of references to various sources, not all of which had been discussed in class, the use of class concepts applied to different contexts, and the use of relevant knowledge (e.g., current events, daily life, other courses, etc.). The type of questions that the participants asked each other impacted the focus of the discussion on one topic and the depth of the discussion on a given topic.

The participants who mostly engaged in the cognitive process of remembering what had been discussed in class generally organized content-talk as a review of class material. In contrast, the participants who applied what they had learned in class and what they remembered and understood from a variety of sources were able to build analyses and even defend arguments, sometimes through extensive discourse. They organized their content-related talk as an extension of class.

Features of Talk about Language Form

The analyses carried out to answer RQ1 showed that only 4.8% of the words produced by the participants in their WDs were devoted to language-related talk (see Table 2). Some participants were more likely to support their conversation partners than others.[6] For instance, in Excerpt 6, Kyle made it very clear that he was looking for the word *resource* in French; he looked at Evelyn and said that he did not know the word. Evelyn did not move an inch, responded with "hm hm" (i.e., backchannel), and waited for Kyle to continue.

Excerpt 6
Language-Related Talk: Not Providing Lexical Support

K	Hm, et hm pense aussi avec, avec cette situation hm de hm les Chagos et cette idée de une, une heu, une heu, une force étranger hm entrer dans, une espèce de hm des peuples et, et, et prendre hm la, le, la terre ou hm hm les, l'espace même, ou des *resources* ((looks at her for the word)), des heu, oui, c'est tout. C'est, c'est c'est le même idée de, de, de, de vol hm.	K	Um, and um, I also think, with, with this situation um uh um the Chagos and this idea of a, a, um, foreign power hm entering in, in a place belonging to people and, and, and taking um the, the, the ground or um um the, the space itself, or the *resources* ((looks at her for the word)), the um, yes, that's all. Its, it's, it's the same idea of, of, of, of, stealing um.

Language-related talk was both rare and, when it occurred, brief. It usually consisted of three turns: a request for help, a one-word answer and, possibly, a verbal response that constituted uptake. This type of triadic exchange, although collaborative (i.e., more than one participant produced it) does not really constitute an LRE. None of the participants engaged in languaging. Rather, they supported each other with vocabulary. The language-related talk was not aimed at furthering their knowledge of the language, but rather at supporting content development.

Reasons for the production of language-related talk

Most typically, the participants asked their conversation partners how to say a specific word. Similarly, they sometimes asked for confirmation after producing a word they were not sure of. At times the participants also offered help without being asked, as seen in Excerpt 2.

The participants also produced language-related words in a non-collaborative way. They sometimes expressed the fact that they did not know how to say a word, produced what they thought the word was, and continued with their ideas without pausing or looking at their conversation partner. Kyle did so when he made up the word *performativité*, expressed his doubts about the word, and continued his train of thought (see Excerpt 7).

Excerpt 7
Language-Related Talk: Acknowledging an Interlanguage Gap

K	Je pense que cette idée de, de performativité je ne sais pas que si c'est le mot en, en français aussi mais hm, mais je pense que cette, performan, performativité c'est, c'est une une naturel, une aspect naturel heu d'existence de d'être, d'être humain.	K	I think that this idea of, of performativity, I'm not sure if that is the word in, in French too but um, but I think that this, performan, performativity is, is a, a natural, a natural aspect um of existence, of being, of being human.

Although most of the language-related talk was collaborative, there were instances when the participants resolved lexical problems on their own. In those situations, the participants could practice the strategy of circumlocution. In other cases, the learners may have helped each other without intending to, as seen in Excerpt 5, in which the instances of *fierté* 'pride' were bolded. In turn 20, Evelyn used the English word as the last word of her turn. Kyle did not offer support, either because he did not remember the French word or because he was more focused on what he was about to say. However, he produced the correct French word later in the dialogue (turns 29 and 33). Most interesting, however, is Evelyn's use of the French word in turn 30. Although it cannot be known for certain if she picked up on Kyle's utterance of the word or if she remembered it on her own, we can at least say that as a whole, the participants benefitted (linguistically) from their content-related talk by helping each other in terms of vocabulary and, broadly, by interacting in the L2 with another learner.

Language-related connections with previous class discussions

Few connections were detected between the language-related talk taking place in class and in the dialogues. However, there were numerous instances in the weekly discussions when the participants imitated the language of their instructor. One class started with a presentation by Sarah about a movie. In her presentation, Sarah described one of the characters, Carmen, as a stereotype. The instructor wrote the word *stéréotype* on the board to emphasize its importance. Throughout that class period, the word was used a total of 12 times: twice by Sarah and 10 times by the instructor. The words *naïf* 'naive,' *naïveté* 'naiveté,' and *analphabète* 'illiterate' were also produced.

In Excerpt 3, Megan and Sophia mentioned the fact that Carmen was a stereotype (turn 14) and remembered both his lack of education (turn 27) and naiveté (turn 30). Charlotte also discussed Carmen in WD2, using the word *stéréotype* four times. When the learners imitated the lexical choices of their instructor, it helped them to remember the content of class discussion. The strategies used by the instructor, namely the repetition of key words, the use of the board, and questions based on the viewing of a movie excerpt, all contributed to this success. This

example also demonstrates how content and language are intertwined. In fact, by building up the vocabulary of her students, the instructor was building up their content knowledge.

To conclude the discussion of RQ3, it is important to note that the participants helped each other linguistically by providing the necessary vocabulary to their conversation partner. They trusted each other's ability to correct them, which most likely encouraged the provision of words without the trigger of a question for some participants. Unfortunately, there were not many linguistic connections between class discussions and the weekly group discussions, but the strategies employed by the instructor impacted the majority of the students, who both remembered the words and the content that had been provided by their professor.

DISCUSSION

The participants all brought different levels of interest, preparation, motivation, content knowledge, and language proficiency to their weekly dialogues. While Hannah and Sarah, the weakest students in terms of proficiency, spent the majority of their conversations *doing* being friends, the other groups focused on content. Even though the speaking proficiency levels of the members of these other groups were higher than those of Hannah and Sophia, a higher proficiency level did not ensure a deeper level of analysis. On the contrary, the general attitude, preparation level, and frequency of class participation of the students seemed more related. Unsurprisingly, when participants (i.e., Charlotte, Kyle, and Evelyn) were prepared to discuss the texts they had been assigned to read or view, they did not need to summarize them during their weekly discussions. On the contrary, because they were more familiar with the texts, they could make more connections and synthesize the texts to include them in arguments. They treated their weekly dialogues as an extension of class, a place to explore more topics, apply class concepts in new settings, and make additional connections to build stronger and longer arguments. This was advantageous in terms of both content and language. The participants could co-construct content and knowledge about content with their conversation partners, especially when they shared knowledge coming from other settings than their common class. This focus on content meant that language-related talk was produced for the purpose of sustaining content-related talk. Some participants focused on language more than they did on content (i.e., Megan and Abby), but even if they contributed less than their conversation partners, they were attentive because they were quick at providing lexical support. These participants most likely benefitted from the content-related talk of their partners, just as their partners benefitted from their language-related talk.

Weekly Group Discussions and Collaborative Dialogues

RQ1 examined the number of words produced for each category of talk. The results indicate that the participants were either focused on content or on other talk. Language-related talk was the least frequent for all groups of learners; on average, it represented less than 5% of the conversations. This lack of emphasis on language differs from other studies that investigated the impact of collaborative dialogues (e.g., Sato & Viveros, 2016; Storch, 2008; Swain & Lapkin, 2001), which report numerous LREs as well as language gains. However, the participants in these studies were engaged in talk while being primarily focused on researcher-designed language-related tasks, such as a dictogloss (e.g., Kowal & Swain, 1997), a translation exercise (e.g., Ohta, 2000), or a composition (i.e., de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994). In other words, their language-related talk supported the performance of a concrete task centered on

language, involved a written production, and took place in an immersion language arts course (Kowal & Swain, 1997) or a post-secondary elementary or intermediate foreign language course (Ohta, 2000; de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994).

In contrast, the participants in the current study were undergraduate French majors or minors enrolled in an upper-division Francophone literature and culture course who were assigned to discuss topics related to the content of their course. Unlike the other studies on collaborative dialogues, the current study investigated the role of (1) generally unclear tasks (2) involving spoken production (3) in the context of an upper-division content course taught in a foreign language.

The tasks, the mode of production, and the type of courses in which participants were enrolled affected the amount of language-related talk the participants produced. Choi and Iwashita's (2016) findings support this claim. In their study, which is the most similar to the present study when compared to all other collaborative dialogue research, the participants watched a movie excerpt, discussed a possible ending to the movie, and wrote this ending in small groups. Choi and Iwashita were focused on the impact of proficiency on the LREs of their participants, and they mentioned that the grammatical LREs were less frequent during the group discussion than during the writing stage of the experiment. Although the learners were completing a specific task during their discussion, they were more attentive to language when they were focusing on a written task. This finding suggests that language-related talk is more likely to be prevalent when learners are engaged in the production of a written report. In fact, the collaborative dialogues featured in the other studies have a supportive function for the learners; that is, they were designed to lead to something else. In contrast, the group discussions of the participants in the current study were themselves an end product.

Factors Supporting Analytical Engagement

RQ2 focused on the content-related talk of the participants. The low proficiency level of a few participants may have hindered their ability in their weekly dialogues to go beyond the basics of what had taken place in the previous class sessions. Hannah and Sarah, the weakest students in terms of analysis, were rated Novice High in speaking at the beginning of the semester. In contrast, Charlotte, one of the strongest students in terms of analysis, was also the strongest student in terms of language; her oral proficiency rating at both the beginning and end of the semester was Advanced Low. But the relationship between speaking ability and analytical ability was far from direct; Evelyn (Intermediate Mid) and Kyle (Intermediate Low) were among the strongest participants in terms of their analytical ability.

The lack of engagement in analysis may be explained by limited experience with literary text analysis. Charlotte and Kyle, who were French minors, were both English majors. Additionally, Charlotte was also a Comparative Literature major and Kyle had a Philosophy minor. In other words, the two students who best supported their own arguments (i.e., engaged in the cognitive processes of evaluating and creating) were also those who had the most experience with literary texts.

Previous research suggests that overall cognitive development and general academic language ability in the native language (L1) of the students affects the performance of content-and-language integrated learning (CLIL) students (Dalton-Puffer et al., 2010; Llinares & Whittaker, 2010; Lorenzo & Moore, 2010). It may be relevant to note that Hannah and Sarah were the only participants of the study who were solely French majors. All other participants had at least one additional major (e.g., finance, psychology, chemical engineering) through

which they developed knowledge and cognitive abilities in their L1 in the context of advanced work in those disciplines. In sum, the focus on analyzing content rather than remembering main points made during class discussion may have been impacted by one or a combination of the following factors: proficiency in the L2, experience with literary texts, cognitive development, and academic language ability in the L1.

We now turn to an analysis of the white board in the classroom as a mediation tool. The instructor used the board to write important class concepts, which doubled as important vocabulary words, and, sometimes, the relationships between these concepts (see Figure 1). The participants in this study showed a tendency to include what was written on the board, particularly the connections, in their weekly group dialogues. By using the board to write key concepts, indicate connections between them by means of arrows, and the like, the instructor was exercising mediation in real time in response to the immediate needs of her students.

Alanen et al. (2006) found a similar use of the board as a mediation tool and they argue that the board was used to negotiate the meaning of the concept discussed in class. Similarly, the instructor of the class used in the current study negotiated the meaning of important concepts and relationships on the board. She erased the board only when she needed more space to write, maximizing the use of the board as a thinking and attention-focusing device for the students.

To conclude the discussion of RQ2, although there is not enough data to establish why some students were more likely to discuss the instructor's prompts, focus on content, analyze the texts, and make their own connections with readings, movies, class concepts, and other knowledge, the weekly dialogues were a place where content discussion took place. Whether the participants reviewed the previous class discussion or extended it, these content-rich discussions can serve as productive sites of learning for all students enrolled in an upper-division content course.

The Value of Weekly Group Discussions in Terms of Language

Second language proficiency, which almost certainly impacted the content creation of the participants, did not seem to affect language-related talk. The proportion of talk dedicated to language was 4.7% for Hannah and Sarah, who were the two weakest students in terms of L2 speaking proficiency. This proportion is almost equal to the mean proportion for all of the groups (M=4.8%). This finding is not consistent with previous research on collaborative dialogues, which suggests that higher proficiency groups produce LREs more frequently (e.g., Leeser, 2004; Watanabe & Swain, 2007; Williams, 2001). These LREs are also typically longer (e.g., Storch & Aldosari, 2013) and are generally better resolved (e.g., Choi & Iwashita, 2016; Kim & McDonough, 2008). Rather than L2 proficiency, it seems that a higher focus on content diminished the focus on language. The two groups of Kyle and Evelyn and Ben, Megan, and Sophia, who devoted more than 86.5% of their discussions to content, spent less than 3% of their production on language.

Nikula (2012) analyzed the speaking tasks of Finnish teenagers enrolled in a CLIL history class taught in English. In their groups, the participants provided each other lexical and content support (which are intertwined), accompanied by frequent backchanneling. This finding led Nikula to conclude that "meaning-making was a joint accomplishment" (p. 145). Nikula (2012) argues that the students would not have behaved this way during a class discussion because of the power position of the instructor and the associated pressure of speaking in class. The same conclusion can be reached regarding the value of weekly group

discussions in terms of language. Even though the participants did not co-construct language or knowledge about language together, they demonstrated an ability to provide each other with lexical support. Most importantly, they benefited from more time to practice speaking in their L2. The speaking skill is the weakest for students enrolled in upper-division courses (CARLA, 2017), and the time devoted to student discussions is limited in these typically instructor-oriented courses (e.g., Darhower, 2014; Donato & Brooks, 2004; Thoms, 2011).

LIMITATIONS

As with all empirical research, the current study has several limitations. The focus on a single class and the small number of participants and discussion groups prevented the use of inferential statistics and limits the generalization of the findings. A longitudinal study might have resulted in more insights into the functioning and potential of the weekly group discussions and analyzing more conversations would have allowed a better understanding of the impact of instructor prompts. However, the small number of learners participating in this study allowed an in-depth analysis of their contributions both in the weekly dialogues and whole-class discussions.

CONCLUSION

Most of the upper-division literary–cultural classes limit the oral proficiency development of the learners because of the IRE pattern, the question type of the instructors, and the lack of focus on form. Donato and Brooks (2004) defend that these courses "need to include a variety of interaction patterns to provide opportunities for elaborated responses" and that "large group discussion may not be the ideal context for enacting advanced speaking function" (p. 195).

This study demonstrates the pedagogical value of weekly group discussions taking place outside of class. In terms of language, the collaborative dialogues allowed the participants to interact with another speaker, practice strategies such as circumlocution, support their conversation partner by providing vocabulary, and elaborating, something that can rarely be done in the classroom. The learners of this study were able to co-construct language together, but they also showed that they were able to co-construct content knowledge. Some participants developed entire arguments built on connections with class discussions, class materials, and personal knowledge.

This study also illustrates the theoretical limitations of the dichotomous approach to content vs. form. Coding content-related talk and language-related talk was not problematic as language-related talk was both rare and brief and was typically unrelated to content. However, in this upper-division course, the students often and simultaneously learned new concepts (i.e., content) in the target language (i.e., language), meaning that providing lexical support could in some instances equal providing content support. This situation, typical in CLIL courses (Nikula, 2012) is also prevalent in upper-division content courses. Future research would do well to avoid the binary approach between content and form despite how entrenched it is in the research literature. The Multiliteracies approach could frame upcoming studies because it stresses the contextualization of language use and the creation of connections between form and meaning as the Available Designs (comprising grammar and vocabulary) and texts are all seen as the content of a course (Paesani et al., 2016).

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NOTES

[1] Language-related episodes are episodes during which students discuss language itself. Philp et al. (2014) explain that researchers use LREs to analyze peer interactions.
[2] Participants took the SOPI, the precursor of the computerized OPI (OPIc), at the beginning and the end of semester during which the study took place.
[3] Because Megan engaged in the process of applying and analyzing, we know that she was not only understanding class content, but also that she was able to build arguments based on this understanding. It is therefore safe to say that all of the participants engaged in the processes of remembering and understanding.
[4] Unlike when Ben was present in WD1 and WD2, Megan and Sophia, in WD3, talked for a longer period of time and focused on other talk.
[5] The black shape has been added to the picture to focus the attention of the reader. Following are the English translations of the French words: generation (génération), ring (bague), wealth (richesse), name (nom), inheritance (héritage).
[6] In the majority of cases, it was not possible to know if participants did not offer lexical support because they could not or because they did not want to.

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Appendix

Length of Discussions

The following table presents the length of the three weekly discussions for each group of participants. Times are displayed in minutes and seconds.

Table 5
Length of Weekly Discussions

Week	A&C	B&M&S	K&E	H&S	Mean
WD1	16:52	12:30	18:16	15:14	15:43
WD2	15:17	12:06	15:26	15:31	14:35
WD3	13:25	14:06	15:47	10:41	13:30
Mean	15:11	12:54	16:30	13:49	14:36