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Strengthening Ties to L2: Improving Secondary Students' Attitudes through Dialogic Literary Gatherings.

Maite Santiago-Garabieta¹, Rocío García-Carrión¹, Lourdes Villardón-Gallego¹

¹University of Deusto (Spain)

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Maite Santiago-Garabieta
University of Deusto

Rocío García-Carrión
University of Deusto

Lourdes Villardón-Gallego
University of Deusto

Abstract

Over the last decades, many efforts have been made to establish the Basque minority language as a normalized language in the Basque Country. Research has shown that language use, language proficiency and attitudes towards language are closely associated. Likewise, the benefit of interactive learning environments for improving language proficiency is well known. However, the effect of such environments on attitudes towards second languages (L2) has been less studied. This article presents a qualitative study that explores the extent to which the implementation of a particular dialogue-based classroom strategy, named Dialogic Literary Gatherings (DLGs), may transform secondary students' attitudes towards Basque (L2). The DLGs were carried out with 46 secondary education students in the Basque Country. After implementing DLGs, teachers' interviews and students' focus groups were conducted and analysed inductively. Results show that participants reported changes in students' attitudes towards Basque and they related these changes to the dialogical space they experienced during the DLGs, since this created affordances for them to engage in meaningful discussions when speaking in Basque. Implications of the study are discussed.

Keywords: Basque, language learning, interactive communication, bilingual education, secondary education

Fortaleciendo Lazos con la L2: Mejora de las Actitudes del Alumnado de Secundaria a través de Tertulias Literarias Dialógicas.

Maite Santiago-Garabieta
University of Deusto

Rocío García-Carrión
University of Deusto

Lourdes Villardón-Gallego
University of Deusto

Resumen

Durante las últimas décadas se han dedicado numerosos esfuerzos a normalizar el uso en el País Vasco de la lengua minoritaria vasca. Investigaciones previas han demostrado que el uso de la lengua, el dominio de la lengua y las actitudes hacia la lengua están estrechamente relacionadas. Asimismo, se ha confirmado el beneficio que los entornos interactivos de aprendizaje tienen para promover el dominio de la lengua. Sin embargo, el efecto de dichos entornos en las actitudes hacia segundas lenguas (L2) se ha explorado menos. Este artículo presenta un estudio cualitativo donde se analiza hasta qué punto la implementación de una determinada estrategia de aula basada en el diálogo, conocida como Tertulias Literarias Dialógicas (TLD), puede transformar las actitudes del alumnado de secundaria hacia el euskera (L2). Las TLD se realizaron con 46 estudiantes de educación secundaria del País Vasco. Después de implementar las TLD, se realizaron y analizaron inductivamente entrevistas a docentes y grupos focales de estudiantes. Los resultados muestran que las actitudes del alumnado hacia el euskera mejoraron y relacionaron estos cambios con el espacio de diálogo experimentado durante las TLD, ya que este entorno les permitió participar utilizando el euskera en discusiones significativas. Se discuten las implicaciones del estudio.

Palabras clave: Euskera, aprendizaje de lenguas, comunicación interactiva, educación bilingüe, educación secundaria

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Fostering the use of the Basque language in education and in society has been a constant challenge over the last decades. Currently, Basque is still a minority language, in contact with Spanish, as the dominant language in the region (Gorter & Cenoz, 2011). Despite the efforts made by the Basque Government with specific language policies for the promotion and normalisation of Basque in both public and private spheres, there is still long way to go for achieving a more equal linguistic situation. Data show that only 33,9% of the population older than 16 years-old is a Basque speaker (Basque Government, 2016).

According to the latest sociolinguistic survey undertaken in the Basque Country, the tendency to have a less favourable attitude towards Basque language arises among those who report having lower linguistic competence. Thus, whereas 87% of Basque speakers are in favour of promoting its use, this percentage drops to half among those who are not proficient in the language (Basque Government, 2016). Similar trends have been identified in other studies between language attitudes and language proficiency (Brown & Sachdev, 2009; Studer & Konstantinidou, 2015). Indeed, other studies show that pupils with positive attitudes towards a target language display higher proficiency, whereas negative attitudes correlate with lower proficiency (De Smet et al., 2019).

In the same vein, a study carried out in the Basque Country by Lasagabaster (2005) focused on attitudes towards languages among university students in a context where a minority language (Basque), a predominant language (Spanish) and a foreign language (English) are present in the compulsory curriculum. According to the results, the degree of competence in the language exerts as the most significant effect on attitudes towards it.

In fact, this association between language proficiency and attitudes must be considered, particularly in the Basque educational system, where 67% of students have Basque as the language of instruction (EUSTAT, 2020). Both, language proficiency and attitudes towards Basque may play an important role for students to access the curriculum and perform in other school subjects, which are taught in Basque (Berasategi et al., 2019). Therefore, it seems important to offer students opportunities to engage in stimulating learning environments that foster simultaneously their linguistic competence and their attitudes towards the instructional language (Elosua & Egaña, 2017).

Along these lines, previous studies indicate that interactive learning environments and interaction-based strategies improve language proficiency

in second language learning (Loewen & Sato, 2018; Mackey & Gass, 2015). However, is less known about their effect on the development of language attitudes. The aim of this study is to identify whether the implementation of a specific dialogue-based classroom strategy, known as Dialogic Literary Gatherings (DLGs), has an impact on changing the attitudes of secondary education students towards L2 (Basque).

Attitudes towards Languages: A Brief Review

Attitudes towards languages and their impact on behaviour have been extensively studied by scholars from diverse fields such as social psychology, sociolinguistics and pedagogy. Despite the extensive literature in this field, the definition of 'language attitudes' varies considerably, due to the complexity of the construct. In the case of the present study, we will frame the concept within the tripartite model (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960) that assumes attitudes are comprised of three components: affective (positive or negative feelings toward the attitude object), cognitive (beliefs held about the attitude object) and behavioural (overt actions and responses to the attitude object). More specifically, 'language attitudes' have been defined as the evaluative reaction to a language (Dragojevic et al., 2020), in our case, the Basque language as L2.

Attitude is not understood as static but rather as a dynamic concept that may change along life span (Allport, 1935; Gardner, 1985). Hence, personal experiences and interactions with other people in a particular context shape individual and community attitudes (Baker, 1992). Thus, attitudes are situated in social interactions with diverse agents such as educational and professional groups, family, and friends, among others (Marlow & Giles, 2010; Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002).

Moreover, factors such as age could affect beliefs regarding language attitudes (McKenzie & Carrie, 2018; Oktavia, 2020; Schüppert et al., 2015). Several studies conducted in bilingual settings, including those involving a minority language, have identified that attitudes towards language, rather than improving, get weaker with age. For example, Baker's (1992) study, showed that attitudes towards Welsh tended to fall from 11-14-year-olds, but most significantly between the ages of 13-14. Similarly, Etxebarria (2000) concluded that attitudes towards Basque are particularly positive among the youngest students. Along the same vein, the study carried out by Cenoz (2001)

showed the same decreasing pattern between primary and baccalaureate students' attitudes towards multilingualism in the Basque Country.

According to a recent review conducted by [Albarracín and Shavitt \(2018\)](#), personal development, emotions or individual objectives play a significant influence on the change of attitudes towards language. At the social level, contact groups and social media are particularly relevant in its development. In addition, since attitudes are not established in a vacuum, socio-historical characteristics in each spatiotemporal and socio-cultural context also have an influence on them, as they have in cognitive development ([Vygotsky, 1980](#)).

The Key Role of Learning Environments for Attitudes Development

Authors such as [Lambert \(1974\)](#) and [Gardner \(1985\)](#) have asserted that attitudes strongly influence language learning. This statement is consistent with other studies that reported that people with positive attitudes towards L2 have higher achievement in the learning process than those who do not ([Brown, 2000](#); [Ellis, 1994](#); [Merisuo-Storm, 2007](#)). Thus, since attitudes can influence students' language learning and considering that attitudes develop in a particular socio-cultural context, the classroom and the learning environment have an important role in fostering both attitudes and L2 learning.

Indeed, [Mantle-Bromley \(1995\)](#) argues that specific classroom settings can affect attitudes towards language. For example, the Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodology has helped to foster positive attitudes towards language learning in general, when compared with traditional Foreign Language (FL) classrooms in English ([Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2009](#)). Indeed, a recent research conducted in Belgium confirmed more positive attitudes toward languages among CLIL students, compared to non-CLIL students. Accordingly, CLIL students acquired more familiarity with the language and perceived it as less difficult ([De Smet et al., 2019](#)). This positive impact on students' attitudes could lie in the fact that a CLIL approach provides more intense exposure and more opportunities to use the target language meaningfully. Indeed, in CLIL classrooms, learners co-construct knowledge together and increase their engagement and language learning ([García & Lázaro, 2015](#); [Coyle, 2013](#); [Gómez-Parra, 2020](#); [Zhao et al., 2021](#)).

Dialogic Classrooms: The Case of Dialogic Literary Gatherings

A wide array of research has shown that in dialogic classrooms students have more opportunities to participate extensively in productive discussions. As such, they elaborate on and query of previous contributions, which was also positively associated with learning outcomes and attitudes (Howe et al., 2019). Among different dialogic practices achieving positive learning outcomes and linguistic competence, Dialogic Literary Gatherings are identified. Grounded on Flecha's dialogic learning concept (Flecha, 2000) this educational action consists of reading the greatest literary works in a whole-class setting. The teacher facilitates the sessions where students share and discuss their ideas making meaning of the text through egalitarian dialogue (García-Carrión, 2015).

Indeed, this educational action is consistent with the sociocultural perspective in the field of second language learning (Donato, 1994; Swain & Lapkin, 2013). This approach highlights the relevance of promoting collaborative interactions between students to replace the usual teacher-centred monological discourse by an interactive and inclusive environment (García-Carrión et al., 2020). In this way, the students can build knowledge and learn a language on their own resources and peer scaffolding interactions (Donato, 1994; Swain & Lapkin, 2013).

Previous research already provided evidence about the benefits of DLGs. For instance, there are studies that have showed its effectiveness for language acquisition (De Botton et al., 2014), oracy skills (Santiago-Garabieta et al., 2022), vocabulary acquisition (Santiago-Garabieta et al., 2021), academic language development (López de Aguilera, 2019) and reading skills (Serrano et al., 2010). However, despite the benefits achieved in these aspects, their impact on attitudes towards languages has not been investigated yet.

Recently, a research conducted by Díez-Palomar et al. (2020) with primary students showed that DLGs improve attitudes towards learning. This is the only study focused on the impact of DLGs in attitudes towards learning, so far. However, no study has explored the impact they may have on shaping attitudes towards languages, and particularly in secondary education. Thus, this study aims to explore in which ways, if any, the DLGs in Basque change secondary students' attitudes towards the language itself.

Methods

Setting

The study was carried out in a comprehensive school serving students from 3 to 18 years. It is located in a medium-high socio-economic area of a city in the Basque Country, northern Spain. The social use of Basque in this city is even lower than the use in the region, being Basque speakers only 12.3% of young people aged between 15 and 24 ([Soziolinguistika Klusterra, 2017](#)).

Techniques

Two in-depth interviews were conducted with the participant teachers and two focus groups were carried out with 32 students. The students' focus group protocols were designed aiming at finding out whether and how the DLGs influence their attitudes towards Basque.

On the one hand, in the case of teachers, they were asked about the evolution of the pupils' attitudes towards Basque since they started DLGs. Specific questions focused on exploring their perception on existing barriers to speak Basque, how their attitudes towards L2 evolved and the role of the DLGs in this respect were posed.

On the other hand, students' focus groups were aimed at exploring their attitudes towards Basque before and after their participation on DLG sessions. Questions regarding topics such as their opinion towards Basque were addressed.

Participants

Two secondary classrooms with a total of 46 students aged 14-15 took part in the DLGs during the subject 'Basque Language and Literature'. A total of 20 girls and 26 boys, were involved in the DLGs. Among them, there is a high homogeneity of linguistic profiles, being Spanish the only mother tongue of the 80% of students. For the two focus groups, only those who had the written consent of their parents or legal guardians took part on the study, a total of 32 students.

Two teachers, a woman and a man, with no previous experience in facilitating DLGs, were interviewed on completion of the intervention. Both teachers have extensive experience in teaching Basque at the school. They are aware of the value of the Basque language and concerned about the importance of its learning and acquisition.

Procedure and Data Collection

Prior to the start of the DLGs implementation, the school senior leadership team, as well as the teaching staff, were contacted to present the project. Once they agree to participate in the study, the teachers selected for the study took part in one-day training session, for them to get acquainted with the dialogic learning theory and the practices of the Dialogic Literary Gatherings.

Implementation of the DLGs started in September 2019 and lasted until March 2020. The 50-minute DLG sessions took place within the framework of the subject 'Basque Language and Literature'. The students held a weekly Dialogic Literary Gathering, where they engaged in dialogue and collectively discussed the readings of 'Oliver Twist' by Charles Dickens and 'The Metamorphosis' by Franz Kafka, in their Basque version.

After the implementation, the interviews and focus groups were conducted. The two individual interviews and one focus group were carried out in the school. However, the second focus-group was online, during the lockdown period in Spain, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All the sessions were audio-recorded, for later transcription and in-depth analysis. All the personal data has been anonymized with pseudonyms.

Ethics

This study was developed considering the guidelines on Ethics for Researchers ([European Commission, 2013](#)) and with the approval of the university's Ethics Committee. The school management team, the teaching staff involved the students and their families and/or legal guardians were informed of the study approach, as well as of the objectives. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, and information collected would be kept confidential. They were also informed of the option of leaving the study at any time and without consequences. The signed informed consents from the school principal, teachers and families were collected by the researcher (1st author).

Data Analysis

The analysis of the interviews and focus group were conducted using an inductive approach. The identification of the categories, detailed in Table 1, was carried out by three researchers. Based on the reading of the transcripts, the researchers identified the three main categories first independently and

then by consensus. The transcript of the interviews and the focus groups were analysed using Nvivo 12 software.

Table 1

Coding categories

Main category	Definition
Students' barriers to using Basque.	This category refers to the barriers identified as challenging to the use of Basque in the students' everyday life before implementing DLGs.
Change of attitudes towards Basque.	This category focuses on the changes students experienced in their attitudes towards the Basque language.
Features of DLGs	This category encompasses the features of the DLGs that may contribute to a change of attitude towards the Basque language.

Results

The results show that changes in students' attitudes towards Basque were positively associated with their experience in the Dialogic Literary Gatherings. Whereas students acknowledge barriers related to the lack of opportunities for using Basque and their lack of proficiency, in the DLGs they were more willing to communicate in Basque and increased their self-confidence and fluency.

Students' Barriers to Using Basque

Both teachers and students identified specific barriers that hinder students' communication in Basque. Specifically, the findings refer to: (1) lack of opportunities for using Basque (2) limited proficiency in L2 (Basque) and, (3) resistances towards its use.

Lack of opportunities for using Basque language

One of the aspects that students stated during the focus groups is that they do not have many opportunities to speak Basque in the classroom. Despite being Basque the language of instruction -that is all subjects are delivered in Basque, except Spanish and English-, they do not consider themselves having many opportunities to communicate in Basque. Some reasons they provided, refer to the prevalent monologic discourse in the class where the teacher speaks and the students listen. Martin, a 15-year-old student, describes the dynamic they usually have in their classes:

In the class, you do the exercises that the teacher gives you, you listen to the explanation, but you don't speak that much. So, you study Basque, but you don't speak it. (Martin, boy, 15 years)

On the other hand, the lack of opportunities is more prevalent in secondary education, compared with the opportunities they used to have in primary. Gorka emphasises his feelings about how the use of Basque decreases.

It's true that people in primary school speak Basque more than us. And then, as the years go by, I don't know why, Basque is spoken less (...). I don't know why, but it's becoming less and less spoken. (Gorka, boy, 15 years)

As it can be seen, students are aware that once they are in secondary education the monologic teacher's discourse predominates and they perceive fewer opportunities to participate in the classroom and to communicate in Basque.

Students' perception of a limited proficiency in L2 (Basque)

According to the data, students do not feel skilled enough in communicating what they really want to. They state facing limitations to express their opinions in Basque. According to the reasons they acknowledge, as Gorka does in the following quote, the lack of practice emerges as one of the main causes of this problem:

Since usually we speak less Basque, it's a bit more difficult for us to express ourselves freely, as we would do in Spanish. But I think it's

more a problem of practice. Because we don't practice as much as we do in Spanish. (Gorka, boy, 15 years)

In the same vein, Nekane, one of the teachers, confirms these difficulties when she tries to have an ordinary conversation about their everyday life in school, but they cannot follow the conversation in Basque:

On top of that, it's a language they've been working with since they were little. And if you ask them what they did at the weekend, they don't know how to answer in Basque, and they say, "Can I speak in Spanish?" (Nekane, teacher)

The feeling of a limited proficiency in Basque increases the fear of making mistakes when speaking in a social context. As a result, this leads to a students' avoidance behaviour for using the language to communicate with other people. Ibon describes such feeling as follows:

[I feel shame] to say something awful, on the street. Imagine if you say something that is very badly formulated and the person in front of you looks very strangely and he or she says, "what did he say?". (Ibon, boy, 15 years)

Resistances towards using Basque

Basque is for the students the language of the school and their main language of instruction. However, it is not the language in which they live beyond the school walls. In this sense, there is a mismatch that creates students' resistances towards the language. As one of the teachers highlights, students perceive Basque as an imposition rather than a choice:

Basque is for students a tool that they have been given for school, that they must use. They have been forced to use it; in many cases they feel that way. (Nekane, teacher)

The perception that Basque is something imposed, and compulsory has reinforced students' reluctance to use it. Moreover, students like Iker have experienced it as something troublesome:

I think the problem with Basque has always been that it was compulsory, and that has been always a trouble (...). I think that's a problem. (Iker, boy, 15 years)

The lack of motivation to use and the lack of understanding the target language emerge as resistances the students refer to speak Basque. This reduces student participation in the classroom discourse. According to Ander's experience:

Usually, I don't participate [in class]. (...) I think it could be because sometimes I don't understand anything or because I don't have any motivation... there are many reasons. (Ander, boy, 14 years)

Hence, Nekane, the teacher, points out students' negative affective comments alters their ability to cope with Basque, as she describes in her quote:

There are young people here who said in their presentation that they hated Basque. In other words, they hated it, they didn't want to use it, they didn't want to use it at all. (Nekane, teacher)

Changes in Attitudes towards Basque

The results obtained from the analysis show transformations in students' attitudes towards Basque. These changes have occurred specifically around two specific axes: (1) confidence in their Basque language competence, and (2) increasing Basque language use in other contexts.

Increasing students' self-confidence and improving fluency

Both teachers and students reported an increase in students' confidence in themselves to speak Basque. The participant teachers in their interviews highlighted this as a relevant change, and related it with students' participation in the DLGs:

Since they started to participate in the DLGs, there has been an improvement in attitude [...] and in confidence too, in themselves. (Nekane, teacher)

In the DLGs they have seen that they are able to speak, to express ideas and feelings, where before they didn't think so. (Julen, teacher)

Since students have experienced productive dialogues in Basque during the DLGs, they affirm to be more confident to choose Basque as the language to communicate with others, for example, with the teachers. This shows a change in some of the barriers the teachers reported before the DLGs. As discussed above, when they asked ordinary questions in Basque, the students felt unqualified to reply in the very language. After participating in DLGs, Alaia expresses less fear of speaking in Basque:

That's it... less fear of speaking. (...) I've felt it [more confidence to speak in Basque] when asking him [Basque language teacher] something outside [DLG sessions], in a usual class or in the corridor. I went to ask or to show him something I've done and before, I was more afraid to speak in Basque with him. (Alaia, girl, 15 years)

Students are aware they have improved their communicative competence in Basque, particularly they feel they are now more fluent than before. Ana, one of the students states she has realised Basque sometimes appears in her inner speech. This can be explained as part of the social process of learning, from the social plane, in the DLGs, to the individual plane when she is talking with herself. She explains this can occur because they have become more fluent in Basque:

Yes, (...) it often happens to me and sometimes I'm surprised and I say, "what am I doing thinking in Basque?" I think it could be because we think we're more fluent than before, and we're more fluent. So, it becomes easier for us. (Ana, girl, 15 years)

This is consistent with Unai's experience who reported an increase in the use of Basque during the DLGs and, consequently, an improvement in his communicative competence and in all the students in the classroom:

In (other) classes we don't speak Basque and here (in DLGs) we are improving our level. It's easier than in class. For me now people speak better Basque. (Unai, boy, 15 years)

Increasing the use of Basque in other school contexts and beyond

As a result, the increase in self-confidence has encouraged some of the students to use Basque more frequently in other spaces in the school and out of the school context. Indeed, many of them agree they have experienced that change, and now they do not switch to Spanish as they used to. The experience of Ibon using Basque, for example, in History classes illustrates this:

Yes, we use it (Basque) more frequently. For example, before gatherings in History class, you start to ask a question and you're formulating it in Basque. But then, you just don't know how to finish it, basically, and you switch to Spanish. I think that after the gatherings, we managed to finish those questions or finish our opinions in Basque, and that was much better. (Ibon, boy, 15 years)

Similarly, Gorka, after the implementation of the DLGs, feels more willing to speak Basque in other subjects beyond the gatherings, which he did not use to do it before. This shows a transference of the communicative skills developed in the DLGs to other school contexts, such as Social Sciences or History subjects. He describes this process as “unconscious” and shows again the process of internalization discussed above, where he transfers to his inner speech the use of Basque, for example, when doing homework:

You're doing some Social Sciences or History [tasks] and you're thinking in Basque. Because the subject is in Basque, isn't it? And it's like a bit unconsciously (...) You feel more willing to speak in Basque, don't you? Well, you're alone at home, thinking, talking to yourself while you're doing your homework. (Gorka, boy, 15 years)

As a result, other students report they have started to use Basque in their daily life, where they did not use to, such as speaking with their families at home or in the street. Alaia and Ibon provide evidence of this change. As Alaia says, she has experienced that changed when talking to her mother:

I, for example, I often speak Basque with my mother. Nowadays, usually more than before. (Alaia, girl, 15 years)

In the case of Ibon, he has dared to speak Basque beyond the school context, overcoming some of the barriers he had experienced for many years. His personal experience illustrates this change:

I spend my summer holidays in a small town on the coast and they have a rather special or peculiar Basque. And so, ever since I was little, I've never dared to go to the sweet shop, or whatever, and start talking [in Basque]. But I feel more confidence to say "wow, what if I try it now? (Ibon, boy, 15 years)

DLGs Create Affordances for Changing Students' Attitudes

Since the participants have referred to the changes in their attitudes towards Basque because of their participation in DLGs, the features of this dialogic space have been analysed. The two main characteristics refer to DLGs as a: (1) dialogic space for learning through interaction and (2) interactions that enhance meaningful participation for sharing personal insights.

DLGs create affordances for dialogic interactions that encourage learning

DLGs create affordances for students to share their opinions, speak and interact among them in Basque. This dialogic space has transformed the traditional pattern present in many classrooms where teacher talk prevails. Indeed, students like Gorka, stated the DLGs gave them the opportunity to talk in Basque, which usually they did not have the chance to do it in the regular classroom. As he points out:

Yes, we have made some progress for sure. Because if we had not been in the gatherings, we wouldn't have spoken in Basque for so long and so often in the classroom. I think we would have ever done it. (Gorka, boy, 15 years)

One of the teachers, Nekane, echoes this students' perception about not giving them enough opportunities to communicate in Basque in the classrooms before starting the DLGs. Indeed, she notes that teenagers do not usually can have a space to articulate their own feelings or ideas. This is consistent with the students' statements the monologic classrooms they have been mostly exposed to:

They are young people who are too used to listen, and not used to speaking, conveying and bringing out what's inside them. So, this [Dialogic Literary Gathering] gives them the opportunity. (Nekane, teacher)

It is important to consider that if students are not given opportunities to co-construct new knowledge, lower demand in terms of cognitive effort arises. However, the DLGs allowed them to engage in cognitive challenging interactions where they had to make meaning of the text and share it with others, in Martín's words:

In the gathering, I would say using the language is a bit more difficult... because it is not just reading something. I mean, it is explaining it in your own words. (Martín, boy, 15 years)

This interactive space fosters the use of complex linguistic structures when the students share their ideas among them. Indeed, according to the teacher, the DLGs leads them to communicate in authentic scenarios where they put into practice linguistic concepts:

Because they can see a little about... "hey, the conditionals like that". And then they see that they have to use them, don't they? And there is a real use of them. In other words, there is a need to know certain concepts in order to be able to use them. (Julen, teacher)

Interactions that enhance meaningful participation for sharing personal insights

In the DLGs students shape the lesson themselves. There is not a teacher script or factual recall of the content, but the classroom discourse is co-constructed jointly by the students who participate and take an active role in the lessons. They share their own ideas previously selected from the book and provide their arguments for choosing them. This leads students to delve into topics that are relevant and meaningful for themselves. As Marta states, they can talk and guide the dialogue according to their preferences and motivations:

[I take part in the gatherings] because we talk about interesting things, and we never talk about those things in class. For example, if we are

in Basque, we do Basque: verbs... But we never have an hour to talk about whatever we want and about interesting things that we all like. (Marta, girl, 14 years)

Similarly, it is noteworthy that students consider DLGs a space to engage in profound conversations that go beyond academic issues. Indeed, Julen insists on that because the students have used Basque, that is their L2, to communicate feelings and emotions during the DLGs. He commented as follows:

Obviously, students feel more comfortable speaking in Spanish, but it does break the taboo that talking about emotional issues [in Basque] is impossible. (Julen, teacher)

Overall, DLGs make it possible for pupils to feel comfortable when interacting in Basque. The atmosphere within the gatherings helps to create an organic space, providing opportunities to involve pupils in natural daily communication that make sense for them. In Diego's words, after having done DLGs, they no longer perceive Basque as imposed, like they experienced before:

In a normal Basque lesson we tried to do a B1.1 [level oral exam], but we were very much forced to do it. It didn't come out easily. What we do in the gatherings comes out much better. [...] In the gatherings, Basque becomes a tool to transmit your ideas, it's not something imposed. (Diego, girl, 14 years)

Discussion

After exploring in which ways conducting DLGs in Basque might change secondary students' attitudes towards the language, our results indicate that the students have developed closer attitudinal ties with the Basque after reading and discussing "Oliver Twist" and "The Metamorphosis" during the DLGs.

Considering the three elements of the attitude construct: affective, cognitive, and behavioural within the tripartite model (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960), students have reported changes across these dimensions. First, they

have increased their interest in the language as part of the affective side. Second, students have improved their perception of ability or self-confidence as central mediating construct of achievement and improved their fluency and competence. Third, they have reported changes in their behaviour, using Basque beyond the classroom and the school.

Since several studies have previously concluded the significant relationship between language attitudes and language proficiency (Brown & Sachdev, 2009; Studer & Konstantinidou, 2015), our study might contribute to advance towards improving students' proficiency in Basque. On the one hand, after participating in the DLGs students perceived themselves as more fluent speakers in the language. On the other hand, they have started to understand Basque as a useful tool for communication. Thus, these two changes can contribute to foster language learning.

According to research, both personal and social factors affect attitudes towards languages (Albarracin & Shavitt, 2018; Marlow & Giles, 2010). So, in our study the socio-cultural context created in the DLGs have facilitated positive changes in language attitudes and learning. This is consistent with studies that have shown the influence of the educational context in attitudes towards language learning (Gardner et al., 2004; Mantle-Bromley, 1995). Indeed, interactive methodologies have previously demonstrated their benefits in contributing to this improvement (De Smet et al., 2019). Similarly, the DLGs have create affordances for meaningful interactions in a dialogic space (Wegerif, 2010). This occurs because the egalitarian dialogue that takes place in the DLG encourages students to reason and think together in a dynamic space where new voices are included and reflection is expanded to foster learning. (Wegerif & Major, 2019; Wegerif, 2015).

By implementing DLGs, a dialogue-based educational action students need to use language as a tool for making meaning of the text and of their own thoughts about the reading. When they get involved in this dialogic space, learners themselves co-construct knowledge through collective interactions about the book. Therefore, they share knowledge jointly first, before they internalise it through inner speech (Vygotsky, 1980, 1986), as observed in the results. As reported, during DLG, students engage actively in the dialogue most of the time, toppling the teacher domination of classroom talk, which still prevails (García-Carrión et al., 2020; Hargreaves & García-Carrión, 2016). This process of dialogue and co-construction and sharing knowledge

by dialogue is also essential to foster language learning (Donato, 1994; Swain & Lapkin, 2013).

Indeed, the DLGs have created affordances to broad students' exposure to the target language and increase their opportunities to share relevant ideas. This is consistent with previous research that has shown how students make sense of their learning process and improve their attitudes when they are more exposed to the language, such as in CLIL classrooms compared to traditional foreign languages classes (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2009).

Overall, our results are in line with previous research focused on DLGs and attitudes towards learning (Díez-Palomar et al., 2020), having expanded this research to the field of secondary students' attitudes towards language learning, particularly, towards Basque.

Conclusion

This study supports and extends existing knowledge on the potential of DLGs to have an impact on students' attitudes towards language. Our main interest to explore this impact in the case of the Basque language in secondary education has led us to show that DLGs have contributed to address some of the main challenges students face. Particularly, the study has demonstrated students have overcome some barriers related to their lack of confidence or lack of fluency in Basque. Moreover, they changed their perception of Basque as an imposed language used only in the academic environment. This also had a positive impact on their interest and motivation for the Basque language. Overall, the findings show how the dialogues that emerge in DLGs are a suitable tool for creating socio-cultural environments that overcome individual and collective difficulties and barriers. This is achieved by putting interactions at the core of the learning process during DLGs, creating affordances for dialogic and meaningful interactions that encourage learning.

Whereas this study has shed light on the impact of DLGs on attitudes towards language, several limitations must be acknowledged. The study has been developed with a relatively small sample and during one academic year. Attitudes are a complex construct that develop over time, so the constraints of having study a particular context in a limited amount of time, must be considered. Hence, the design of the study does not allow generalizing the results. Further research would address these limitations by collecting

quantitative data and including longitudinal studies with bigger samples over time.

Finally, this study seems to support the DLGs have played a role in transforming the secondary classroom in a positive context for using and valuing the Basque language. Whereas the results are hopeful, we need to further replicate this study to confirm (or refute) that statement. Anyhow, this has also implications for educational practice where teachers can find transformative pathways to organize their L2 classes for meaningful engagement of students in language learning.

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Maite Santiago-Garabieta University of Deusto, Spain
ORCID: 0000-0003-1149-829X

Rocío García-Carrión University of Deusto, Spain
ORCID: 0000-0002-5520-5105

Lourdes Villardón-Gallego University of Deusto, Spain
ORCID: 0000-0001-7011-2444

Contact Address: Unibertsitate Etorb., 24, 48007 Bilbao, Bizkaia