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The effects of instructional focus and task type on pre-vocational learners' ability in EFL oral interaction

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Little is known about the effect of diverging pedagogies on the development of interactional oral skills in a foreign language. In a controlled study, we evaluated three newly developed instructional programmes that were situated in the same training context, but that differed in instructional focus and type of task. These were compared to the effects of business-as-usual instruction. Multilevel analysis revealed that all experimental groups outperformed the 'business-as-usual' control group on oral interaction skills ($N=199$), with similar results for the programmes. Positive effects were found on interaction skills for trained contexts of use only. No transfer was found to tasks in other contexts of use. We conclude that receiving contextualised oral interaction instruction is beneficial to the development of pre-vocational learners' interaction skills.

Keywords: EFL oral interaction, focus-on-forms instruction, interactional strategies instruction, information gap tasks, task transfer

Introduction

Communicatively competent speakers are able to convey and understand communicative intent in interaction with others or, in other words, are able to adequately achieve specific goals in communication (cf. Celce-Murcia, 2007). The extent to which speakers attain functional or communicative adequacy depends on the extent to which their messages are accurate, fluent and complex enough to express their intended meanings (e.g. (cf. De Jong et al., 2012; Kuiken & Vedder, 2017; Révész et al., 2014). This functional dimension is dependent on both linguistic and interactional resources. Speakers must possess linguistic knowledge

and must be able to mobilise this knowledge swiftly whilst speaking (e.g. De Jong et al., 2012). They must also know how to make use of socio-cultural knowledge when selecting language and structuring speech events in ways appropriate to the particular context of language use (e.g. Canale, 1983; Kormos, 2006). In addition, speakers must be able to manage the interactional encounter itself.

Since oral interaction is mediated by time constraints, it is mostly unplanned. This requires speakers to conceptualise, formulate and articulate messages more or less in parallel (Levelt, 1999), which directly affects their capacity to interact effectively (Bygate, 1987). Furthermore, reciprocity conditions in dialogue require speakers to both produce *and* understand messages in real time and to adjust these messages to their speech partner's understanding. While interactional encounters are largely steered by employing informational and interactional routines, improvisational skills are needed when such routines falter (Bygate, 1987; Kurtz, 2011). In addition to linguistic knowledge and the ability to mobilise this knowledge in real time, oral interaction thus also requires a set of self-supporting and other-supporting strategies that help speakers address communicative problems (cf. Canale, 1983; Celce-Murcia, 2007).

Self-supporting strategies are used to overcome problems in speech production and reception, and include compensation strategies such as message reduction, -substitution and – reconceptualization and meaning negotiation strategies, such as checking and indicating understanding, uncertainty and incomprehension and asking for elaboration, clarification and repetition of the message (Bygate, 1987; Dörnyei & Scott, 1995; Færch & Kasper, 1983; Poulisse, 1993). To ensure mutual understanding, successful interaction also requires speakers to possess other-supporting strategies, i.e., attentive listening, aligning messages to the speech partner's need for information, topic knowledge and understanding, and responding to clarification requests, indications of incomprehension and erroneous interpretations of the message (cf. Bygate, 1987). Although such strategies are also employed in L1 interaction, effective use of these does not automatically transfer to L2 interaction (e.g. De Bot, 1992; Kormos, 2006).

For pre-vocational learners in the Netherlands, developing strong EFL oral interaction skills is indispensable. These learners are headed for further vocational education and employment at middle-management levels (cf. Liemberg & Van Kleunen, 1998), where they will need to interact in English for occupational purposes, i.e., in service encounters with non-Dutch customers as part of their job. EFL teachers in the vocational programmes, however, report that pre-vocational learners are reportedly too hesitant to engage in EFL oral interaction, and at times fail to meet the required level of accuracy and fluency upon entering vocational programmes (Jansma & Pennewaard, 2014). Therefore, the main aim of this study

is to find out what type of pedagogy best supports pre-vocational learners' development of EFL oral interaction.

L2 interaction pedagogy

For many years, L2 oral interaction was thought to not require separate training, but to arise naturally from the study of language (Hughes, 2002). There are indications, however, that effects of training are mode-dependent, i.e., that interactional ability will improve when learners are actually required to interact (Lightbown, 2008), but it is not clear whether such improvement is dependent on the type of training that learners receive. Two instructional foci and task types are now discussed, along with their potential advantages and disadvantages for developing L2 oral interaction.

Focus-on-forms instruction and tasks

To date, the majority of commercially produced coursebooks for secondary education in the Netherlands adopt a focus-on-forms approach to teaching L2 interaction, i.e., coursebooks primarily focus on the teaching of discrete linguistic structures rather than on drawing learners' attention to linguistic features during a communicative activity (Long, 1991). Most commonly, this is achieved by using the PPP approach. Here, learners are typically guided from the presentation of language forms (P[1]) to practicing them in controlled activities (P[2]) to producing them in application tasks (P[3]). The model is based on the idea of information processing, i.e., that skills mastery entails moving from declarative to procedural knowledge, which becomes automatized through repeated practice (Anderson, 2016; DeKeyser, 1997). Acquisition of language knowledge is thus viewed as a prerequisite for developing communicative abilities (Ellis, 2009). Application tasks are usually pre-structured roleplays, with speakers' roles prescribed and known to the learners. Learners are provided with language instructions (e.g. grammatical transformation), which are prepared prior to interaction. Application tasks are placed at the end of the activities sequence to allow learners to demonstrate their ability to use the targeted language forms accurately (Ellis, 2009).

Forms-focused teaching is known to affect the acquisition of linguistic forms positively (for overviews, see Lyster & Saito, 2010; Spada, 2011) and with regards to oral skills, positive effects of form(s)-focused instruction are reported on the development of pronunciation (e.g. Saito & Lyster, 2012) and accurate oral production (Sheen, 2005). Effects on the development of L2 interactional ability as a whole, however, are under-researched and thus largely unknown (e.g. Ellis, 2006; Norris & Ortega, 2000). Thus far, studies have mainly focused on language acquisition resulting *from* oral interaction or speech production, e.g. on the effects of

interaction on the acquisition of grammar and vocabulary (for overviews, see Keck et al., 2006; Mackey & Goo, 2007), the effects of meaning negotiation on the retention rate of linguistic items (Bitchener, 2004) and the effects of modified output on the accurate production of linguistic items (Loewen, 2005). Research into the effects *on* oral interaction include the influence of different proficiency levels within speaking dyads (Kim & McDonough, 2008; Storch & Aldosari, 2013), the influence of class context on the quantity of meaning negotiation (Foster, 1998; Eckherth, 2009), and the influence of digital media on the quantity of interaction (e.g. Van de Guchte & Rijlaarsdam, 2018), but not the effects of forms-focused instruction.

Studies by Lightbown & Spada (1990) and more recently Van de Guchte et al. (2015), however, provide some indication that an explicit focus on developing accurate language use has a negative influence on developing fluency in oral performance. This is consistent with the idea that limitations in learner's attentional resources lead to a trade-off between dimensions of complexity, accuracy and fluency in language production (Skehan, 1996; Housen, Kuiken & Vedder, 2012). Furthermore, information processing may not fully explain how skills are mastered. Johnson (1996) argues that knowledge is sometimes proceduralised directly, without the aid of explicit explanation or the acquisition of declarative rule knowledge. Moreover, skills building relies not only on explicit processes, but also on implicit processes. Lowie, Verspoor & Van Dijk (2018) argue that this is particularly true for speaking, because constraints of time and attention hinder the application of explicit knowledge. Finally, while applying a small set of language structures in pre-scripted interaction tasks may lead to task success, it may also create an illusion of mastery that underprepares learners for dealing with the unpredictability of real-world interaction (cf. Willis, 1996), and leaves little room for the development of improvisational skills.

Information gap tasks

To address the issue of unpredictability, some coursebooks supplement focus-on-forms teaching with information gap tasks, i.e., tasks that require learners to exchange unknown information with each other. This generates substantial, spontaneous L2 interaction, during which learners are likely to come across interactional problems (Pica, Kanagy & Falodun, 2009). This evokes the need to safeguard mutual understanding, which requires not only learners' use of self-supporting strategies, such as meaning negotiation, but also the use of other-supporting strategies, such as providing assistance and reformulating misunderstood messages (Foster & Ohta, 2005; Yule & Powers, 1994).

Information gap tasks thus provide relevant communicative language practice for actual real-life interaction. They are frequently used in interaction-oriented

approaches like task-based language teaching (TBLT), where achieving specific interactional goals in real-world situations is prioritised over producing accurate forms (e.g. Ellis, 2003). Although research into the learning benefits of tasks has not yet focused on the functional dimension in developing L2 interactional ability, a substantial body of research exists that supports the use of tasks in order to advantage performance on measures of complexity, accuracy and fluency (for overviews, see e.g. Shehadeh & Coombe, 2012; Bygate, 2015).

Typical TBLT sequencing places task performance at the beginning of the activities sequence (often preceded by a task orientation phase, e.g. studying a model) and is followed by an evaluation of task achievement. This 'task first approach' helps raise learners' awareness of possible gaps in their resources (Swain, 1985; Schmidt, 1990). The negotiated interaction that results from these gaps generally affects language acquisition positively (e.g. Doughty & Pica, 1986; Long, 2015), in particular when this is combined with form-focused instruction and activities that pay attention to language structures during task performance (e.g. Lightbown, 2000; Griggs, 2005; Goh, 2007; Goh & Burns, 2012). Repeating the same, or a similar task at the end of the sequence counters the transitory 'one-off' nature of speech and frees up attentional resources. This helps learners progress after their initial attempt (Bygate, 2001, 2018; Goh, 2007; Goh & Burns, 2012), both in terms of accuracy (e.g. Lynch & Maclean, 2001; Fukuta, 2016) and fluency (e.g. Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2011; De Jong & Perfetti, 2011; Lambert, Kormos & Minn, 2017), and on measures of complexity, accuracy and fluency simultaneously (Sample & Michel, 2014; Wang, 2014).

In classroom settings, learners sometimes engage only in limited meaning negotiation (Foster, 1998; Eckherth, 2009). Foster (ibid.) suggests that encountering many interactional problems discourages learners to negotiate for meaning, especially if doing so slows down the interaction substantially. If interactional ability not only hinges on linguistic knowledge, but also on strategic conduct, teaching learners a set of self-supporting and other-supporting strategies may encourage them to persist in difficult interactional encounters (Dörnyei, 1995), such as those potentially provided by information gap tasks. Advantages and disadvantages of strategies instruction will now be discussed.

Interactional strategies instruction

Despite growing support for strategies-based pedagogies, coursebooks rarely provide interactional strategy instruction (e.g. Bueno-Alastuey & Luque Agulló, 2015), and the teachability of interaction strategies has remained a point of dispute. Some have argued that strategic conduct varies from L1 to L2, and that receiving explicit instruction and practice is likely to benefit L2 speakers (e.g. Konishi & Tarone, 2004). This has been confirmed to some extent in studies with

advanced learners that focused on attentive listening (e.g. Sayer, 2005) and meaning negotiation (e.g. Bejarano et.al., 1997), and, albeit to a lesser degree, on compensation strategies (Dörnyei, 1995; Nakatani, 2005; Rossiter, 2003), as well as in instruction that combined interactional strategy instruction with (meta-)cognitive, social and affective strategy instruction (Cohen, Weaver & Li, 1996). Others have argued that the cognitive processes underlying strategic behaviour are the same in L1 and L2, and that strategic conduct is therefore not sensitive to instruction (e.g. Kellerman, 1991). This is supported in studies reporting little to no effect of training on the use of strategies (e.g. Naughton, 2006; Scullen & Jourdain, 2000).

In addition, the degree to which instruction is effective seems to correlate with learners' proficiency level. Lam (2004, 2006) reports that changes in meaning negotiation behaviour were limited in her study on low-proficiency speakers. Gallagher-Brett (2001) reports similar results on post-test performance, but notes that instruction did increase the amount of meaning negotiation that her low-proficiency speakers undertook during practice activities.

Finally, studies report on the effects of interaction strategy instruction on a wide range of outcomes measures, including vocabulary and grammar (Cohen, Weaver & Li, 1996), general proficiency (Lam, 2006; Rabab'ah, 2016), the degree of participation in interactional encounters (Bejarano et al., 1997; Naughton, 2006), the quality and quantity of strategy use (e.g. Bejarano et al., 1997; Lam & Wong, 2000) and the quality of the interaction itself (Nakatani, 2005; Lourdunathan & Menon, 2005). Much less is known about the effects of instruction on actual task achievement i.e., on learners' ability to convey and understand communicative intent. Rossiter (2003) reports little overall impact on task achievement, while Dörnyei (1995) and Lam (2006) report more positive results. However, Rossiter and Dörnyei's studies both made use of monologic tasks. The tasks used in Lam's study are the only ones that produced two-way communication.

Context-dependency of instruction

An additional issue is the degree to which interaction instruction is context-dependent. Segalowitz & Lightbown (1999) argue that learners must practice using language in interactive contexts in order to become better at mobilizing language in such contexts in real life. Furthermore, Long (2015) suggests that language learning operates differentially in different discourse domains. In line with the theory of transfer-appropriate processing, Lightbown (2008) posits that a sustainable transfer of learnt skills can only take place if the training context and the eventual interactional situation are closely matched (cf. Long, 2007). The working of transfer-appropriate processing is demonstrated in De Jong & Perfetti (2011), who found transfer of learning only when practice task and target task were on

the same topic, and in Spada et al. (2014), who found that learners who had been taught the passive construction as they were engaged in performing in a communicative task are better able to retrieve this knowledge and use it accurately in an oral task than learners who had been taught this construction outside of communicative practice.

In this light, it is feasible that pre-vocational learners may benefit from oral interaction instruction that makes use of their future professional context during interactional practice. Job analysis (McNamara, 1997) demonstrated that service encounters in the area of instruction, advice and sales should be included in such instruction for pre-vocational learners enrolled in a Business & Administration programme. Such context-specific language learning apprentices learners into the discourse of their future professions (cf. Widodo, 2016).

This approach in turn raises the question of whether the potential benefits of instruction in a specialized professional context will also transfer to other interactional contexts. The issue of transferability is an important question for language education, because it could provide valuable information for syllabus design, i.e., if language ability developed in one task or task domain transfers to other tasks or task domains, then fewer target tasks of the same type need to be included in instructional materials (Benson, 2016).

In a laboratory study on listening tasks, Benson (2016) reports some evidence of transfer across tasks situated in different domains (e.g. following directions in the street vs following directions in a hospital), but only for the group of lowest proficiency learners in her sample. Her study does not find evidence of transfer to other knowledge domains (e.g. following directions vs evaluating product information). To date, however, no research is available that discusses whether oral interaction skills developed in one context transfers to other contexts of use.

The present study

To date, little is known about the effects of explicit L2 oral interaction instruction and practice on the development of interactional ability. There are some indications that improving interactional ability requires engaging in interaction (cf. Lightbown, 2008), but it is not clear to what extent improvement is dependent on the type of instruction and practice that learners receive. At present, pre-vocational EFL learners in The Netherlands are predominantly taught EFL oral interaction in coursebook-based, form-focused curricula, where instruction and practice are aimed at learning language structures, and pre-scripted interaction tasks are used to demonstrate accurate application of these. Some coursebooks supplement pre-scripted tasks with information gap tasks, but these are certainly not commonplace. Instruction and practice of interactional strategies is missing

from coursebooks altogether. To our knowledge, no studies have investigated how form-focused instruction, strategy-focused instruction and task type impact on learners' development of EFL oral interaction. In this study, we therefore compared the effects of three instructional EFL programmes that are reflective of the above-mentioned approaches, i.e., (1) a programme that combined focus-on-forms instruction and practice with pre-scripted interaction tasks (F-PS programme), (2) a programme that replaced the traditional pre-scripted interaction tasks with information gap tasks (F-IG programme), and (3) one that combined these information gap tasks with interactional strategies instruction and practice (S-IG programme). Since the study focused specifically on pre-vocational learners, these programmes were all situated in a training context suited to the professional track that they were enrolled in (Business & Administration studies). We posed the following research questions:

1. Does receiving explicit instruction and practice in EFL oral interaction improve pre-vocational learners' ability to interact in dialogic speech tasks, compared to business-as-usual EFL instruction?
2. If receiving explicit instruction and practice is beneficial, what type of programme is most effective: a programme that combines focus-on-forms instruction and practice with pre-scripted interaction tasks (F-PS), one that replaced the traditional pre-scripted interaction tasks with information gap tasks (F-IG), or one that combines these information gap tasks with interactional strategies instruction and practice (S-IG)?
3. To what extent does receiving instruction in EFL oral interaction affect pre-vocational learners' use of self- and other-supporting interaction strategies in dialogic speech tasks?
4. Are positive effects of EFL oral interaction instruction confined to the trained (professional) contexts, or are there also positive effects for untrained (personal) contexts?

With regards to RQ1, we hypothesised that receiving explicit instruction and practice would positively affect learners' oral interaction skills (cf. Lightbown, 2008) Against the backdrop of current models (e.g. Celce-Murcia, 2007) and the literature supporting the merits of information gap tasks (e.g. Doughty & Pica, 1986; Foster & Ohta, 2005), we theorised that learners' oral skills would develop better in programmes that allow for practice in negotiating interactional problems in unpredictable situations than in a solely form-focussed programme that makes use of pre-scripted interaction tasks (RQ2). In view of the mixed results reported in studies on interactional strategies development and instruction, no hypothesis was formulated for RQ3. In the absence of prior research on transferability of oral interaction skills developed in one context of use to other contexts of use, no hypothesis was formulated for RQ4.

Method

Participants

This study is part of a larger research project into the effects of focus-on-forms instruction and interaction-oriented instruction on pre-vocational learners' (motivation for) EFL oral interaction (cf. Van Batenburg et al., 2019). Sixteen secondary schools were asked to participate in this research. Eight of the ten responding schools expressed an interest in participation, three of which eventually accommodated the project, providing a total of 10 classes. One of the three participating schools was situated in a small town in the north of the country, and two were situated in a city near Amsterdam. Participants (aged 14–15) were pre-vocational learners ($n=199$), 57.1% male, in their third year of a four-year pre-vocational Business & Administration programme in The Netherlands. They were enrolled in the two lowest levels of pre-vocational education, roughly equivalent to ISCED level 2 (UNESCO, 2012). Of these participants, 63.4% were monolingual and 26.7% were multilingual speakers of Dutch, 3.2% of whom reported English as one of the home languages. 9.9% had a non-Dutch language background. In accordance with local educational research guidelines and in close collaboration with the schools, all parents were informed about the study and the possibility of non-participation. One parent objected and their child was subsequently withdrawn from the sample.

All participants had received ca. 3 years of compulsory EFL instruction prior to this study. During this time, the participating schools timetabled an average of 120–135 minutes of English per week. All schools made use of course materials produced commercially in The Netherlands (*New Interface* and *Stepping Stones*), and the main language of instruction during lessons was Dutch. Teaching teams at all schools consisted of teachers trained to teach in the pre-vocational tracks, with of at least one member of staff with a minimum of 10 years' experience.

Design

An experimental design was implemented to assess the effects of three approaches to teaching EFL oral interaction. Participants were randomly assigned within classes to one of three experimental conditions: Focus-on-forms instruction with pre-scripted tasks (F-PS group, $n=52$), Focus-on-forms instruction with information gap tasks (F-IG group, $n=50$), and Strategy-focused instruction with information gap tasks (S-IG group, $n=53$). This led to the formation of three new groups per class, each of which was taught as a separate group, in a separate classroom. At two of the participating schools, an intact class was assigned to

the 'business-as-usual' control condition ($n=44$). This complete partitioning of experimental- and non-experimental classes aimed to prevent diffusion of the experimental programmes into the regular school curriculum, and to safeguard the 'business-as-usual' implementation of the standard curriculum in a way that would not be possible with only a quarter of the class attending.

Information with regards to individual differences between participants that potentially relate to ability in oral interaction was obtained prior to the intervention. This includes information about gender, home language, participants' scores on a receptive vocabulary test and measures of their prior experience in interacting in English, both inside and outside of the classroom and both with adults and with peers.[1] Table A summarises the effect of randomisation on the composition of the four conditions. Conditions were comparable with regards to gender (χ^2 (3) = .097, $n=199$, $p=.992$), home language (χ^2 (9) = 6,83, $n=199$, $p=.654$), and vocabulary knowledge (F (3,187) = 1.53, $p=.206$). English was a home language for three participants, all Dutch/English multilingual and spread across three of the four conditions (the control group, the F-PS group and the S-IG group). There was a difference for prior experience in interacting in English (F (3,186) = 4.09, $p=.008$). The control group was significantly less experienced than the F-PS group (Mean Difference = −.392 (CI = −.717 to −.067)) and the F-IG group (Mean Difference = −.566 (CI −.891 to −.241)). Both vocabulary and experience were added as covariates in our analyses.

Table A. Background information of the sample

	n	Gender		Home language			Vocabulary	Experience
		M	F	Mono-lingual Dutch	Multi-lingual Dutch	Non-Dutch	M (SD)	M (SD)
Control group	44	25	19	33	8	3	34.0 (6.4)	2.09 (.69)
F-PS group 1	52	29	23	30	17	5	36.3 (5.1)	2.48 (.93)
F-IG group 2	50	28	22	29	13	8	34.8 (5.3)	2.66 (.75)
S-IG group 3	53	31	22	34	14	5	36.0 (6.0)	2.39 (.68)

1. Focus-on-forms instruction with pre-scripted tasks
2. Focus-on-forms instruction with information gap tasks
3. Strategy-focused instruction with information gap tasks

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1. For a full description of Vocabulary and Experience, see 'Measures'.

Interventions

Each intervention consisted of nine 40–45 minute lessons that were taught during normal school hours within a twelve-week time span. During this time, the business-as-usual group followed its regular EFL curriculum that focused on developing EFL proficiency in general, and in which circa 15 interaction activities were integrated. These learners were taught in two intact classes of 19 and 25 learners.

In contrast, the experimental groups received explicit practice and instruction in a professional domain, i.e., in the role of hotel receptionist. Since professions are organised as a series of tasks (cf. Long, 2007), a job analysis (McNamara, 1997) was carried out to establish what task types, task settings and professional interactional routines are relevant to the Business & Administration sector. From this, three types of service encounter were distilled for the lessons, i.e. instruction, advice and sales encounters.

Learners were taught in groups of 5–8 learners. In each of the three groups, identical sample dialogues were studied that modelled both the use of the targeted language structures and the use of target interaction strategies. Depending on the programme's focus, these dialogues were accompanied by noticing and awareness activities aimed at either language structures or interaction strategies. Participants in all conditions received the same amount of instruction. To control time on task, the programmes contained similar numbers and types of activities, including two speech tasks (on identical topics) per lesson, i.e., a total of 18 speech tasks over the course of the nine lessons. The programmes differed in lesson focus, type of task and task sequencing (Figure A).
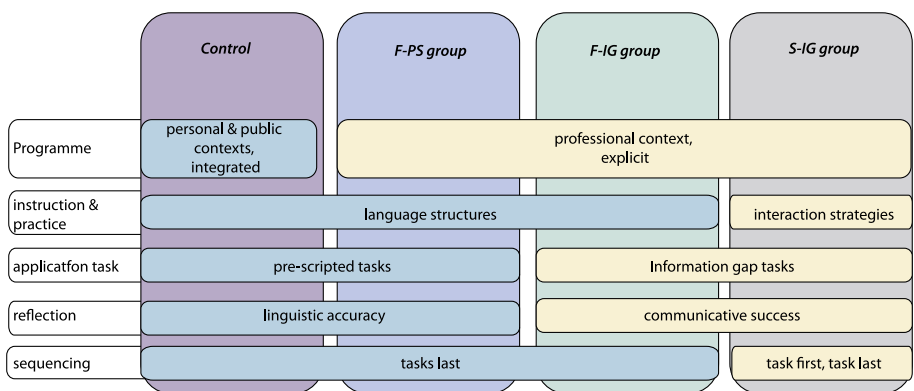

Figure A. Differences and similarities between conditions

Control condition

In this condition, learners followed their regular, coursebook-based curriculum aimed at developing accurate language use, i.e., either chapters 3, 4 and 5 from *Stepping Stones 3 B/K* or chapters 4 and 5 from *New Interface Yellow Label* (textbook) and *Orange Label* (workbook). This curriculum consisted of explicit language study (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling) and skills practice in non-professional interactional contexts. Dialogic interaction activities were typically placed at the end of an activities sequence. Most of these activities were pre-scripted and provided learners with language instruction, e.g. translating sentences from L1 to L2, grammatical transformation or lexical encoding in gap-fill tasks, or responding to L1 content cues (see Appendix A for an example). As such, these activities allowed learners to demonstrate proficient use of the taught language forms. Lessons did not contain systematic post-task reflection activities.

Focus-on-forms interaction with pre-scripted tasks (F-PS condition)

Lessons focused on learning the language structures necessary to fulfil specific language functions in the professional domain (hotel receptionist). These included modals of necessity, connectives and adverbs of time (instruction tasks), modals of recommendation, asking for preferences, and comparatives (advice tasks), intensifying adjectives, comparatives, superlatives and modals of obligation (sales tasks). Activities included studying sample dialogues, noticing target language structures in these dialogues, explicit rule presentation and controlled practice activities, e.g. matching clauses or conjugation activities. Application tasks were pre-scripted tasks that guided participants through professional dialogues modelling the interactional encounter, and that provided language instruction, i.e., grammatical encoding (see Appendix B for an example). Post-task reflection focused on the accurate application of the taught language structures. In line with the PPP approach, lessons were sequenced as follows: sample dialogues; noticing, presentation and practice of language functions; two interaction tasks, each followed by a reflection task.

Focus-on-forms interaction with information gap tasks (F-IG condition)

Participants received the same focus-on-forms instruction as the F-PS group (see above), except that these were combined with information gap tasks (Appendix C.1, 2 and 3), designed to encounter a number of interactional problems in conversation, e.g. needing to explain a concept for which they lacked the vocabulary. No instruction on interaction strategies was provided. Post-task reflection on the application tasks focused on the extent to which the communicative goal had been achieved. Lessons were sequenced as follows: sample

dialogues; noticing, presentation and practice of language functions; two inter-
action tasks, each followed by a reflection task.

Strategy-focused interaction with information gap tasks (S-IG condition)

This condition explicitly taught interaction strategies considered helpful in
addressing problems and maintaining mutual understanding in interactional
encounters. These included compensation strategies (e.g. approximation, circum-
locution and exemplification), meaning negotiation strategies (e.g. indicating
incomprehension and asking for elaboration, clarification, tempo adjustment and
repetition of the message) and audience awareness strategies (e.g. attentive listen-
ing, avoiding and addressing misunderstanding and message alignment). Activ-
ities included studying sample dialogues, noticing target strategies in these
dialogues, and explicit presentation and practice of said strategies. Application
tasks were the same information gap tasks used in the F-IG group (see above).
Post-task reflection focused on the extent to which the communicative goal had
been achieved. In line with the TBLT approach, lessons were sequenced as follows:
sample dialogues; noticing of interaction strategies; interaction task 1 followed by
a reflection task; presentation and practice of interaction strategies; interaction
task 2 followed by a reflection task.

Procedure

In the experimental conditions, the nine lessons were divided into three blocks
of three. After each block, participants' oral performance was measured with
two dialogic speech tasks (Figure B). The experimental groups were taught by
research assistants who had been recruited and trained specifically for this pur-
pose. All assistants were university educated, with a background in Education
Studies, Pedagogy or Psychology. Assistants were allocated to specific schools
in groups of three, where they each taught lessons in one specific condition to
prevent cross-conditional contamination. Lessons were taught in three separate
classrooms, in parallel.

For improving treatment fidelity, we trained assistants in their roles as teach-
ers, using teacher's guides that consisted of an explanation of the methodological
approach, instructions for organisational and pedagogical conduct, and lesson
plans containing lesson phasing, time limits and protocols for instructions and
explanations. Unannounced treatment fidelity checks of ca. 15–20 minutes per
observed lesson were carried out by the first author and reflection forms were
filled out by the research assistants after each lesson. No anomalies were detected.
The completed reflection forms indicated that planned activities were delivered in
all conditions, except that the second interaction task and corresponding reflec-
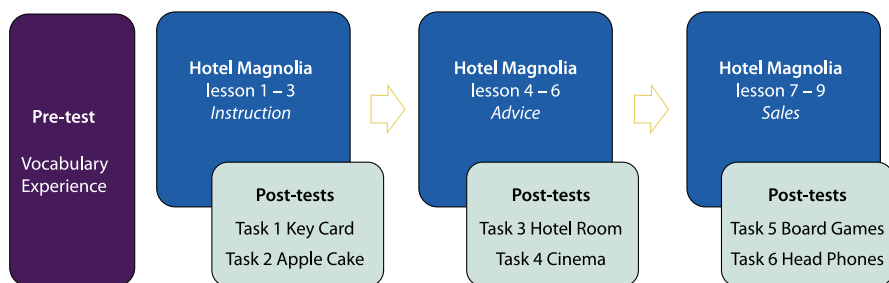
Figure B. Procedure

tion task were not always implemented in lessons delivered in the F-IG (89% and 86% implementation respectively) and S-IG (92% and 74% implementation respectively) conditions. This likely occurred because the content preparation required for information gap tasks takes longer than the linguistic preparation required for pre-scripted tasks.

Participants in the control group followed the regular curriculum. They were taught by their regular teachers of English, who had been asked to teach their standard programme without alteration, and who had been informed that their learners would partake in assessment tasks every three weeks. The teachers were asked to outline the content of their regular programme prior to the start of the intervention, and to confirm the content of the delivered programme at the end of it. No substantial alterations to the intended programme were detected. In one of the groups, learners had received an extra listening and viewing task. In the other group, learners spent an extra hour preparing a speaking test task. This lesson was witnessed by the first author, who observed that the approach taken to this preparation was in line with the approach adopted in the coursebooks, and in the standard curriculum overall (e.g. situated in a non-professional context, focused on forms and pre-scripted). This confirmed that the coursebook curriculum had largely been delivered as anticipated. Teachers did not have access to the lesson materials used in the experimental groups. The learners were assessed using the same tasks as in the experimental groups, at the same points in time.

Measures

EFL oral interaction

Participants' interactional performance was measured after lessons 3, 6 and 9 with the use of two dialogic speech tasks that were aligned with the lesson focus, i.e. instruction tasks, advice tasks and sales tasks. For each task type, two dialogic tasks in which authentic interaction is simulated were developed. The tasks within one task type – or task set – required the candidates to achieve the same goal (e.g.

to explain a procedure) and tapped similar language functions, but differed in terms of content, audience and domain. Within a task set, one task was situated in the professional domain in which the learners had been trained, with the candidate assuming the role of a hotel receptionist and the interlocutor the role of hotel guest, and one task was situated in the personal domain, with both candidate and interlocutor assuming the role of acquaintances (Table B). See Van Batenburg et al. (2016) for a full discussion of task design, administration, justification and validation.

Table B. Six speech tasks

Task type	Task	Goal	Domain
Instruction	(1) Key Card	Explain to a customer how to open the door using a hotel key card.	Professional
	(2) Apple Cake	Explain to a family friend how to bake apple cake.	Personal
Advice	(3) Hotel Room	Advise a guest which hotel room to choose.	Professional
	(4) Cinema	Advise a family member which film to see.	Personal
Sales	(5) Board Games	Persuade a guest to buy a gift from the hotel gift shop.	Professional
	(6) Head Phones	Persuade your sibling's friend to buy your second-hand head phones	Personal

During each of the three test sessions, participants carried out two tasks individually with a trained research assistant acting as interlocutor. Interlocutors made use of scripts that fully prescribed their textual and interactional contribution, standardising both linguistic (complexity, register, style) and interactional (set points requiring the use of interactional strategies) challenges posed to candidates.

Performances were video-taped and subsequently assessed by trained raters blind to condition on a Likert scale of 1–5 for measures that reflect the three dimensions of EFL oral interaction: *Task Achievement* (functional adequacy, or the degree to which participants achieve the communicative goals set by the task, taking into consideration the extent to which task performance is complete, the message is conveyed successfully and formulated in a socio-linguistically appropriate manner), *Linguistic Accuracy* (the degree to which participants use linguistic resources with which they can make themselves understood easily, i.e., in English that makes use of correct sentence structure and lexical choice) and *Interactional Ability* (the degree to which participants use interactional resources to help them overcome potential communication problems, i.e., the extent to which

they achieve mutual understanding and effectively avert or address communication problems).

Interaction strategies

The same tasks were used to measure participants' use of interaction strategies. In addition to eliciting functional language use at a global level, the interlocutor scripts evoked self-supporting compensation and meaning negotiation strategies by asking candidates to handle language beyond their current ability (cf. Dörnyei & Scott, 1995) and other-supporting strategies by the interlocutor misinterpreting information provided by the candidate (cf. Weir, 2005). This produced two analytic measures of self-supporting strategies (*Compensation* and *Meaning Negotiation)* and one analytic measure of other-supporting strategies (*Correcting Misinterpretation*).

As described earlier, videotaped performances were measured by trained raters. Ratings of *Compensation*, *Meaning Negotiation* and *Correcting Misinterpretation* focused on the adequacy and appropriateness of participants' responses during individual episodes in the interaction, and were rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (very weak) to 5 (very strong).

For each task, different teams provided ratings for global achievement (*Task Achievement*, *Linguistic Accuracy* and *Interactional Ability*), and for the quality of the specific interaction strategies (*Compensation*, *Meaning Negotiation* and *Correcting Misinterpretation*). Each team consisted of two raters, who rated a set of fifty tasks randomly selected from the sample to establish inter-rater reliability. These four raters subsequently rated a set of ca. sixty tasks (50% of the remaining total) individually. Intra-class correlation coefficients (two-way random model, absolute agreement) ranged from .70 to .94. Raters did not participate as teachers or interlocutors in this study.

Vocabulary

Productive and receptive vocabulary is known to correlate highly (Meara & Fitzpatrick, 2000), therefore we chose to measured participants' vocabulary knowledge using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Dunn & Dunn, 2007), adapted for use in an EFL setting. Taking coverage in pre-vocational EFL coursebooks as a selection criterion for determining item familiarity, 46 items were selected from sets 1 to 12 of the original test. The test covered different content areas (e.g. actions, sports, animals) and parts of speech (nouns, verbs and adjectives). In a whole class setting, participants matched orally delivered vocabulary items with one of four pictures projected on a smart board by circling the correct number of the picture on their answer sheets (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$). The test was administered before the intervention commenced.

Experience

On a Likert scale of 1–5, participants indicated how experienced they were in interacting in English both inside and outside of the classroom, both with adults and with peers (six items, Cronbach's $\alpha = .73$). These data were obtained prior to the start of the intervention.

Gender and home language

Participants reported information about their gender and home language(s) on the answer sheet used for the vocabulary test. Home languages were recoded into three groups: monolingual Dutch, multilingual Dutch and non-Dutch.

Analysis

The variables were examined for accuracy of data entry, distributions and missing values. 8,3% of items were missing, with missingness varying from 0 to 14,7%, and one variable reaching 20,9%. Little's MCAR test indicated that data were missing at random (χ^2 (1123) = 1155,01 $p = .247$). Eight participants who did not partake in the interaction tests, and / or had attended less than 50% of the lessons were deleted prior to imputing data (using Expectation Maximization in SPSS version 22). The imputation model included all test information (vocabulary, experience and interaction scores), as well as information about gender, home language and group size. Comparisons of results from analyses of the original data and the imputed data showed no substantial differences. We therefore report on the results from the imputed data set ($N = 191$).

  With participants in this study being drawn from different classes, the data were structured hierarchically. Since independency between class and measures of interaction could not be assumed under these circumstances, linear multilevel analyses were applied, with *Class* added as random factor. Analyses of the global measures revealed that *Class* contributed to the model on the measure *Interactional Ability*. It was therefore decided to analyse all global measures (*Task Achievement, Linguistic Accuracy* and *Interactional Ability*) using a mixed model (SPSS version 22). *Vocabulary* and *Experience* were added as covariates to these statistical models.

  Mean scores for tasks 1, 3 and 5 were calculated to obtain measures of EFL oral interaction in a professional setting, i.e., *Professional Task Achievement* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$), *Professional Linguistic Accuracy* (.81) and *Professional Interactional Ability* (.69), and mean scores for tasks 2, 4 and 6 were calculated to obtain measures of performance in the personal domain, i.e., *Personal Task Achievement* (.79), *Personal Linguistic Accuracy* (.83) and *Personal Interactional Ability* (.77).

Cronbach alpha statistics for performance in either professional (tasks 1, 3 and 5) or personal (tasks 2, 5 and 6) contexts for these measures ranged between .40 and .61, suggesting that task effects played a role. For this reason, interactional strategies were analysed at task level.

No variation at class level was found for the analytic measures *Compensation*, *Meaning Negotiation* and *Correcting Misinterpretation*, indicating that the assumption of independence relevant to AN(C)OVA analysis was met. However, Levene's test for equality of variance showed that variability of scores were dissimilar for *Compensation* in Task 3 (F (1,188) = 3.243, p = .023) and Task 6 (F (1,188) = 3.260, p = .023), and for *Correcting Misinterpretation* in Task 2 (F (1,188) = 2.926, p = .035). Furthermore, histograms revealed that the analytic measures were not always normally distributed. For this reason, all analytic measures were analysed using the non-parametric Kruskall-Wallis Test as an alternative to a one-way between group AN(C)OVA.[2] To reduce the risk of a Type 1 error, a Bonferroni correction was applied. Consequently, all effects are reported at .008 significance level.

Results

Effect of the intervention on EFL oral interaction

To establish whether receiving explicit, contextualised instruction in EFL interaction improved learners' ability to interact in dialogic speech tasks, all experimental groups were first compared to the control group. Table C shows the means, standard deviations and effect sizes for the global measures, resulting from the post-tests (controlled for covariates vocabulary and experience).[3] Multilevel analyses revealed an effect of the intervention on experimental versus control groups in the professional domain, i.e., *Professional Task Achievement*, (F (1,9) = 10.650, p = .010), *Professional Linguistic Accuracy* (F (1,9) = 8.985, p = .015) and *Professional Interactional Ability* (F (1,7) = 7.748, p = .026). Effect sizes were large (ES = 0.74–0.83).

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2. ANCOVA analysis that controlled for Vocabulary and Experience produced the same results as the Kruskall-Wallis Test.

3. Both professional and personal measures of *Task Achievement*, *Linguistic Accuracy* and *Interactional Ability* were predicted by *Vocabulary* (all t's > 7.20, p's < .001) and Experience (all t's > 3.15, p's < .003).

No overall effect of instruction was found on interactional performance in the personal domain, *Personal Task Achievement* (F (1,10) = 2,107, p = .178), *Personal Linguistic Accuracy* (F (1,9) = .673, p = .434) and *Personal Interactional Ability* (F (1,9) = 3.460, p = .095).

Table C. Means, standard deviations and effect sizes for EFL oral interaction (controlled for vocabulary and experience)

	Control group (N = 41)	Experimental group (N = 150)	
	M (SD)	*M (SD)*	*ES$_1$*
Task Achievement			
Professional	2.58 (.89)	3.26 (.79)	.83
Personal	2.60 (.91)	3.12 (.91)	
Linguistic Accuracy			
Professional	2.51 (.90)	3.13 (.81)	.74
Personal	2.63 (.90)	2.99 (.85)	
Interactional Ability			
Professional	2.34 (.80)	2.99 (.89)	.74
Personal	2.44 (1.05)	3.08 (.93)	

1. Hedges' *g*

To determine which type of instruction was most effective, further analyses to establish differential effects between different types of treatment were conducted on measures where significant overall effects had been found. Table D displays the means and standard deviations for the three experimental groups on the global measures (controlled for covariates vocabulary and experience).[4] No differences between the three experimental groups were found on *Professional Task Achievement*, (F (2,140) = .577, p = .563), *Professional Linguistic Accuracy* (F (2,149) = .639, p = .529) and *Professional Interactional Ability* (F (2,139) = .910, p = .405). These results indicate that the three types of lessons are equally effective for pre-vocational learners.

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4. For the experimental groups, professional measures of *Task Achievement*, *Linguistic Accuracy* and *Interactional Ability* were predicted by *Vocabulary* (all *t*'s > 5.53, *p*'s < .001) and Experience (all *t*'s > 3.88, *p*'s < .001).

Table D. Means and standard deviations for the three experimental groups on EFL oral interaction (controlled for vocabulary and experience)

	F-PS group [1] ($N=49$)	F-IG group [2] ($N=48$)	S-IG group [3] ($N=53$)
	M (SD)	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*
Task Achievement			
Professional	3.27 (.71)	3.19 (.91)	3.32 (.76)
Personal	3.29 (.81)	3.10 (.87)	2.95 (1.03)
Linguistic Accuracy			
Professional	3.10 (.77)	3.11 (.88)	3.18 (.79)
Personal	3.15 (.78)	2.80 (.92)	3.00 (.83)
Interactional Ability			
Professional	2.95 (.70)	2.94 (.99)	3.07 (.95)
Personal	3.15 (.85)	3.16 (.94)	2.93 (1.00)

1. Focus-on-forms instruction with pre-scripted tasks
2. Focus-on-forms instruction with information gap tasks
3. Strategy-focused instruction with information gap tasks

Effect of the intervention on interaction strategies

To determine whether receiving instruction in L2 oral interaction affects pre-vocational learners' use of self- and other-supporting interaction strategies, all experimental groups were first compared to the control group. Where relevant, further analyses were conducted to establish whether differential effects between different types of treatment had occurred. Means, standard deviations and effect sizes for the measures are presented per task (Tables E and F). Kruskall-Wallis analyses revealed effects of instruction for the experimental versus control groups on *Compensation* in Task 3, H (1)=11.640, $p=.001$, *Meaning Negotiation* in Task 2, H (1)=10.247 $p=.001$, Task 3 H (1)=8.481, $p=.004$ and in Task 6, H (1)=8.598, $p=.003$ and on *Misinterpretation* in Task 2, H (1)=12.792, $p=.000$. Effect sizes for these measures were moderate ($ES=0.44–0.70$). These results show that positive effects of treatment are limited to a relatively small number of tasks.

Further analyses did not indicate differences among the three experimental groups on *Compensation* in Task 3, H (2)=1.124, $p=.570$, *Meaning Negotiation* in Task 2, H (2)=.859, $p=.651$, Task 3 H (2)=1.917, $p=.383$ or Task 6, H (2)=.865, $p=.649$), nor on *Correcting Misinterpretation* in Task 2, H (2)=1.285, $p=.526$). In other words, learners in the different experimental groups did not perform differently from each other in the application of interaction strategies.

Table E. Means, standard deviations and effect sizes for the analytic measures

	Task	Control group ($N=41$) M (SD)	Experimental group ($N=150$) M (SD)	ES_1
Compensation				
Professional	1	2.07 (1.11)	2.16 (1.29)	
	3	1.32 (.84)	2.12 (1.52)	.57
	5	3.17 (1.67)	3.42 (1.80)	
Personal	2	2.44 (1.31)	2.65 (1.24)	
	4	2.05 (1.15)	2.31 (1.24)	
	6	1.82 (1.04)	2.27 (1.34)	
Meaning negotiation				
Professional	1	2.30 (1.36)	2.55 (1.24)	
	3	2.49 (1.40)	3.17 (1.29)	.52
	5	3.03 (1.28)	3.33 (1.14)	
Personal	2	2.28 (1.20)	3.04 (1.35)	.57
	4	2.79 (1.49)	2.86 (1.31)	
	6	2.73 (1.18)	3.24 (1.15)	.44
Correcting misinterpretation				
Professional	1	1.87 (1.29)	2.38 (1.49)	
	3	3.46 (1.17)	3.75 (1.12)	
	5	2.82 (1.25)	2.84 (1.24)	
Personal	2	1.81 (1.34)	2.91 (1.62)	.70
	4	2.70 (1.35)	3.24 (1.33)	
	6	3.36 (1.30)	3.66 (1.51)	

1. Hedges'

Table F. Means and standard deviations for the three experimental groups on analytic measures

	Task	F-PS group$_1$ ($N=49$) M (SD)	F-IG group$_2$ ($N=48$) M (SD)	S-IG group$_3$ ($N=53$) M (SD)
Compensation				
Professional	1	2.36 (1.37)	2.07 (1.29)	2.07 (1.22)
	3	1.90 (1.38)	2.24 (1.59)	2.20 (1.59)
	5	3.84 (1.69)	2.81 (1.80)	3.59 (1.80)
Personal	2	2.81 (1.20)	2.27 (1.23)	2.84 (1.24)
	4	2.19 (1.25)	2.37 (1.23)	2.36 (1.27)
	6	2.15 (1.42)	2.28 (1.31)	2.37 (1.30)

Table F. *(continued)*

	Task	F-PS group $_1$ (N=49) M (SD)	F-IG group $_2$ (N=48) M (SD)	S-IG group $_3$ (N=53) M (SD)
Meaning negotiation				
Professional	1	2.28 (1.13)	2.73 (1.23)	2.62 (1.33)
	3	3.04 (1.15)	3.13 (1.36)	3.34 (1.34)
	5	3.50 (.95)	3.13 (1.22)	3.35 (1.22)
Personal	2	2.99 (1.38)	2.97 (1.18)	3.16 (1.47)
	4	2.87 (1.25)	2.70 (1.44)	2.99 (1.25)
	6	3.39 (1.14)	3.22 (1.17)	3.14 (1.14)
Correcting misinterpretation				
Professional	1	2.45 (1.47)	2.41 (1.53)	2.28 (1.51)
	3	3.78 (1.28)	3.83 (.98)	3.65 (1.10)
	5	2.91 (1.32)	2.78 (1.25)	2.83 (1.18)
Personal	2	2.79 (1.59)	3.11 (1.61)	2.82 (1.67)
	4	3.27 (1.41)	3.31 (1.18)	3.15 (1.41)
	6	3.92 (1.47)	3.47 (1.61)	3.60 (1.45)

1. Focus-on-forms instruction with pre-scripted tasks
2. Focus-on-forms instruction with information gap tasks
3. Strategy-focused instruction with information gap tasks

Discussion and conclusions

To our knowledge, this is the first study that has focused on the effects of diverging instructional programmes on the development of EFL oral interaction skills in classrooms. Its main objective was to gain insight into the effects of three instructional training programmes on the interactional performance of pre-vocational EFL learners, as compared to the effects of the standard EFL curriculum. We hypothesised that learners in the experimental groups would outperform learners in the control group on measures of task achievement, linguistic accuracy and interactional ability. The results showed that receiving explicit instruction in EFL interaction indeed had a positive effect on pre-vocational learners' interactional performance in professional contexts, and that this effect was substantial. These gains did not transfer to personal contexts. In these contexts, learners who received interaction practice integrated in a general EFL curriculum, performed equally well as our experimental groups.

Our second hypothesis was that EFL oral interaction would develop better in programmes that used information gap tasks to practice addressing inter-

actional problems in spontaneous encounters than in programme using pre-scripted application tasks. We did not find support for this hypothesis. The absence of differential effects may be explained by the fact that the last speech task and its corresponding reflection task were not always implemented in the F-IG and S-IG lessons, where information gap tasks were used. This suggests that the content preparation required for information gap tasks is more effortful and time-consuming for pre-vocational learners than the linguistic preparation required for guided role plays. Had these programmes been fully implemented, a different picture might have emerged.

Another possibility is that the development of oral skills hinges more on implicit knowledge than on explicit knowledge. Lowie, Verspoor & Van Dijk (2018) argue that speaking development is a dynamic, individually owned and variable process in which learners' current states of knowledge and ability are continually at interplay with the resources, the exposure and the attention given to them, which makes it difficult to predict attainment as a result of instruction. In this light, it is possible that being given the opportunity to practice oral interaction is more important to skills development than the precise type of practice that is offered.

Occasional effects of explicit, contextualised instruction were found on learners' use of self-supporting and other-supporting interaction strategies, but no differential effects between programmes were found. Previous studies have shown that positive gains of instruction on learners' strategic ability do not always lead to a significant increase of strategies use in post-test task performance, even if they do generate an increase in use during practice activities (Bejarano et al., 1997; Gallagher-Brett, 2001). Interactional problems encountered during interaction tend to catch the speaker off guard, and demand a response swift enough to meet the demands of real-time conversation. Under such pressure, speakers may resign themselves to insufficiently resolved problems, because addressing these takes time that also needs to be spent on satisfying other task demands (Foster, 1998; Sayer, 2005). Since strategies use was new territory for learners, the taught interaction strategies may not have been fully internalised yet, and so may not have been readily available for swift retrieval during task performance (cf. Lam, 2004; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

The modest effects of instruction on the use of strategies may also be due to the limited cognitive and linguistic abilities of the pre-vocational learners. Most of the distributions for *Compensation* and a third of the distributions for *Correcting Misinterpretation* were positively skewed, with most participants receiving 1 or 2 on scale of 1–5. This suggests that the majority of participants struggled to use these strategies, which seems consistent with Lam (2004), who found limited effects of instruction on the use of compensation and meaning negotiation

strategies by low-proficiency learners, and suggested that low-proficient speakers favour simpler 'bedrock' strategies (e.g. making use of task input) over the use of strategies that are more cognitively and linguistically demanding.

The results showed that the gains of receiving explicit, systematic instruction in EFL in professional contexts did not transfer to personal contexts. This indicates that the linguistic and interactional abilities learners developed in the practice tasks only transferred to test tasks that were situated in the same social setting (hotel) and featured the same participants (hotel employee and guest), but not to tasks aimed at achieving the same goal (e.g. to advise someone) and requiring the same language function (e.g. modals of recommendation), but that were situated outside of the hotel setting and participants (e.g. family and friends).

Widodo (2016) posits that language use becomes context-specific because it shapes the social practices in which students engage as specific participants. In this light, the experimental programmes in our study not only apprenticed learners into the *discourse* of hotel receptionists, but also assisted them in fulfilling the *social role* of hotel receptionist. Such role awareness might have manifested itself in more socio-linguistically appropriate formulation, more carefully formulated advice or more persistence in completing the tasks than was the case in personal tasks. Speakers' perceptions of the social role may thus be of vital importance in determining performance in oral interaction.

In all, the results indicate that pre-vocational learners benefit from receiving explicit interaction instruction in their language lessons and that contextualising this instruction yields larger effects than adapting the instructional focus or task type. At present, learners in the pre-vocational tracks are prepared for future uses of English by being taught general English language proficiency. This study, however, shows that the effects of instruction do not automatically transfer to contexts outside the training context (Lightbown, 2008). This substantiates the notion that oral performance is firmly context-bound (Bygate, 1987).

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study has shown that explicit, contextualised EFL oral interaction in the classroom positively affected linguistic and interactional resourcefulness, and overall task achievement, but it did not show differential effects between the experimental conditions. A possible explanation may have been that the last speech task and its corresponding reflection task were not always implemented in the F-IG and S-IG lessons where information gap tasks were used. This suggests that the content preparation required for information gap tasks is more effortful than the linguistic preparation required for guided role plays, and that pre-vocational learners with limited cognitive ability need more time to accomplish

this. To gain a more in-depth understanding of the potential merits of strategies-inclusive teaching, future studies should compare fully implemented programmes.

In this study, treatment fidelity was checked by unannounced lesson visits from the first author (visits each lasting ca. 15–20 minutes per observed lesson), by the research assistants' completion of post-lesson reflection forms, and by obtaining information from the regular class teachers about the intended and actual delivery of the standard curriculum pre- and post- intervention. Audio-or video-recording lessons could have provided additional information about the implementation of intended lesson activities.

Another possible limitation is that because the control group followed their usual curriculum and the experimental groups did not, the learners in the experimental groups might have been more aware of their participation in an experiment than the learners in the control group. Therefore, to prevent a Hawthorne effect from occurring, the control group was officially informed of their participation in the experiment. They furthermore partook in the same data collection sessions as the experimental groups, i.e., information about their vocabulary and background information was obtained, and their ability in oral interaction was tested every three weeks. Although the absence of a Hawthorne effect cannot be fully guaranteed, the results obtained in this study are not indicative of this (a Hawthorne effect cannot explain benefits for certain tasks only).

An important limitation is that learners in the control condition were taught intact classes consisting of 19–25 learners, whereas learners in the experimental conditions were taught in groups of 5–8 learners. Although the results do not suggest this, it is possible that the discrepancy in group size disadvantaged learners in the control condition. Conducting the study with more comparable group sizes would help demonstrate whether the obtained results are retained under such circumstances.

Detectable effects of instruction on learners' use of strategies in this study were limited. Previous studies, however, have shown that effects of instruction are often indirect and delayed (Long, 2015; Skehan, 1996), and that the effects of strategies training tend to be very small (cf. McDonough, 1999). Coding transcripts of speech tasks for strategies use may provide additional information on the effects of instruction, i.e., it would allow for a comparison of both type and frequency of strategies used by learners from different experimental groups. Moreover, Lam (2004) found that instruction had not only affected the use of targeted, but also non-targeted strategies. An analysis of learner performance on both evoked and non-evoked turns could thus provide insight into the indirect effects that strategies instruction may have had.

Since the use of interaction strategies is sensitive to task effects, it was not possible to establish whether participants' strategic conduct is different in professional and personal language use situations. However, since Kouwenhoven et al. (2016) found L2 users to make more use of effortful strategies (such as compensation) in formal settings, and less effortful strategies in informal settings, this remains a relevant question for future research. Analysis of strategies use in both professional and personal tasks could determine whether the pre-vocational learners adapted their strategies use to the language use situation.

This study was one of the first to study the issue of task transfer. The results show that oral interaction skills developed in the training context may not transfer to tasks set in a different context, and we have suggested that speakers' perceptions of the social role they fulfil in tasks may have played an important role in this. However, the empirical evidence for absence of transfer of skills from one context to the other was indirect in our study, and derived from the effects of our experimental conditions on specific interaction tasks. Future studies could analyse in more detail which aspects of oral interaction skills can or cannot transfer to other contexts.

Implications for practice

Currently, oral interaction instruction offered to pre-vocational learners is integrated in coursebook-based curricula that aim to develop EFL proficiency in general contexts. This study suggests, however, that the development of learners' interactional performance in specific contexts benefits from receiving explicit, contextualised instruction. Since pre-vocational learners are being prepared for vocational studies within specific vocational contexts, practitioners could capitalise on contextualised skills development by selecting vocation-specific activities that match their learners' future interactional situations. Put differently, the issue of non-transfer pleads in favour of using tasks that reflect the type of real-world tasks that learners are likely to encounter. As such, the development of EFL learners' oral interactional ability could benefit from the integration of more real-world tasks in classroom curricula, as is currently the case in TBLT curricula.

Furthermore, this study does not provide any indication that the widely adopted approach that combines focus-on-forms instruction with pre-scripted tasks yields better results than other approaches. This gives practitioners curricular flexibility; within the context of overall curricular demands, they can equally make use of focus-on-forms instruction, strategy-focused instruction, pre-scripted role plays and information gap tasks.

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Appendix A. Example of a speech task from a standard curriculum

10 Xpress yourself!

A What do you say? Tick the correct sentences.

Je (**A**) komt een klasgenoot (**B**) tegen en vraagt je af of alles wel goed met hem of haar gaat.

A1 Gaat het wel goed met je?

   a ☐ Are you OK?
   b ☐ You look pale.

B2 Eén ding waar ik depressief van word, is het tijdschrift.

   a ☐ I couldn't find it anywhere.
   b ☐ One thing that's depressing me is the journal.

A3 Deel je zorgen.

   a ☐ Share your worries.
   b ☐ I'm the one who's got a problem.

B4 I know, you're right.

A5 Ik ben je vriend(in), je zou mij kunnen proberen.

   a ☐ You should talk to somebody.
   b ☐ I'm your friend, you could try me.

B6 Er is niets. Ik voel me alleen een beetje beroerd.

   a ☐ It's nothing. I'm just a bit miserable.
   b ☐ I just got out of bed on the wrong side!

A7 All right. Hope you feel better soon.

B Have the conversation with a classmate. One of you is **A**, the other is **B**. Finished? Switch roles.

From: New Interface (Orange Label)

Appendix B.   Example of a pre-scripted speech task (Sales)

Hello there. Are you being served?

Not yet, no. I was thinking of buying a jigsaw for my daughter, but I can't decide whether I should get this 2D of Holland, or the 3D Windmill.

Compares 2D to 3D jigsaw

Number of pieces
Well, the 3D Windmill has _____ more pieces than the 2D.
Ease
But it's not an easy jigsaw. In fact, the 3D jigsaw is _____ than the 2D of Holland.
Age
This shows that the 3D Windmill is meant for _____ children than the 2D of Holland. In fact, it's a 12+ jigsaw.

	2D	3D
Pieces	150	260
Ease	★	★★★
Age	6+	12+

She's twelve, that's no problem. The Windmill sounds lovely. But is it not terribly expensive?

Pitches 3D jigsaw

Yes, it's a little more expensive.
Beautiful
But when it's made, it's _____ beautiful souvenir of Holland.
Interesting
And with so many pieces, it's _____ interesting!

Yes, I guess you're right. It would be a much better gift for her. OK, I'll take the Windmill.

Closes sale

Good choice
That is definitely _____ choice you could make!

Would you like me to wrap the present for you?

Yes, please. Thanks very much.

Closes conversation

No problem. I'm glad I could help.

Appendix C.1   Example of an information gap task

Speech Card RECEPTIONIST

You will play the role of **receptionist**.

A customer wants to buy a jigsaw for their niece. You have a 3D jigsaw for sale. Once the jigsaw has been made, you can play with it forever! This is the jigsaw you want to pitch to your customer.

Compare the two jigsaws overleaf, and persuade the customer to buy the 3D Windmill.

→ **First make sure that you know all the facts.**

Study the picture overleaf..

→ **Now check that you have understood all the information.**

Circle the correct answers below, and finish the sentence.

Checklist

☑ The 2D jigsaw has far more / far fewer pieces than the 3D Windmill.

☑ Completing the 3D Windmill is a fair bit more / less difficult than completing the 2D jigsaw.

☑ The 2D jigsaw is suitable for much younger / older children than the 3D Windmill.

☑ The 2D jigsaw helps you learn a great deal more / less about The Netherlands.

☑ Some parts of the 3D Windmill can / cannot move when the wind is right.

☑ The 3D Windmill is a good deal more / less expensive than the 2D jigsaw.
  A good reason to buy it is ……………………………………………………………..............
  ……………………………………………………………………………………………

→ **Now you are ready to do the task.**

Speech Card CUSTOMER

You will play the role of customer.

Your 8-year old niece loves jigsaws. She's very good at them! You want to bring her a nice gift and you see some jigsaws in the hotel gift shop. You want to check whether you can find something suitable for her.

First read the information below.

WISHLIST

☑ a challenging jigsaw [djik-soh]
☑ a jigsaw that your daughter can learn from
☑ you really don't want to spend too much money
☑ ....

You want to know

∇ exactly which part of the 3D Windmill can actually move!

→ Answer the following question.

Imagine that you are the one buying this present.
Which of the two points below would you add to your wishlist?

☐ You want your niece to have fun while she makes the jigsaw, but also after it's completed.
☐ You want the jigsaw to be just right for her age.

Add your choice to the wishlist.

→ Now you are ready to do the task. You can use the following starter sentence:

"Hello. My niece is very fond of jigsaws. Would you have something nice in store for her?"

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