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Formative Use of Language Assessment: Supporting Learning Through the Medium of a Second Language

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Over the last decade, there has been an increased interest in investigation of assessment for learning. However, to date, there are still very few studies that investigated assessment for language learning or formative language assessment, focusing particularly on: (a) effects of formative assessment on learners' linguistic development and on teachers' teaching and lesson planning; (b) variables influencing the frequency and extent of effectiveness of formative assessment; (c) teachers' and learners' views on teacher feedback and learner peer- and self- assessment; and (d) fulfilment of the requirements set in the official United Kingdom (UK) policy documents on effective teaching and assessment of learners with English as an additional language (EAL), also known as English as an second language (ESL) in the United States (U.S.), in real classrooms. This article addressed these issues, and thus, extended the limited knowledge base on formative language assessment research to date. Moreover, through examining classroom-embedded language assessment processes from various perspectives, this research paper made a link between two research areas: (a) language testing and assessment; and (b) second language acquisition, also a relatively neglected field of research. This paper investigated two intact primary immersion classrooms, with learners as young as 8-10 years old and teachers whose teaching roles in the classrooms differed; two teachers were mainstream classroom teachers (CTs) and one was a mainstream teacher with specific responsibilities for language development in the school. The data were derived from literacy, numeracy, and science lessons through classroom observations and from the research participants through interviews. The data were firstly transcribed and coded qualitatively and then analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The findings revealed that various language assessment strategies were used regardless of the subject area of the lessons or role of the teachers and had formative potential for both the teachers and the learners. However, the frequency of use and extent of effectiveness of these strategies sometimes varied. It was also found that four out of five language assessment strategies, namely, teacher feedback, teacher questioning, learner peer-assessment, and learner self-assessment, had a clear positive effect on learners' linguistic development, with the teachers and the learners overall reporting having a positive attitude to these strategies.

Keywords: formative assessment, language assessment, self-assessment, peer-assessment, formative teacher feedback, English as an additional/second language (EAL/ESL) learning and teaching

Introduction

The most recent school census results published by the Department for Education revealed that in January 2013, in English primary schools, as many as 18% (612,160) of pupils or every sixth child, whose

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first language was not English, were recorded; and the total number of pupils whose first language was other than English—including primary, secondary, special schools, and pupil referral units—was 32% (1,048,310) of the total school population (National Association for Language Developemnt in the Curriculum (NALDIC), 2014). Many of these children have to acquire English language alongside their acquisition of the content of national curriculum (School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA), 1996). On the one hand, this requirement creates challenges for children, as they have to develop their English language skills at the same time as they develop their knowledge in school subjects (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), 2000; Times Educational Supplement (TES), 2005). On the other hand, it also creates challenges for teachers as they have not only to help English as an additional language (EAL) learners access the national curriculum fully and raise their standard of achievement in all subjects, but also to assist them "in becoming competent English language users as quickly and effectively as possible" (SCAA, 1996, p. 2).

To achieve these goals, the United Kingdom's (UK) official policy documentation—with specific reference to learners with EAL—puts forward a number of requirements, underlying the need for all teachers in all lessons to be responsible not only for provision of opportunities for learners' language development and support (SCAA, 1996; Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), 1999; Teacher Training Agency (TTA), 2000; Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), 2002; Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2001; 2003; 2004a; 2005b; Training and Developmemt Agency (TDA), 2006b), but also for the formative assessment of learners' linguistic knowledge (QCA, 1999; 2000; Ferris, Catling, & Scott, 2000; DfES, 2003; 2004b; 2005a; NALDIC, 2007) in order to inform their teaching on the one hand, and support learners' progression in EAL on the other. As Rea-Dickins (2008) put it, "In classrooms, teachers are expected both to develop and to measure their learners' language learning" (p. 5), thus, they appear to be "assessors of curriculum attainment (on the one hand), and facilitators of language development (on the other)" (Rea-Dickins, 2007a, p. 193). This statement suggests that "within the (current) socio-cultural context of the classroom, the term 'assessment' (should be) used to refer (not only to approaches) to the elicitation of learner language" (Rea-Dickins, 2007b, p. 492), but also to the approaches to supporting and promoting the development of language being elicited; since the main purpose of formative assessment is to bring about a change in learning and support it, but not merely measure.

In recent years, considerable interest has been shown in the use of formative assessment in the context of second or foreign language or mainstream classrooms (Butler, 1988; Fontana & Fernandes, 1994; Tunstall & Gipps, 1996; Gattullo, 2000; Hasselgren, 2000; Torrance & Pryor, 2001; Patri, 2002; McDonald & Boud, 2003; Wiliam, Lee, Harrison, & Black, 2004; Cheng & Warren, 2005; Smith & Gorard, 2005; Carless, 2005; Ross, 2005; Pinter, 2007; Storch, 2007; Cheng & Wang, 2007; McGarrell & Verbeem, 2007). However, to date, there are still very few studies that have investigated formative language assessment in immersion classrooms (Rea-Dickins & Gardner, 2000; Rea-Dickins, 2001; 2003; 2006; Leung & Mohan, 2004), which Rea-Dickins (2007b) defined as:

> Good teaching—where teachers respond to learners' language learning and needs, with different types of feedback of an appropriate kind, of learner involvement through collaborative learning activities and self- and peer- assessment, with ample opportunities for language practice. (p. 503)

The above quote suggests that the main purpose of formative language assessment is to bring about change in learners' language learning; in other words, to support and promote their language development. The

research results reported in this paper shed some light on how teachers through classroom-embedded language assessment practices facilitated and promoted EAL/ESL learners' language development in primary classrooms in England. The following five research questions were investigated:

1. Which language assessment strategies, if any, do teachers and learners use in immersion classrooms to support and promote learners' linguistic development?

2. What does the type and frequency of language assessment strategies used by the teachers and learners depend on (subject area or role of the teacher)?

3. What is the impact of language assessment on learners' linguistic development?

4. What does the effectiveness (measured by successful uptake) of language assessment depend on (subject area or role of the teacher)?

5. What are the teachers' and the learners' views on various language assessment strategies (self-, peer-, and teacher- assessment) in immersion classrooms?

Methodology

The research investigated two classrooms at Key Stage 2 of the English National Curriculum, years 4 and 5 in a mainstream primary school in an inner city area. Both classes comprised a high proportion of pupils learning EAL and were taught by either a classroom teacher (CT) or a language teacher (LT), or through the collaboration of both teachers. Two methods for data collection were used. The classroom observation data consisted of audio and video recordings of six lessons taught by CT-1, six lessons taught by CT-2, and 12 lessons (or their parts) taught by the LT. Classroom observations focused on three core curriculum areas: literacy, numeracy, and science. The interview data consisted of four interviews with the targeted learners and three interviews with the teachers. The interview data were also collected by means of audio and video recordings. The interview data focused on the following areas: teacher formative assessment and learner self- and peer- assessment. Classroom observation data were analysed using the language assessment framework developed on the basis of Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen's (2001) theory on focus on form, Lyster and Ranta's (1997) error treatment model, and the author's personal empirical research observations (Afitska, 2004). Statistical analysis of the data was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 12.0.1.

The Language Assessment Framework

The language assessment framework (see Figure 1) consists of five components which represent five ways in which language assessment may be implemented in the context of immersion classrooms. The first component, "teacher supportive input", takes up the notions of "pre-emptive and reactive teacher initiated incidental focus on form" (Ellis et al., 2001) as its theoretical basis. This language assessment strategy suggests that teachers may promote learners' linguistic development by addressing linguistic issues even though learners have not asked for linguistic assistance; and by responding explicitly to learners' linguistic errors and queries. The second component of the language assessment framework, "teacher questioning", takes up the notion of "pre-emptive teacher initiated incidental focus on form" (Ellis et al., 2001) only as its theoretical basis. This language assessment strategy suggests that teachers may promote learners' linguistic development by questioning their linguistic knowledge during the lessons. The third component of the language assessment framework, "teacher feedback", takes up the notion of "reactive teacher initiated incidental focus on form"

(Ellis et al., 2001) as its basis. This language assessment strategy suggests that teachers may promote learners' linguistic development by providing them with feedback once a linguistic error or query has occurred. The fourth component of the language assessment framework, "learner peer-assessment", takes up the notion of "reactive learner initiated incidental focus on form" (Ellis et al., 2001) as its basis. This language assessment strategy suggests that learners, in a way similar to the teachers, may promote their peers' linguistic development by providing them with feedback when linguistic errors or queries occur. Finally, the fifth component of the language assessment framework, "learner self-assessment", similarly to "learner peer-assessment", takes the notion "reactive learner initiated incidental focus on form" (Ellis et al., 2001) as its basis. This language assessment strategy suggests that learners may contribute to the development of their linguistic proficiency through self-assessment and attempt to correct their linguistic errors as well as fill in the gaps in their linguistic knowledge by themselves in the first instance.

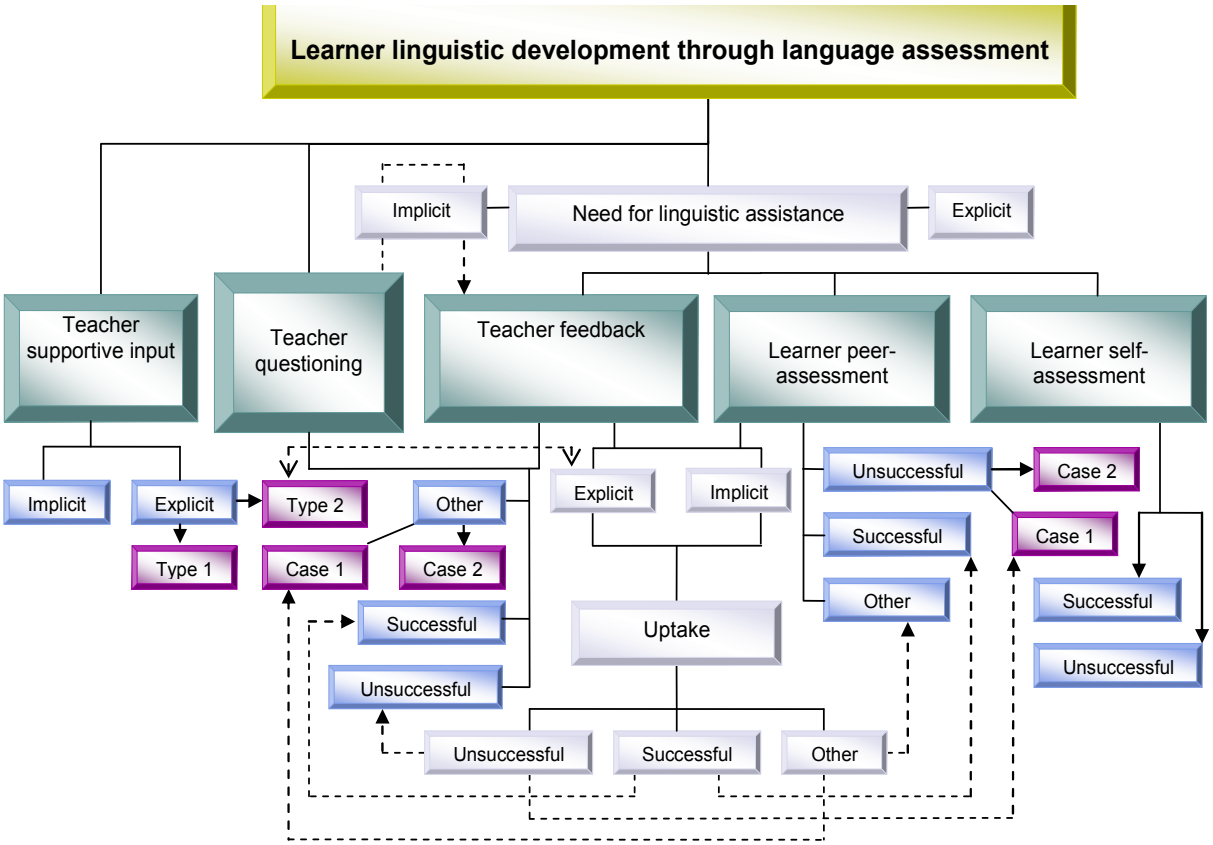

Figure 1. Structure of the language assessment framework.

The following extracts exemplify some categories from the framework drawing on classroom observation data collected during this study.

Teacher Supportive Input

The episode (see Table 1) presents an example of explicit provision of formative linguistic input as the teacher overtly draws learners' attention to a linguistic item (equivalent) in order to remind them of the meaning of this concept.

Table 1
Example 2: Observation-Year 4-CT-Numeracy-June 13

59	CT	… Remember what that word "equivalent" mean, it means the same amount as … ok, put your boards up, ok, good girl Chan….

Teacher Questioning

The example in Table 2 presents successful teacher questioning, since after asking a linguistic question (line 403) which identified a gap in the learners' knowledge (line 404) and after providing feedback to the learners on their replies (lines 405 and 407), the teacher finally succeeds in eliciting target form ("did" well) (line 408).

Table 2
Example 6: Observation-Year 4-CT-Literacy-June 6

403	CT	Not to just say "My group done well" … which word is wrong there anyway.
404	Px	"Well".
405	CT	No, there was nothing wrong with "well".
406	P14	"Done well" … "done".
407	CT	What is wrong with "done"… my group?
408	P15	"Did".

Teacher Feedback

The example in Table 3 presents successful teacher feedback (line 19) since the learner's uptake move (an immediate reaction of the learner to the teacher's feedback move) is successful—the learner is able to notice and correct her linguistic error (line 20).

Table 3
Example 9: Observation-Year 4-LT-Numeracy-June 6

18	Ifr	Because five is a odd number.
19	LT	Do we say "a odd"?
20	Ifr	An odd.

Learner Peer-assessment

The example in Table 4 presents a successful use of peer-assessment since the "struggling" learner's uptake move is successful (line 143)—The learner corrects his linguistic error (line 141) after the feedback was provided to him by his peer (line 142).

Table 4
Example 15: Observation-Year 4-CT-Literacy-June 15

141	Kar	Use your logbook records to show two al-alternative (Reads alternative as alt(e)rn(ei)tive).
142	Px	Alternative.
143	Kar	Alternative ways in which Joshua can answer the question in the lab for example.

Learner Self-assessment

The episode in Table 5 reveals that the learner succeeded in noticing and correcting her error without any help being provided to her by a teacher or another learner.

Table 5
Example 19: Observation-Year 4-LT-Numeracy-June 6

1	Sop	Because if (inaudible) was a hundred and seven was a 10, we would had a zero as a ho-hold place a place holder.

Analysis and Results

Responsibilities by Teacher's Role

In the TTA (2000) document, it is stated that "Developing the English of bilingual students is the responsibility of all teachers" (p. 47) and that "All teachers need to be prepared to teach or comment explicitly on the language forms, functions and structures" (p. 51). Furthermore, DfES (2004a) reinforced the point highlighted by the TTA (2000) and stated that "All mainstream class and subject teachers have responsibility for developing pupils' competence in English, both written and spoken" (p. 8).

Classroom observation revealed that in the examined classes, both types of teachers (the mainstream CTs and the LT) supported learners' language development and provided them with opportunities for language learning (see Table 6). Both teachers were observed using the following strategies to support learners' language learning: provision of supportive input, questioning learners' linguistic knowledge, and provision of feedback to learners' linguistic errors and queries. Therefore, it may be suggested that the researched teachers' practices in supporting and promoting the learners' language development correspond to the requirements outlined in the TTA (2000) and the DfES (2004a) documents.

Table 6

Language Assessment Strategies by Teacher's Role

			Language assessment strategy					
			TSI	TQ	TF	LPA	LSA	Total
Teacher's role	LT	Count	62	98	146	18	16	340
		% within teacher's role	18.2%	28.8%	42.9%	5.3%	4.7%	100%
	CT	Count	62	137	93	69	22	383
		% within teacher's role	16.2%	35.8%	24.3%	18.0%	5.7%	100%
Total		Count	124	235	239	87	38	723
		% within teacher's role	17.2%	32.5%	33.1%	12.0%	5.3%	100%

Notes. TSI—teacher supportive input; TQ—teacher questioning; TF—teacher feedback; LPA—learner peer-assessment; and LSA—learner self-assessment.

Interestingly, however, it was also observed that the extent to which the CTs and the LT provided learners with the language help and opportunities for language development sometimes seemed to depend on the language support strategy that the teachers used. Thus, it was observed that the LT provided linguistic feedback to the learners more often than the CTs (146 and 93 episodes respectively), whereas the CTs questioned the learners' linguistic knowledge more often than the LT (137 and 98 episodes respectively) (see Tables 7 & 8).

Table 7

Teacher Feedback by Teacher's Role

	Observed *N*	Expected *N*	Residual
LT	146	119.5	26.5
CT	93	119.5	-26.5
Total	239	-	-

Notes. Chi-square[a] = 11.753; *df* = 1; asymp sig. = 0.001; $p < 0.05$. a: 0 cells (0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 119.5.

Both teachers, however, provided the learners with supportive linguistic input equally often (62 and 62 episodes respectively) (see Table 9).

Table 8

Teacher Questioning by Teacher's Role

	Observed *N*	Expected *N*	Residual
LT	98	117.5	-19.5
CT	137	117.5	19.5
Total	235	-	-

Notes. Chi-square[a] = 6.472; *df* = 1; asymp sig. = 0.011; $p < 0.05$. a: 0 cells (0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 117.5.

Table 9

Teacher Supportive Input by Teacher's Role

	Observed *N*	Expected *N*	Residual
LT	62	62.0	0
CT	62	62.0	0
Total	124	-	-

Notes. Chi-square[a] = 0.000; *df* = 1; asymp sig. = 1.000, $p > 0.05$. a: 0 cells (0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 62.0.

Therefore, it can be concluded that even though both teachers did assist the learners with their language learning as requested by the official policy documents, they seemed to prefer different strategies for doing so. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the language support strategies used by both the CTs and the LT were generally effective in promoting learners' learning (see Table 10).

Table 10

Successful Language Assessment by Teacher's Role

			Language assessment strategy: Successful uptake				
			TQ	TF	LPA	LSA	Total
Teacher's role	LT	Count	28	52	5	16	101
		% within teacher's role	27.7%	51.5%	5.0%	15.8%	100.0%
	CT	Count	15	17	45	19	96
		% within teacher's role	15.6%	17.7%	46.9%	19.8%	100.0%

Notes. TQ—teacher questioning; TF—teacher feedback; LPA—learner peer-assessment; and LSA—learner self-assessment.

However, the extent of their effectiveness sometimes seemed to depend on which teacher used them. It was observed that teacher feedback was more effective in leading to successful learner uptake when the LT rather than the CTs used this strategy (35.6% and 18.3% respectively) (see Table 11).

Interestingly, teacher feedback strategy also seemed to be a preferred LT's strategy as it was observed used by her more often than other support strategies (teacher feedback—146 episodes, teacher supportive input—62 episodes, and teacher questioning—98 episodes) (see Table 6 above).

The extent of effectiveness of the teacher questioning was similar for both teachers (56% and 55.6%) (see Table 12), even though the CTs were observed using it more (137 episodes for the CTs and 98 for the LT) and seemed to prefer this strategy to other support strategies (teacher questioning—137 episodes, teacher feedback—93 episodes, and teacher supportive input—62 episodes) (see Table 6 above).

Similar to Mackey, Polio, and McDonough (2004), this finding suggests that the teacher's experience may have a role to play in the effectiveness of the teacher's teaching. Indeed, the LT in the present research overall had the most years of teaching experience.

Table 11

Teacher Feedback: Uptake by Teacher's Role

	Value	*Df*	Asymp sig. (2-sided)	Exact sig. (2-sided)	Exact sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-square	8.315[b]	1	0.004	-	-
Continuity correction[a]	7.492	1	0.006	-	-
Likelihood ratio	8.664	1	0.003	-	-
Fisher's exact test	-	-	-	0.005	0.003
Linear-by-linear associtation	8.280	1	0.004	-	-
N of valid cases	239	-	-	-	-

Teacher feedback: uptake			Successful	Other uptake	Total
Teacher's role	LT	Count	52	94	146
		% within Teacher's role	35.6%	64.4%	100.0%
	CT	Count	17	76	93
		% within Teacher's role	18.3%	81.7%	100.0%

Notes. Chi-square[a] = 8.315; *df* = 1; $p < 0.05$. a: Computed only for 2 × 2 table; b: 0 cells (0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 26.85.

Table 12

Teacher Questioning: Uptake by Teacher's Role

	Value	*Df*	Asymp sig. (2-sided)	Exact sig. (2-sided)	Exact sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-square	0.001[b]	1	0.970	-	-
Continuity correction[a]	0.000	1	1.000	-	-
Likelihood ratio	0.001	1	0.970	-	-
Fisher's exact test	-	-	-	1.000	0.579
Linear-by-linear associtation	0.001	1	0.970	-	-
N of valid cases	77	-	-	-	-

Teacher questioning: uptake			Successful uptake	Other uptake	Total
Teacher's role	LT	Count	28	22	50
		% within teacher's role	56.0%	44.0%	100.0%
	CT	Count	15	12	27
		% within teacher's role	55.6%	44.4%	100.0%

Notes. Chi-square[a] = 0.001; *df* = 1; $p > 0.05$. a: Computed only for 2 × 2 table; b: 0 cells (0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 11.92.

Responsibilities by the Subject Area

It is suggested in the DfEE (1999) document that "Teachers should aim to provide the support pupils need to take part in all subject areas" (p. 37). Similarly, SCAA (1996) required that "Teachers have responsibility for simultaneous teaching of both English and subject content" (p. 2). In other words, these policy documents suggest that learners should be provided with language support in all lessons and not only in literacy lessons, where language is often the main topic.

In this study, the teachers were observed supporting learners with their language development throughout the lessons regardless of their subject area (see Table 13).

This finding may be seen as evidence that the researched teachers did follow the requirements set in DfEE (1999) and SCAA (1996) documents on supporting learners' language development in all subject areas.

Table 13
Language Assessment Strategies by Subject Areas

			Language assessment strategy					
			TSI	TQ	TF	LPA	LSA	Total
Subject	Literacy	Count	58	163	69	45	8	343
		% within subject	16.9%	47.5%	20.1%	13.1%	2.3%	100.0%
	Numeracy	Count	23	21	45	13	10	112
		% within subject	20.5%	18.8%	40.2%	11.6%	8.9%	100.0%
	Science	Count	43	51	125	29	20	268
		% within subject	16.0%	19.0%	46.6%	10.8%	7.5%	100.0%
Total		Count	124	235	239	87	38	723
		% within subject	17.2%	32.5%	33.1%	12.0%	5.3%	100.0%

Notes. TSI—teacher supportive input; TQ—teacher questioning; TF—teacher feedback; LPA—learner peer-assessment; and LSA—learner self-assessment.

This research has also provided some evidence that even though the learners were provided with language help and opportunities for language development in all core subjects—literacy, numeracy, and science—the extent to which they were provided with such help seemed to depend on the subject lesson. The learners were provided with supportive linguistic input more often in literacy and science than in numeracy lessons (58, 43, and 23 episodes respectively) (see Table 14).

Table 14
Teacher Supportive Input by Subject Areas

	Observed *N*	Expected *N*	Residual
Literacy	58	41.3	16.7
Numberacy	23	41.3	-18.3
Science	43	41.3	1.7
Total	124	-	-

Notes. Chi-square[a] = 14.919; *df* = 2; asymp sig. = 0.001; $p < 0.05$. a: 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 41.3.

The learners were asked more linguistic questions in literacy than in science and numeracy lessons (163, 51, and 21 episodes respectively) (see Table 15).

Table 15
Teacher Questioning by Subject Areas

	Observed *N*	Expected *N*	Residual
Literacy	163	78.3	84.7
Numberacy	21	78.3	-57.3
Science	51	78.3	-27.3
Total	235	-	-

Notes. Chi-square[a] = 143.013; *df* = 2; asymp sig. = 0.000; $p< 0.05$. a: 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 78.3.

The learners received linguistic feedback from the teachers more frequently in science than in literacy and numeracy lessons (125, 69, and 45 episodes respectively) (see Table 16).

It may be clearly observed from these findings that overall learners seemed to be receiving most of their language help in their literacy lessons and least in numeracy. This finding is similar to the finding of Afitska (2004), in which, it was found that in literacy lessons, learners were provided with more opportunities for

language development than in numeracy lessons.

Table 16

Teacher Feedback by Subject Areas

	Observed *N*	Expected *N*	Residual
Literacy	69	79.7	-10.7
Numberacy	45	79.7	-34.7
Science	125	79.7	45.3
Total	239	-	-

Notes. Chi-square[a] = 42.310; *df* = 2; asymp sig. = 0.000; $p < 0.05$. a: 0 cells (0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 79.7.

It is also interesting to note that even though the teachers supported learners' language development more in some subject areas that in others, they did it equally effectively regardless of the subject lessons (see Tables 17 & 18).

Table 17

Teacher Questioning: Uptake by Subject Matter

			Value	*Df*	Asymp sig. (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-square			2.504[a]	2	0.286	
Likelihood Ratio			2.577	2	0.276	
Linear-by-linear associtation			1.414	1	0.234	
N of valid cases			77	-	-	
Teacher questioning: uptake			Successful uptake		Other uptake	Total
Subject	Literacy	Count	22		23	45
		% within subject	48.9%		51.1%	100.0%
	Numeracy	Count	6		2	8
		% within subject	75.0%		25.0%	100.0%
	Science	Count	15		9	24
		% within subject	62.5%		37.5%	100.0%

Notes. Chi-square[a] = 2.504; *df* = 2; $p > 0.05$. a: 2 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.53.

Table 18

Teacher Feedback: Uptake by Subject Matter

			Value	*Df*	Asymp sig. (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-square			2.831[a]	2	0.243	
Likelihood ratio			2.889	2	0.236	
Linear-by-linear associtation			1.252	1	0.263	
N of valid cases			239	-	-	
Teacher feedback: uptake			Successful uptake		Other uptake	Total
Subject	Literacy	Count	15		54	69
		% within subject	21.7%		78.3%	100.0%
	Numeracy	Count	16		29	45
		% within subject	35.6%		64.4%	100.0%
	Science	Count	38		87	125
		% within subject	30.4%		69.6%	100.0%

Notes. Chi-square[a] = 2.831; *df* = 2; $p > 0.05$. a: 0 cells (0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 12.99.

Teacher Assessment—Supporting Learning

In this study, both teacher assessment strategies (teacher questioning and feedback), led to successful learner uptake (see Tables 19 & 20). The rates of successful learner uptake were 100% for teacher questioning and 95% for teacher feedback[1].

Table 19

Teacher Questioning: Successful Uptake

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Successful uptake	43	55.8	55.8	55.8
	Other uptake	34	44.2	44.2	100.0
	Total	77	100.0	100.0	-

Table 20

Teacher Feedback: Successful Uptake

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Successful uptake	69	28.9	28.9	28.9
	Unsuccessful uptake	13	5.4	5.4	34.3
	Other uptake	157	65.7	65.7	100.0
	Total	239	100.0	100.0	-

This finding may imply that indeed the teachers' classroom-based assessment had formative potential for the learners since the learners could benefit, that is, learn from it. Similarly to McDonough (2005) and Loewen (2005), the author sees learner uptake as a possible indicator of successful language acquisition. Furthermore, when commenting on the feedback strategies they used, the teachers reported finding them helpful for supporting learners' learning.

However, this research also showed that in 6% of teacher questioning, the linguistic gaps in learners' knowledge remained unaddressed by the teachers, therefore, opportunities for these assessment interactions to become formative for the learners were lost (see Table 21).

Table 21

Teacher Questioning: Addressing Gap

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Teacher questioning—problem addressed	77	93.9	93.9	93.9
	Teacher questioning—problem not addressed	5	6.1	6.1	100.0
	Total	82	100.0	100.0	-

Moreover, the study also revealed that in 51% of cases when the learners showed need for linguistic help (see Table 22), this was not provided to them even though the teachers seemed to be aware of the learners' problems. Here again, the opportunities for formative use of language assessment seemed to be neglected by the teachers.

[1] The "other uptake" episodes were excluded from the analysis. When included, the rates of successful uptake following the teacher questioning comprise 56% (with 0% of unsuccessful learner uptake) and the rates of successful uptake following the teacher feedback comprise 29% (with 5% of unsuccessful learner uptake).

Table 22
Teacher Feedback: Addressing Gap

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Teacher feedback—addressed	239	49.4	49.4	49.4
	Teacher feedback—not addressed	245	50.6	50.6	100.0
	Total	484	100.0	100.0	-

The teachers were also observed providing learners with supportive linguistic input (see Table 23) when they presumed that learners might have difficulties with understanding language or could benefit from, that is, new vocabulary or a different way of expressing meanings in English.

Table 23
Type of Teacher Supportive Input

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Teacher supportive input—explicit	85	68.5	68.5	68.5
	Teacher supportive input—implicit	39	31.5	31.5	100.0
	Total	124	100.0	100.0	-

The author sees the process of such teacher decision-making as assessment. This study could not measure the extent to which teacher supportive input could possibly assist learners' language learning by means of learner uptake as this teacher assessment strategy did not mean to lead to immediate learner uptake. However, CT-1, when commenting on how she marked the learners' work, noted:

> Sometimes, it is a word that I might have introduced to them in the shared reading, or you know, we have been talking or discussing something and they liked the word and they want to use it, but you know, they do not know how it is spelt. I am trying to think of one … dilapidated … or something like that you know (laughing) and some children, like Px, will straight away remember that word and want to use it straight away in their writing, and if they have used that word and it is very close to how it should be, or you know, I can understand which word they mean, then, I probably will not correct it. (Comment 1: CT-1; Int-June 15; line 115)

This extract provides evidence showing that this learner could benefit from the teacher's supportive linguistic input in that he would remember the new word and use it in his writing. When the teacher supportive input is used in this way, the author believes that it may be seen as having formative potential for the learners.

Teacher Assessment—Supporting Teaching

When the LT and the CTs were invited to talk about classroom assessment and their use of the assessment outcomes, they stated:

> I do make notes of particular problems that I have observed so that they can then be included in planning future lessons…. I also write down samples of language that the children use which again go on to their records … and I have got bits of paper all over at home that will when I do the language development records (and) we can see the mistakes they are making. I pick up on the language needs which I then share with a class teacher and put forward suggestions. (Comment 2: LT; Int-June 15; lines 56, 66, 68, 110, and 114)
>
> What I will do when problems like that (English language learning related problems) arise try to actually plan them into the teaching…. I may not do it in the next lesson, I may do it in the next unit of work … and it might be something that I mean in the case say literacy, it might be something that actually is not part of the year 4, you know, curriculum for

> literacy, but it might be part of the year 3, which they still have not grasped and, so, you know, I will go over that. (Comment 3: CT-1; Int-June15; line 43)

It is evidenced from both comments (Comments 2 and 3) that the teachers made formative use of their assessment outcomes. They used the information collected about the learners' linguistic knowledge to inform the next stages in teaching. These teachers' practice reflects on the requirements of official policy documents on effective assessment of learners' with EAL. Specifically, it is stated in one of these documents that "Assessment for learning can be used formatively and should feedback into classroom planning, teaching, and learning" (DfES, 2003, p. 2).

In her interview, the other CT also commented on her use of classroom-based assessment and its outcomes. She stated:

> … I will overhear while I walk around the classroom generally and I will stop at them and actually say, well, what is it you are doing, do you understand, and then, from that, I can, you know, I can think…. Well, it is informal assessment rather than more formal assessment you know and I can find out well. Actually, yes, this child with EAL, they do understand concept or they clearly do not and that is you know. I can find out from there, well, actually, how can I help them understand it more, em, but definitely, it is a combination of both and that is the best way it works because sometimes you might (inaudible) intentions have a lesson planned, but, it may not go according to plan, you might think that actually and this has happened several times where the children have not been at the level that I wanted them for the lesson, so, I had to go beyond, I had to take step backwards and think right how are we going to get to this step. (Comment 4: CT-2; Int-June 12; line 62)

This teacher's comment suggests that unlike the other two teachers (CT-1 and the LT) who spoke about using the assessment data to inform the next stages in their teaching (forthcoming lessons), this teacher was referring to use of the assessment data to inform her immediate teaching (teaching within the same lesson). The importance of using the assessment data to "immediately inform planning and teaching" is also highlighted in the DfES (2003, p. 13) document.

Learner Assessment

Table 24
Learner Peer-assessment: Successful Uptake

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Successful uptake	50	65.8	65.8	65.8
	Unsuccessful uptake	2	2.6	2.6	68.4
	Other uptake	24	31.6	31.6	100.0
	Total	76	100.0	100.0	-

Table 25
Learner Self-assessment: Successful Uptake

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Successful uptake	35	92.1	92.1	92.1
	Unsuccessful uptake	3	7.9	7.9	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	-

In this study, the learners were observed assessing their peers' and their own linguistic development by means of peer- and self- assessment. It can be concluded that 98% of learner peer-assessment and 92% of

leaner self-assessment learner uptake was successful[2] (see Tables 24 & 25).

Resting on these findings, the author suggests that in the researched classes, learner initiated language assessment, similar to teacher initiated language assessment, could have had formative potential for the learners since they were observed benefitting from such assessment. Moreover, the learners reported that they and their peers could indeed support their own and each other's language learning through self- and peer-assessment:

> I would like to correct other people's work in case they are wrong because they would help me to correct my.… I first like tell them like first I ask them questions and then giving them clues and then they would like come up with the answer … but sometimes, like when I corrected the person like, they would see their mistake, and next time, they would write it right. (Comment 5: P4; Int-June 15; lines 18, 140, and 144)

Furthermore, it is stated in the DfES (2005a) document on effective assessment of learners with EAL, that teachers should "ensure opportunities for learner self-assessment and peer-assessment as part of feedback" (p. 22). Indeed, the observed high rates of successful learner uptake following learner self- and peer-assessment (92% and 96% respectively) suggest that allowing for learner-driven assessment in the classrooms may considerably support the learners' learning. However, even though in the researched classes, the teachers did provide the learners with opportunities to self- and peer- assess, the learners were observed doing so on average as infrequently as once every 52 minutes (i.e., once in each lesson) when self-assessing, and once every 18 minutes (i.e., three times in each lesson) when peer-assessing.

Discussion

Impact on Learning

Findings from this study seem to corroborate the findings of other researchers (Fontana & Fernandes, 1994; Black & Wiliam, 1998a; 1998b; Rea-Dickins, 2001; McDonald & Boud, 2003; Wiliam et al., 2004; Ross, 2005; Carless, 2005; Pinter, 2007; Storch, 2007; McGarrel & Verbeem, 2007) who observed that formative assessment may have a positive impact on learners' linguistic or other cognitive development, and therefore, potentially may promote learning. In this study, it was observed that both the teacher and the learner initiated assessment had a positive effect on learners' linguistic development[3].

Use in the Classrooms: Attitudes

Similar to Hasselgren (2000), Torrance and Pryor (2001), McDonald and Boud (2003), Carless (2005), and Pinter (2007), this study suggests that the researched teachers overall had a positive attitude to the classroom-based—both teacher and learner initiated—assessment. They reported using such assessment themselves as well as observing their learners' use of it and finding it useful for supporting and promoting learners' learning. Moreover, the teachers also highlighted promoting learner self-assessment in their classes by encouraging pupils to self-assess and by training them in using this assessment strategy. However, several other studies on "formative assessment" revealed that learners were found not always feeling positive about classroom-based assessment and learner peer-assessment in particular. In some studies, learners doubted their ability to fairly and responsibly assess their peers (Cheng & Warren, 2005), in others, they interpreted

[2] The "other uptake" episodes were excluded from the analysis. When included, the rates of successful uptake following the learner peer-assessment comprise 66% (with 3% of unsuccessful learner uptake) and the rates of successful uptake following learner self-assessment remain the same 92%, as learner self-assessment never resulted in "other uptake" moves.

[3] A positive effect was measured by means of successful learner uptake following teacher or other learners' treating turns.

peer-assessment as criticism (Morris & Tarone, 2003). In this study, overall, the learners seemed to have a positive attitude to teacher assessment as well as peer- and self- assessment. However, they also reported preferring the teacher feedback to that of their peers when they had choice as to who will assist them. The learners reasoned their choice by their belief that the teacher "knows better". This finding seems to be different from both Cheng and Warren's (2005) and Morris and Tarone's (2003) findings. In the research results reported in this paper, the learners neither seemed to doubt their own ability to fairly assess their peers (contrariwise, they reported liking assessing their peers), nor reported interpreting their peers' feedback as criticism. It seems to be just the matter of them trusting their teachers more. In relation to such issues, Storch (2007) commented that "learners' concerns about learning the 'wrong grammar' from their peers should be allayed" since "in most instances, learners (can) reach grammatically correct decisions when working with peers" (p. 156).

Teacher Feedback

It was reported by Black and Wiliam (1998b) and reinforced by Cheng and Wang (2007) that in classrooms, the giving of marks and the grading functions are often over-emphasised while the giving of useful advice and the learning functions are under-emphasised. In this study, however, it was observed that the teachers preferred to comment on their learners' performance to help them progress through learning, rather than judging their performance by means of grades. It was also believed by the researched teachers that learners could particularly benefit from the verbal comments as opposed to the written comments which they might not read at all. However, P1, who was one of the interviewed children, noted that he would read the teacher's comments, understand them, and benefit from them. This finding seems to contradict Carless' (2007) claim that "Much written feedback which occurs after a task is completed is relatively ineffective because it does not provide much motivation or opportunity for a student to act upon the feedback" (p. 175). The fact that P1 reported benefitting from the teachers' written comments and other children reported benefitting from the verbal teacher comments may suggest that the quality of teachers' comments were good in that they allowed supporting and maybe promoting learners' learning. Similarly, Butler (1988), reported by Black and Wiliam (1998b), also observed that learners could benefit from teachers' comments more than they could from the grades. However, Smith and Gorard (2005) noted in their study that learners had difficulties understanding the teachers' comments, therefore, they could hardly benefit from them. Tying all the findings together, the author concludes that it is probably not the comments per se that can make feedback work for the learners, but it is rather the quality of the comments as well as the way they are provided, that is, how and when the comments are presented to the learners that might make them become useful to the learners. But, of course, this hypothesis would need to be researched.

Self- and Peer- assessment Compared to Teacher Assessment

Several studies have investigated the quality of learner initiated assessments in comparison to the teacher assessment. Some of these studies found that learners could assess themselves (Hasselgren, 2000) and their peers (Patri, 2002) in a manner similar to their teachers. Others, however, revealed that learner assessment resulted in judgements different to those of the teachers (Patri, 2002, in relation to self-assessment; Cheng & Warren, 2005, in relation to peer-assessment). In this research, the author did not compare the quality of the learner assessment to that of the teachers, but she believed that since the teachers reported training their 8-10 years old learners in self-assessment and providing them with opportunities for group work, where the learners

could peer-assess, they probably believed that learners of this age group were mature enough to assess their peers and themselves in a way similar to that of the teachers, that is, in a way that could support and maybe promote their learning. Pinter (2007) also highlighted that "peer-peer interactions of 10 years old learners could offer multiple (learning) benefits to them" (p. 203).

Implications for Teaching

It was observed in this research that when the teachers provided feedback to the learners in eliciting way, that is, by asking questions, making clarifications and requests, and giving prompts, learners were more likely to retain new knowledge (Comment 6) and it can support independent learning in the future (Comment 7):

> I would rather let them work out the problem themselves by giving them more clues and giving them more help … they can, I should say, should try and get there on their own. I think it is far better because if you just tell them something they switch off … and they will not remember it, whereas if they had to think about it and work it out for themselves, they are far more likely to explain it…. (Comment 6: LT; Int-June 15; lines 166-184)
>
> … I do not want them automatically to ask me every everything that they do not know and every word that they do not know. I want them actually start to think if they had come across something they do not know or the word they do not know that they begin to say you know well what word would make sense or what word do I know that sounds a bit like that you know, so that they can actually begin to make the connections themselves when they discover something new ... make links between their previous learning and you know what is going on in future, to make these sort of links really … but I mean, you know if I questioned them a little bit and I think they are not going in a right direction, then, I will tell them, but I think it is important to let them start think about things first. (Comment 7: CT-1; Int-June 15; line 171)

It may be appropriate therefore to suggest that teachers may use interactions that involve implicit eliciting feedback when they aim not only to assess their learners' linguistic proficiency but also to support their linguistic and subject knowledge development. The research has also suggested that learner self-assessment may help learners become more aware of the gaps in their knowledge and may help them support their linguistic development (Comments 8 and 9).

> Yeah (I look through my work) … yeah (I find mistakes) … cross it out and put write a correct word. (Comment 8: P2; Int-June 14; lines 130, 132, and 134)
>
> I check it through first … mostly, I do see mistakes … sometimes, I do know how to correct the mistakes … yeah, about literacy … then, I have to read it through a couple of times and then like if there is a word missing, I put it in. (Comment 9: P4; Int-June 15; lines 160, 162, and 168)

However, it has also revealed that learners self-assessed very infrequently during the lessons. Therefore, the implication for teaching may be that the teachers spend a certain amount of time training learners in self-assessment and motivating them to self-assess. This may be done by ensuring that learners understand their learning goals, that they can position themselves in relation to these goals, and that they have skills and strategies needed to achieve these goals. Finally, the author suggests that teachers should encourage their learners to peer-assess as these practices tend to help learners learn from their peers and develop their linguistic proficiency. In this study, it was found that in 98% of all peer-assessment episodes that resulted in learner uptake, uptake was found to be successful. In other words, learners could benefit from their peers' linguistic assistance in more than nine out of 10 situations when it was possible to evaluate the effectiveness of the help provided.

Conclusion

This paper presented a study—one of few to date—that has investigated classroom-embedded language teaching and assessment in close interaction. Its findings, in line with the findings of other few relevant studies, clearly and yet again highlight the necessity to carry on research in this direction so that more knowledge is gathered about how the development of EAL/ESL learners' linguistic proficiency can be supported and promoted by means of classroom-embedded formative language assessment. A few potentially interesting areas for future research are: investigation of quality of learner assessment in relation to the teacher assessment; examination of learners' language proficiency in relation to their ability to focus on form; and investigation of the aspects of language on which learners tend to focus their attention most. The findings from this research may add valuable knowledge to the existing research on language teaching and assessment.

The author is currently working on a large-scale research project investigating the teaching, learning, and assessment practices in science lessons in classrooms with varied density of EAL/ESL pupils in several state primary schools in Sheffield, England. The research also looks at the use of materials for EAL/ESL learners in these lessons and ways in which these can be further developed and improved.

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