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# **Opportunities to learn and practise English as an L2 in parent-child conversations**

## **Introduction**

L2 learning occurs in interactive spaces between teachers and learners in L2 classrooms and a great deal has been written about both the cognitive and social processes associated with it (Walsh 2011). However, L2 learning can also occur outside classrooms in less formal contexts. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how L2 learning and L2 language practice opportunities were created spontaneously in parent - child conversations that were originally set up as interviews. The data also illustrates how the concept of the 'classroom' can be extended beyond the physical space in a school. When we examined our interview data, we were struck by the resemblance between our data set and what we might consider typical, formal L2 classroom data. Parents in our data seemed to switch between parent and teacher identities, giving their children plenty of useful opportunities to participate in L2 interactions, to practise using L2 English patterns and phrases, and to learn new English vocabulary. The overall aim of this paper is to explore the data set in order to identify types of language learning and language practice benefits and to draw implications for both teachers and parents who want to help children improve their L2 skills

## **Background**

Our larger research project (ongoing since 2008) is aimed at understanding more about the linguistic, social and educational challenges that international families face during their stay in the UK. Student - parents who come to the UK to undertake post-graduate studies (Masters or PhD), often relocate their families because they believe that staying in the UK will give their children a competitive edge in the globalised world. They see the period of their sojourn as an invaluable opportunity to increase the children's 'cultural capital' i.e. the children's future chances in the global world (Norton 2000), mainly through learning English as a second/ global language.

Our current larger data set comprises regular parent interviews where parents reflect on their children's ability to settle down at local schools during their first year in the UK. In addition, we have collected children's diaries and photo projects that depict what experiences they find particularly meaningful and interesting in the UK. We have also been interviewing teachers at schools who reflected on these children's progress. In order to diversify our data set and to gain further insights into these children's school experiences, we would have liked to interview them but the difficulty was that we were unable to conduct interview with them in English because of their very limited L2 competence. We therefore decided to ask the parents to conduct some interviews with their own children at home. One advantage of the parental involvement was that it created a relaxing and comfortable atmosphere for the interview. Current debates about research involving child participants (e.g. Alderson 2005, Christensen and James 2008, Author, 2011) point to the central problem of asymmetrical child- adult relationships and the generational power gap that is hard to overcome in research. While many believe that power can be negotiated and re-distributed in the process of research with children, in practice this is a lengthy process which requires building trust and reciprocal relationships (Christensen 2004, Kuchah and Author 2012, Spyrou 2011). We wanted to take advantage of the already existing special relationship between parents and their children and thus decided to work with 'acquaintance interviews' (as defined by Garton and Copland,

2010). Such interviews are characterised by the type of intimacy that is common between close family members.

The parents were advanced speakers of L2 English, although they were not at all knowledgeable about school life and UK primary school routines. Given that many of the families were from Asian countries, schools were reported by all children to be very different in the UK (Alexander, 2000). Some of the children learnt some English back in their countries but on arrival they all found communication at school difficult. Many children found the first few weeks and months particularly challenging, and they were struggling to learn sufficient English to fit in, make friends and participate at least minimally in school life. This contrast between the children's and the parents' level of English is important and worth noting here because the literature exploring the L2 competence of immigrant/ minority populations consistently reports that children acquire their L2 more rapidly than their parents. There is a whole body of research that suggests that children can and do act as cultural and linguistic mediators to assist their parents in L2 contexts (Guo 2014, Hall 2004, Tse 1995, Hall & Sham 2007, Wu et al 2009). However, our international families especially during the first year of their sojourn are very different because the student-parents already speak fluent L2 (as successful PG students studying at a UK university) while their children have no or very little English.

### **Adult-child talk and learning at school**

Much research into classroom discourse has been inspired by the work of Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) on three-part exchanges and the IRF cycle. The IRF cycle, which begins with teacher initiation, followed by a learner response, and finally rounded up by teacher evaluation, has been researched extensively ever since the 1970s. The IRF has also been widely criticised for its restrictive influence on classroom talk, for not giving students extensive opportunities to express themselves and for its teacher-centred focus (e.g. Kasper 2001, Nunan 1987). In line with such criticism, a more inclusive framework was proposed, incorporating the broader concept of feedback rather than just evaluation. Wells (1993), for example, suggests that with subtle changes made to the third part, the teacher can, instead of evaluating the response from the student, follow up on it, by asking students to expand, justify, clarify points, or make connections within larger sections of the lesson. In contrast to the earlier work that focussed on describing the restrictive nature of the IRF pattern, subsequent work also explored how effective the IRF pattern can be in terms of facilitating learning. For example, Jarvis and Robinson (1997) explored interactions between teachers and learners beyond the three part exchange and developed a framework showing that the teacher fulfilled many different functions in the last part of the exchange: showed acceptance of pupils' utterances, modelled new language, gave clues and elaborated or clarified instructions, or disconfirmed responses. Examining a greater part of the discourse, beyond the 3 part exchange revealed that teachers were 'responsive' to the minute by minute development of ideas through contingent responses. Others argued that the IRF pattern can be made flexible through teacher using genuine, communicative initiations (Radford et al 2006) since these are more likely to elicit longer responses. Nassaji and Wells (2000) talk about the teacher's attentiveness, i.e. how seriously the teacher is prepared to hear the child's answer. Contingency and responsiveness characterise the continual adjustment of help and support offered by more capable others. Recasts and expansions represent features of input that assist language development in young children as well as those with specific language difficulties (Nelson 1983). If in the follow-up move evaluation is avoided, the dialogue that is likely to

develop is more equal. When this happens, the initial IRF generic structure fades into the background and it is replaced by a more conversation-like genre. Further, Cullen (2002) suggests through the F move teachers can provide rich message oriented target language through reformulations and elaborations which are essential for L2 learning. Markee and Kasper (2004) explain that even though classroom talk was traditionally conceived of as a special type of institutional talk where teachers have privileged rights to assign topic and to evaluate the quality of contributions, classroom discourse focussed on task-based work and small group work has now uncovered 'interrelated speech exchange systems' rather than one unified system characterised by a single set of question-answer-comment practices.

Parents' language use (in addition to classroom teachers' language use) has also been studied but this work has focussed exclusively on L1. Parents use language with their children for the purpose of teaching words or new concepts in L1, IRF as a pattern has been found in parent talk as well. According to Seedhouse (1996) the IRF cycle is present in the home in parent-child interactions. Examples of these interactions have been described by Painter (1989, 38), Nelson (1983, 15), Wells Lindfors (1987,114) and Well and Montgomery (1981, 211). Display questions are also common in adult-child talk, especially in the pre-school years (Maclure and French 1981).

## **The study**

As discussed above, the data explored in this paper were recorded between 2008-2012 at an international university in the UK between parents (as interviewers) who were also PG students and their own children (as interviewees). All interactions were recorded during the first year of the families' temporary stay in the UK. They were recorded in English which was an L2 for all participants. To date we have recorded 41 interviews between parents and children. The participating parents were simply asked to find some time at home to sit down with their children and record a conversation related to the children's experiences at school. During the first year in the UK, on average each parent interviewed their child/ children 3 times. In this paper all parent participants are mothers (in fact mothers make up 95 % of the parents in the whole data set) and they all come from Chinese or Korean speaking background (China, Taiwan and South Korea). There was no set time for these interviews and some were much longer and more structured than others. Several are interrupted by other activities in the home which could not be avoided. All data were recorded and transcribed.

The total interview corpus for the purposes of this paper contains 41 interviews. The whole of the data were transcribed and following advice from Richards (2009) and in particular Roulston (2006), multiple layers of analysis were conducted. In the first instance, in line with an exploratory focus, an inductive thematic analysis following Kvale (1996), Braun and Clarke (2006) and Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) was undertaken. The initial codes that emerged from the data were organised into recurring codes which were sorted into categories and themes after several attempts of reading through the transcripts (2009). This layer of analysis produced a set of themes which gave us insights into the school experiences of these international children in general (e.g. *strategies for making friends, strategies to get involved in lessons, favourite activities, play activities in breaks, safe school routines, ambivalent feelings about school*). At the next stage we considered the interviews as *accounts* (rather than *reports*) exploring how the identity categories of interviewer/interviewee and parent/child shaped the co-construction of the interviews. Rapley (2006) talks about how such an analysis of the interview talk can reveal shifts in the way the participants constructed their

identities. It was within this layer of analysis that we uncovered that many of the parents seemed to be shifting between parent and teacher identities quite smoothly in a way that created learning opportunities for the children. At this stage we also conducted a discourse analytical approach using the IRF pattern, and then a more fine-grained micro-analysis (CA like) of the discourse beyond the three part exchange, in order to understand how the original IRF/IRE cycles ‘perform different interactional and pedagogical work according to the context in which they are operating’ (Seedhouse 2004:63). This allowed us to look beyond the IRF cycles and consider sequences of talk in their interactional environment and at the same time to explore how individuals orient to each other and the context.

The aim of this paper is to show how the shift between parent and teacher identities allowed for a rich English learning experience from the children’s point of view.

The parents acted as teachers and in this role they have accomplished

- *Teaching their children some L2,*
- *Encouraging their children to display their L2 competence,*
- *Scaffolding their children’s L2 production during some structured tasks that they themselves introduced / initiated;*
- *Offering extended language practice in L2.*

The following table contains all the basic details about the participants:

Taiwanese	Claire ( parent) and Ryan (son, 8 years old)	
Korean	Sally ( parent) and Ben (son, 10 years old)	
Korean	Jenny ( parent) and Chris (son, 11 years old)	
KOREAN	Sam (parent) and May (daughter, 9 years old)	
Taiwanese	Cassy ( parent) and Tina (daughter, 10 years old)	
Chinese	Lilly ( parent) and Tanya (daughter, 11 years old)	

The rest of the paper demonstrates the various benefits children experienced as a result of participating in the interviews. It is important to note that the children here are all beginning level learners, some with very little L2 English indeed. The parent interviewers are also L2 speakers of varying levels of confidence. At a basic level the interaction between parent and child simply allowed the child to showcase their very limited knowledge of L2 in a meaningful way. This is an important opportunity for the children to simply practise and experience the satisfaction of being able to produce L2 spontaneously. There is some evidence that parents attempted to teach new L2, often vocabulary and sometimes such teaching was ‘taken up’ by the children, in the sense that the new words and phrases were then repeated and incorporated into subsequent child utterances. This may be a narrow view of ‘learning’ but one that certainly reflects that the children were able to take advantage of the ‘affordances’ of the context. (Van Lier, 1996) Parents also used contingent responsiveness to scaffold the children’s talk, i.e. paid very close attention to what assistance was required as the interaction unfolded. Finally, there was also evidence that parents created opportunities for their children to participate in the dialogue on a more equal basis by tolerating disagreements and direct challenges from the children.

*Parent showcasing child's L2 ability at a very basic level*

*Extract (1): Discussing tomorrow's assembly (Taiwanese parent Claire and son Ryan 8 years old)*

Line 90: Claire	Well, um. Right, tell me something about your (.) assembly. You're going to (.), you will have your assembly tomorrow, right?
Line 91: Ryan:	Yes.
Line 92: Claire:	What do you play? What kind of character? Or what do you say, then?
Line 93: Ryan:	Hmm, (.) rainbow fish-, rainbow fish(.) Come on rainbow fish come and play with us. Can I have one of your scales?
Line 94: Claire	Ok, can you sit well? Don't be a mon-, monkey. Sit.
Line 95: Ryan:	I wasn't being a monkey. <makes monkey noise>
Line 96: Claire:	Ryan. Ok-,
Line 97: Ryan	: <laughs> <coughs>

Claire knows that Ryan can say his words that he memorised for the class assembly. She thinks this will be 'convenient' material for the recording, so she initiates the episode by inviting Ryan to talk about his assembly. Ryan confirms that the assembly is happening the next day in line 91. Claire then asks three more specific questions about exactly what part Ryan is playing and what he has to say (Lee 2007). Ryan responds to this by stating the name of the character and then he rolls off the memorised lines. Claire then provides a positive evaluation 'ok' in line 94 (Seedhouse 1997) and asks Ryan to sit well and not to make monkey noises. Ryan, makes more monkey noises to tease her mother, although he says he is not a monkey. Claire makes another attempt to attract Ryan's attention to carry on with the interview but Ryan is not interested and the machine is switched off.

This is a typical 3 part exchange where the parent asks a series of display questions (to which she knows the answer to) and the student/ child provides the expected answer, i.e. repeats memorised lines from the class assembly. Once the memorised text is delivered, the child considers the interview to be over, and both participants switch their roles from being teacher/learner to parent/child. The contribution of the child is minimal but the parent manages to find a meaningful opportunity for Ryan to showcase his memorised lines even though his language level is very basic indeed. This is in line with widely-used recitation practices encouraged by teachers in primary L2 classes reflecting the principle that unanalysed chunks help children build up their language competence (Mitchell and Martin 1997 and Cameron 2001).

Here is a further extract where the parent is simply showcasing her son's ability to provide basic information about his school experiences, in this case, about his friend. Rather than providing a prompt to recite previously memorised text, here the parent is asking a series of display questions.

*Extract (2): What are you going to do tomorrow? (Korean parent Sally and Ben 10 years old)*

Line 28: Sally:	What are you going to do tomorrow?
Line 29: Ben:	I go to the friend's house.
Line 30: Sally:	Who is that?
Line 31: Ben:	His name is Oliver Robinson. Did you know? I go to the Oliver Robinson (.) I think I go

	to 9 o'clock?
Line 32: Sally:	Are you excited? (...) ? Happy?
Line 33: Ben:	Yeah!
Line 34: Sally:	Ok, thank you!

Here, Sally is giving Ben an opportunity to take part in this short conversation fully, even though the level of competence is very low and what Ben can say is quite limited. In line 28 Sally is asking a question that she already knows the answer to. ‘*What are you going to do tomorrow?*’ The response is as expected (*I go to the friends’ house*) but the parent can see another opportunity to ask a further question: ‘*Who is that?* Ben gives the friend’s full name, adds an exclamation (*did you know?*), repeats the statement from earlier about where he is going, and finally, volunteers information about the time he will be going (line 31). This is quite an impressive response. Sally then asks one more question: ‘*Are you excited?* (line 32). After a pause, realising that Ben might not know this word, she immediately provides a synonym (*happy*) to help Ben. Ben replies yes, and at this point Sally concludes this episode by thanking Ben helping with the recording. Just like a language teacher, Sally creates an opportunity for this child to say a few phrases about a meaningful event. She also carefully scaffolds Ben’s utterances and modifies her own language to increase his chances of understanding.

#### *Parent attempting to teach new L2 items*

In the next two examples, we can see evidence that parents, in addition to showcasing their children’s competence, also provide assistance when needed, and teach new words and phrases in L2.

*Extract (3): Asking questions about school: your favourite subject (Korean parent Jenny and son Chris 11 years old)*

Line 1 Jenny:	<laughter> Ok, (.) What is your best subjects in your school?
Line 2 Chris;	My best subject is maths because maths in England (..)
Line 3: Jenny:	Maths in England or in English?
Line 4 Chris	Maths in England is (...) than in Korea
Line 5 Jenny	Maths is easier than in Korea?
Line 6 Chris	Yes!
Line 7 Jenny	So you are quite confident?
Line 8 Chris	Of course!
Line 9 Jenny	What about English?
Line 10:Chris:	Not bad, I like it
Line 11 Jenny	You like it?
Line 12 Chris	Yes. (.) I like the writing.
Line 13 Jenny	Your teacher has said something during the class, do you understand?
Line 14: Chris	(.) Of course, yes.
Line 15: Jenny	But sometimes you don’t get it?
Line 16 Chris	Yes.
Line 17 Jenny	So can you tell me about your day today at school?
Line 18 Chris	(.) It’s just simple. (.) Yes like (.)
Line 19 Jenny	What did you learn today?
Line 20: Chris	Like maths (..) like, pentagon and hexagon
Line 21: Jenny	So you learnt about a lot of shapes?
Line 22: Chris	Yes. And in English we (.) just writing something what I forget, what I wrote

Here, in line 1 Jenny opens this episode by asking what Chris's favourite subject is. She already knows the answer, and Chris knows that, but he plays along and he is about to give a response using a full sentence when he stumbles on a problem. He is searching for a specific word (*easy?*). Jenny scaffolds his language with an indirect error correction move (Seedhouse 1997), offering two forms for Chris to choose from in line 3. Chris then selects one of the options in line 4, and makes a comparison between maths in England and maths in Korea. Realising what exactly her son is trying to say, Jenny provides the missing comparative adjective in line 5. Chris agrees. Then Jenny initiates a new move, asking if he is confident. This is a statement with rising intonation indicating that she expects an affirmative answer. Chris says 'of course', providing an emphatic confirmation. A new initiation by the parent in line 9 is an attempt to change the topic to English. Jenny asks Chris whether he likes English. Chris replies positively, but in line 11 Jenny questions this response. It seems that she knows otherwise. Chris insists that he does like English and offers an elaboration stating that he especially likes writing. This may have been an excellent point to follow up but Jenny is not interested in pursuing this any further. The next initiation is an open question about whether Chris always understands the teacher. Chris says he does ( line 14) but Jenny clearly expects a negative response. Using a statement with a rising intonation ( in line 15) suggests that she expects Chris to agree with her when she says '*but sometimes you don't get it*'. Chris says yes. Once Jenny is satisfied that her preferred response was given, there is another sharp turn in the conversation and the episode about different school subjects is over. This time Jenny moves on to talk about what happened at school 'today' ( line 17). Chris attempts to respond by saying 'not much' (line 18) but the parent is not happy with this answer, so she re-phrases the initiation question. In his response move Chris says they learnt about pentagons and hexagons. Jenny takes the opportunity to reformulate Chris's response (other-initiated correction) and provides Chris with a new generic word ('*shapes*'). It is at this point that Chris returns to his preferred topic (from line 9) and initiates a new move about his English class, but this seems of no interest to Jenny. She moves on to yet a new topic of conversation.

The parent misses several opportunities here to engage with what the child wanted to focus on at the expense of her own agenda. Jenny's focus on Ben 'not always getting it' and 'not liking English' seems to be in contrast with the child's more positive stance. The identity of an over-critical parent is apparent here but at the same time Jenny also performs some L2 teacher-related functions such correcting her son, providing a missing word when he needs it, and attempting to teach a lexical item: '*shapes*'.

In the next extract the parent scaffolds her daughter's talk very closely and this leads to the child being able to incorporate new L2 phrases into her subsequent utterances.

*Extract (4): How to make a cake? (Korean Parent Sam and 9 year old May)*

Line 21: Sam:	You like sponge cake don't you? <door opens> Can you tell me how to do it? How to make- B, can you close the door? (.) Can you go outside, B? Please?
Line 22: May:	Um (.) what did you say?
Line 23: Sam:	Tell me how to make cupcake.
Line 24: May	Um, you have to (..) First, you put egg in it, and second, you put milk in it (..) and mix it. And you put flour in it. And mix it. And when it finish-, when you finish (.) mix it-.
Line 25: Sam:	Mixing.
Line 26: May:	Mixing. You put it (.) you put the (.)
Line 27: Sam:	The mixture into (..)



Line 28: May:	Into the sink.
Line 29: Sam:	Into where?
Line 30: May:	Into the sink! The mixture go to in the sink! <laughter>
Line 31: Sam:	Uh-oh, I think you need to pour it into the cup, paper cup.
Line 32: May:	Yeah, but mixture is going to in a sink, because it gets a wash.
Line 33: Sam:	You need to wash the bowl
Line 34: May:	Yeah, and (.) the (.) paper cup (.) Um, the paper cup (.) We put (.) flowers in the paper cup
Line 35: Sam:	<i>B!!!! &lt;LI&gt;!</i>
Line 36: May:	In a paper cup, and then, you put the chocolates in it. The button chocolates. And it goes in an oven
Line 37: Sam:	And then you wait.
Line 38: May:	Yes.

In this extract, Sam asks May to recount instructions for making a cake. The extract starts with Sam making an initiation move in line 21. May starts her Response move (recounting the cake making procedure) in line 24 but she gets stuck. The perturbations in line 24 function as a repair initiation. In line 25 Sam assists May with an overt grammatical correction by providing the word ‘mixing’. May repeats the word and continues with the recount but in line 27 Sam needs to give her more assistance, this time picking up more quickly on the word mixture. In line 28 May completes the sentence that Sam started and suggests that the mixture is to be poured down the sink. The laughter indicates that this is a joke and it may be a sign that May would like to bring the task to a close. Sam’s rising intonation ‘into where’ signals surprise but her laughter indicates that she appreciates the joke. In line 30 May spontaneously incorporates the new word ‘mixture’ into her utterance, but she still insists that it needs to go into the sink. Although Sam likes the joke, she wants May to continue with the task and be ‘serious’. In line 31 she is providing the next correct step herself to encourage May to carry on but in line 32, May still insists on her idea about the sink. She uses the newly introduced word ‘mixture’ again, and suggests that it goes into the sink because it needs a wash. More laughter follows, but Sam in her F move in line 33 comments that it is the bowl that needs washing. In line 34 May agrees with this and she immediately initiates a new move, picking up on paper cups previously mentioned by Sam, and she suggests that some chocolate should go into the paper cups with some other decoration (flowers)? Finally, May concludes that the mixture goes into the oven. Sam chooses to have the last word and she adds a final step. May accepts this by saying yes and the episode is concluded.

Overall, this extract illustrates that parents took the initiative to divert from original topic of the interview, ‘the school chat’ in various ways. Here Sam uses a structured task to elicit talk from May to showcase her L2 competence and also her daughter’s knowledge about making cakes. Because of the structured task, the parent could scaffold the child with specific vocabulary and structures. In fact Sam and May complete the task collaboratively. While this parent certainly acts like an L2 teacher, it is also obvious that the child is relaxed and is able to challenge/tease her mother. Their relationship is less asymmetrical than a real teacher-pupil one and it is this dual role of being a parent and a teacher at the same time that makes this extract such an impressive learning site.

*Parent tolerating challenge and disagreement from child*

In addition to scaffolding learning via offering new words, much of the data also reflected that the more symmetrical relationship that would not be possible in real classrooms allowed children to challenge parents and argue with their views.

*Extract (5): Recalling a shopping trip (Taiwanese parent Cassy with 10 year old daughter Tina)*

Line 1 Cassy:	And then this term I remember Mrs Crick take you out
Line 2 Tina:	That was fun! And I find a tunnel!
Line 3: Cassy:	Ok, and, what did you do when you go
Line 4 Tina:	I went in the tunnel and I saw nothing inside there, but I saw a playground (.)
Line 5 Cassy:	But wasn't she taking you to Tesco?
Line 6: Tina:	Hm, (.) on the way to Tesco
Line 7: Cassy:	There's a tunnel?
Line 8: Tina	A tunnel in the wood
Line 8: Cassy:	Oo, that's exciting!
Line 9: Tina	We went in there a bit and (.)
Line 10: Cassy:	So what have you done in the Tesco?
Line 11: Tina	We buy some wristbands and she give me 50 pence for buying one for her as well (..) and she buy to us Easter eggs.
Line 12 Cassy	Ok.
Line 13 Tina	And, we were happy. We were very happy!

Here, in line 1 Cassy makes a comment about a memorable event in the past (*going out with Mrs Crick*) and this triggers an immediate emotional response in line 2 from Tina (*'that was fun'*). Tina then adds her own initiation saying that they found a tunnel. In line 3 Cassy acknowledges her comment about the tunnel and asks her to carry on. In line 6, Cassy asks a tentative question about Tesco (*'wasn't she taking you to Tesco?'*) indicating that she does not think the tunnel is really relevant to this recount. She tries to direct Tina's attention back to talking about Tesco. (*'preferred'* answer). In line 6 Tina justifies her prior turn (1-4) in terms of its relevance to the topic. Cassy finally takes notice of the tunnel. She finishes Tina's sentence by completing it with a rising intonation (*'there is a tunnel?'*). Tina gives further clarification about where exactly the tunnel is in her response move in line 8. Cassy admits that it must have been *'exciting'* and yet she still wants to talk about the trip to Tesco. So, when Tina (in line 10) starts a new initiation explaining what happened in the tunnel, Cassy decides to restate the original question insisting that Tina talks about what happened in Tesco (*'So what have you done in the Tesco'*) In line 12 Tina finally provides the preferred response, the one that Cassy was trying to elicit from the start (*'We buy some wristbands and she give me 50 pence for buying one for her as well. And she buy to us Easter eggs'*). The evaluative move (*'ok'*) in line 13 signals the end of this section. Tina adds her own comment about how happy they were that day but Cassy is not interested any further.

This is one long IRF exchange but within that we can see the Tina is able to initiate her own utterances and she attempts to take some control of the agenda within the main topic overtly controlled by her mother. This is rarely the case for learners in teacher-fronted work at school due to a 'strong orientation to the institutional discourse of classrooms' (Garton, 2012). Even though Cassy expects her to talk about something that happened at Tesco, Tina successfully introduces an alternative topic about the tunnel which her mother knows nothing about.

The episode (below) further illustrates how children can resist and disagree with their parents' agenda. This is invaluable L2 practice since to disagree with real teachers at school or resist their instructions would be unthinkable. Consequently, interactions like these (below) offer rare opportunities for experimenting with these language functions in a safe environment.

*Extract (6): Chinese new year (Chinese parent Lilly with 11 year old daughter Tanya)*

Line 14: Tanya	That's the first part and second part
Line 15: Lilly	Yes, and then
Line 16: Tanya	And that's it !
Line 17: Lilly	Keep going!
Line 18: Tanya	No, I forget (.)
Line 19: Lilly	Try to remember something!
Line 20: Tanya	<CHINESE> New Year's Eve feast.(...) < CHINESE> All of the family members will come together to enjoy a big meal and New Year pudding (..) <CHINESE>
Line 21: Lilly	<CHINESE.> Ok!
Line 22: Tanya	CHINESE The monster of New Year
Line 23: Lilly	CHINESE Red bags
Line 24: Tanya	No, it's not like that!
Line 25: Lilly	Ok then!
Line 26: Tanya	The monster will (.) will play the firecrackers to scare away the monster. CHINESE
Line 27: Lilly	Ok then that's fine! Ok alright then!
Line 28: Tanya	The third bag is children's favourite, because there's twenty (**) inside each bag
Line 29: Lilly	Normally, but not necessarily £20 in the bag
Line 30: Tanya	But most of them are!
Line 31: Lilly	It depends on different families.

Prior to line 14, Lilly ask her daughter to talk about Chinese New Year presentation at school. This also (like extract 1) a prompt to recite previously learnt text in English. Tanya agrees to recite some of it. In fact she negotiates to do just the first and the second part. Then between lines 14-19 mother and daughter negotiate how much more Tanya should say. Tanya wants to stop but Lilly wants her to carry on (in line 17). Eventually, Tanya continues with her response after the mother's plea (*'try to remember something'*) in line 19. In line 20 Tanya talks about a feast and the family getting together and then she continues in Chinese. Lilly encourages her to go on and in line 22 Tanya begins a new move about the monster of New Year and then she is stuck. In line 23 Lilly attempts to help her by correcting this indirectly, talking in L1, and suggesting an alternative topic: the *'red bags.'* However Tanya disagrees overtly with what the mother suggests, *'it is not like that'* (unlike classroom discourse) and finishes the response about the monster in line 26. Lilly says fine and her intonation indicates that she is ready to bring this episode to an end (line 27). However, Tanya suddenly wishes to return to her mothers' earlier suggestion about the red bags, and she comments that *'that's the children's favourite'* (line 28). She further suggests that there could be £20 in the bags in line 29. At this point Lilly disagrees about the amount of money in the bags but Tanya asserts her own point (*most of them are!!*). Finally, Lilly closes the episode with a general statement, *'it depends on the families'*, and at this point the machine is switched off.

In this episode, despite the parent's insistence on a topic and her expectations about a preferred answer, Tanya is able to negotiate with her mother about how much she is going to

tell her about her presentation in the school assembly. She also initiates her own ideas and she resists and rejects some of her mother's ideas.

## **Discussion**

When we asked the parents to interview their own children in L2 we did not expect these interactions to be such a 'fertile ground' for learning. However, the above data convincingly indicate that actual L2 language learning is happening, and the children have ample opportunities to practise their language in a 'safe' environment. This learning context usefully combined features of traditional teacher-learner discourse with features of parent-child discourse.

How far can the physical concept of the classroom be extended? Our data indicates with the hybrid role of being a parent/teacher, there are both similarities and differences with traditional classroom discourse. In many respects, these interactions were similar to L2 classroom interactions in that the parents nominated and controlled topics and initiated tasks; they also followed a basic IRF pattern, and provided language repair and scaffolding. Children acted like learners, mainly restricted to the response moves. However the differences were also interesting to notice. It can be argued that while the benefits of the classroom like discourse can lead to L2 word learning and L2 language practice, the differences offer further advantages. Even at lower levels it is noticeable that children can initiate relevant moves, comment on the task, make a joke, and attempt to incorporate their own ideas into the adult-controlled interactions. At slightly higher levels of English competence it is also noticeable that the children are able to initiate more moves and justify them, and even challenge or resist the parents' questions or ideas. In some cases these interactions provide an excellent space for language practice of the kind that the child hardly ever has a chance to participate in at school. We know from parents' as well as teachers' interviews in our larger data set that during the first year, especially the first few months, children do not participate in much interaction at all with their peers, and they certainly do not initiate interactions with their teachers. Mostly they listen attentively, trying to make sense of what is going on (e.g. Ervin-Tripp 1974, Tabors and Snow 1994). In this context, these intensive practice opportunities are particularly beneficial allowing children to rehearse useful L2 language functions in a safe context.

What is evident in the data is that slipping in and out of their dual identity roles of being a parent and a teacher (or more advanced speaker) creates a space where the benefits of learning and practice can be maximised. Children have a chance to learn new words and phrases in L2 when the teacher role is acted out, while they can gain important practice and have an opportunity to take on more dominant roles when the adult is in the parent role. The IRF structures are intertwined with more conversation-like data, where children are able to initiate new ideas, challenge adult views and have some fun with jokes and teasing. Such fluid transition between more relaxed and equal conversations intermingled with IRF is certainly unique here in comparison with traditional school discourse (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975).

Qualified L2 teachers typically engage with the study of classroom discourse as part of their initial training, and, teachers who are interested in pursuing professional development may also study their own classrooms, their own language use, or their colleagues' classrooms. Walsh (2011) argues that recording one's classroom and analysing the unfolding discourse is one of the best ways to develop as a teacher. Experienced teachers typically acquire a great deal of expertise about how to best navigate classroom discourse, use questions, give

feedback, and over time they develop a repertoire of effective strategies to maximise learning opportunities in their classrooms. Parents' use of language, presumably, is at least partly subconscious and instinctive. Parents would rarely study their own language use or record interactions at home (unless they happen to be linguists), and thus their use of language is not usually informed by explicit study and reflection. Yet, there is plenty of evidence in the data that they were able to fulfil a 'teacherly' role and behaved like L2 instructors some of the time.

## **Conclusion and implications**

It seems that even without any help or training, parents can support their children and they can have beneficial conversations with them at home. One implication of this study is that teachers working with these L2 children at schools may want to have a more structured approach to using parents as a resource. Schools in the UK and other countries receive large volumes of newcomers every year and in some cases the parents are more confident L2 users than their children. The data suggests that school-home partnerships, where parents are more involved, can usefully benefit children's developing L2 competence and confidence. Teachers can help to set up regular L2 discussions to be recorded between children and parents or, indeed, many other forms of collaboration are possible. Language teachers may also be able to learn from parents' L2 interactions with their children, and may try experimenting with styles of language use that combined IRF patterns with more fluid and balanced conversational discourse.

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