



Interaction in EFL Classes

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Abstract

It is generally accepted that classroom interaction can facilitate students' language development and communicative competence. The most common proposition of the role of classroom interaction is its contribution to language development simply by providing target language practice opportunities. However, this paper presents the new understanding of the role of classroom interaction drawing on the dialogical approach, which advocates to co-construct the learner's self and cognitive development.

Keywords: Classroom interaction, Collaborative dialogue, Negotiation, Co-construction

1. Introduction

In the field of language teaching over the last few decades, the view about what it is that enables classroom language learners to develop their command of a second or foreign language has been controversial. However, professional experience does lead us to believe that the effectiveness of classroom language learning has something to do with the nature of classroom interaction. Therefore, many language-teaching specialists attach much importance to it. Their works (for example: Allright, 1976, 1984a, 1984b; Breen and Candlin, 1980; Long, 1981; Selger, 1977, 1983; Swain, 1985) present important suggestions for learners' language development over the last few decades. This paper aims to discuss a new perspective of classroom interaction, which not only contributes to language development but also co-construction of learners' self and cognitive development. In terms of a dialogical approach based on Vygotsky's (1978) social cultural theory, learning is to awaken a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement. Therefore, classroom needs to reflect as closely as possible outside sociocultural and institutional realities, and classroom interaction involves the components of collaborative dialogue, negotiation and co-construction.

2. The components of classroom interaction

2.1 Collaborative Dialogue

Collaborative dialogue happens effectively between learner and learner or learner and assistant interaction. Vygotsky was more interested in the individual's potential level of development than his /her current level of development. Two individuals may be at the same level of actual development as determined by their test scores, for example, but may exhibit different levels of potential development as determined by their differing abilities to solve the same problem with a different degree of assistance from an adult (Johnson, 2004) Dialogic interaction is the result between learners and other members of their sociocultural world such as parents, teachers, coaches, and friends. According to Vygotsky's theory, learning is an integral activity of learner's self and adult guidance or collaboration with more capable peers. Therefore, collaborative dialogue is "a knowledge of building dialogue, in which language use and language learning can co-occur. It is language use mediating language learning. It is cognitive activity and it is social activity." (Swain, 2000: 97) Or it may be realized in the format of an everyday conversation. Classroom interaction should take the role as collaborative dialogues do for its significance in communicative language teaching. Furthermore, it also accelerates the development of SLA if the classroom settings play an effective role as social settings.

2.2 Negotiation

Ellis (1990) claims in Interaction Hypothesis that when L2 learners face communicative problems and they have the opportunity to negotiate solutions to them, they are able to acquire new language. Negotiated interaction is essential for input to become comprehensible. It turns counter to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which stresses that simplified input along with contextual support is the key for comprehensible input.

The notion of negotiation is generally defined as 'discussion to reach agreement'. According to Allright (1984), Interactive negotiation should be person-to-person communication since the conditions would be satisfactory. Whenever

a reader reads a text, which is analyzed silently, it involves three fundamental processes: interpretation, expression and negotiation --- or their various combinations. Negotiation is seen as a type of real-life language use that is relevant to the learning purposes of the learners. It is likely to be the case in the context of a course of 'business English' or 'English for diplomats', where 'negotiation' can be expected to be identified as a relevant target language skill for the learners to develop in the classroom through simulated negotiations. The L2 learners exchange their own real-life experiences through the mediation of a second language that helps them acquire the language itself in the meantime.

Negotiation plays a significant role in classroom interaction. While the L2 learners are given more chances to negotiate their problems in comprehension, more success will be gained. Through the peer negotiation the learners in interactive situations would learn and retain more L2 words. As Allright (1984) reports, the learners who negotiated the input achieved higher vocabulary acquisition scores in the immediate post test, and what is more important, they maintained this advantage over time. Therefore, negotiation should be seen as an aid to L2 comprehension and SLA. In classroom settings, the students' input is modified through negotiation, which does not always lead to their immediate comprehension of meaning but it makes them manipulate the form.

There are mainly two negotiated forms in classroom interaction: face-to-face peer negotiation and corrective feedback negotiation provided by the instructor. Some researchers may present three forms of negotiation, which includes self-negotiation. In this paper, self-negotiation is considered a type of self-regulation or construction since it requires the close cooperation between learners and learners, learners and teachers.

2.3 Co-construction

Co-construction is defined as "the joint creation of a form, interpretation, stance, action, activity, identity, institution, skill, ideology, emotion or other culturally-related meaning reality." (Jacoby & Ochs 1995:171) According to He and Young (1998), interactional competence involves the knowledge of language that is jointly co-created by all participants in interaction. All the participants have the responsibility to construct a successful and appropriate interaction for a given social context. Meaning is negotiated through face-to-face interaction and is jointly co-constructed in a locally bound social context.

In classroom interaction, the L2 learners construct the awareness of self-regulation gradually from dialogic interaction when they negotiate with peers and tutors. As Aljaafren and Lantolf (1994:470) claims, "The learner becomes more consistent in using the target structure correctly in all contexts. In most cases, the individual's use of the correct target form is automatized. Whenever aberrant performance does arise, however, noticing and correcting of errors does not require intervention from someone else. Thus, the individual is fully self-regulated". The ability of constructing second language acquisition develops through classroom interaction,

3. The significance and implications of classroom interaction

Classroom interaction is considered a productive teaching technique. According to Allright (1984), it is the process whereby classroom language learning is managed. In the language classroom the process of negotiation involved in interaction is itself to be identified with the process of language learning. As far as the writer is concerned, interaction facilitates not only language development but also learners' development. L2 learners acquire linguistic knowledge and ability through the interaction. In the classroom interaction, both the teachers and students can create the learning opportunities, which motivate the students' interest and potential to communicate with others.

Classroom interaction in the target language can now be seen as not just offering language practice, nor just learning opportunities, but as actually constructing the language development process itself. However, not all the forms of classroom interaction are equally productive for language development. For this reason, interaction must be seriously meaningful about matters of serious concern to the participants and therefore conducive to a serious attempt to communicate, not merely to simulate communication.

Thus, to organize an interactive and cultural classroom becomes very significant for SLA. There are many patterns of classroom interaction, such as group work, closed-ended teacher questioning, individual work, choral responses collaboration, teacher initiates and student answers, full-class interaction, self-access and so on. Among these patterns, pair or group work is considered the most interactive way. It does not only pay attention to the sociocultural and personal experience that guide students' behavior in the classroom, but also have three value systems of choice, freedom and equality. Sullivan (2000) claims that what is embedded in the notion of pair work or group work is the idea of choice because students have a choice of partners or groups; the idea of freedom because students in pairs or groups have a right to talk freely and are also free from the teacher's control; and the idea of equality because students in groups are equal, and the power of teacher within groups is also diminished or neutralized.

From the writer's point of view, in the interaction motivated by teacher-initiated questions, the teacher can use silence to encourage reflection. A reflective pause in the tutor's discourse tells students that "I am thinking about this and so should you." Pauses after teacher-initiated questions encourage students' responsibility. The teacher should resist the temptation to fill the silence or answer the question for them. In addition, there are some other techniques to simulate

interaction in the classroom, for example, arrange and use classroom space to encourage interaction by moving chairs and having students face each other. During lecture, the teacher can move to different parts of room, or teach from the back and have students write on the board. Consequently, to have the entire classroom interaction in a creative and friendly atmosphere will motivate the learners' interest, motives and comprehensible input.

4. Conclusion

Drawing on the discussion above, the learners' classroom environment should be viewed as an integral part of a broader sociocultural and institutional context. It should provide a context for drawing the learner's attention to different discursive practices. Furthermore, it should reflect the social reality that exists outside the classroom. The role of classroom interaction is mainly cooperative negotiation and co-constructive work for L2 learners to their language development and self-development. The cooperative work among students, teachers and researchers to explore the significance of classroom interaction will benefit SLA.

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