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## REVIEW ARTICLE

# ROLE OF INTERACTION IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

# Role of Interaction in Second Language Learning

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## OVERVIEW

Learning a language is an exploitation of the capacities of the mind to make sense of the environment. The private process takes place in the public contexts of the classroom. This internal process of language learning takes place as a result of the external interaction between the two participants- the teacher and the learner and the internal interaction between the learner's cognition and learning material. Interaction is a process in which the people or things have a reciprocal effect upon each other through their actions. Interaction may be between the teacher and the student, student and the student, teacher and the group and the student's schema or previous knowledge related to content and the new learning material. Effective classroom interaction leads to effective learning. Whatever pedagogic approach is taken it is the interaction in the classroom that mediates between teaching and learning. The teacher must engage in the sort of interaction, which will enable communication to take place and learning to occur. Flanders (1970) is of the opinion that "skills of interaction must be developed for developing one's own teaching behaviour and to improve the learning of the learner" (p.4). Thomas (1987) suggests, "The factors, which enter into interaction, should be subjected to careful and critical examination and their implications for pedagogic practice explored in the context of actual classrooms" (p.6).

Chaudron (1998) says that every pattern of interaction has an affective and a cognitive component. "To understand what goes on in the classroom, we have to take both components into consideration. The instructional exchanges between teachers and students provide the best opportunities for the learners to exercise the target language skills, to test out their hypotheses about the target language and to get useful feedback" (p. 10). By making interaction discourse the basic activity, the teacher provides variety of guidance and explanation that is likely to meet the needs of individual students.

According to Hitchcock (1927), language instruction is best accomplished if student is constantly placed in situations where s/he needs to communicate with others through writing or speaking in order to

accomplish his/her goal. DiPierto (1987) explains second language acquisition as an inherent ability in humans, which requires interaction with others through the target language in order to be activated (p.1010).

Interaction is viewed as significant because it is argued that (a) only through interaction can the learner decompose the target language structures and derive meaning from classroom events and (b) interaction gives learners the opportunity to incorporate target language structures into their own speech. (Scaffolding principle). The meaningfulness for learners of classroom events of any kind, whether thought of as interactive or not, will depend on the extent to which communication has been jointly constructed between the teacher and learners. (Allwright 1984, pp. 156-171; Breen 1985, pp. 135-158). Batters (1988) suggests, "The pupils' activity in the classroom or the extent to which they initiate or participate actively in classroom learning strategies, and the kind of communication in which they indulge, are the two crucial factors which influence pupils in their language learning" (p.3643). Hark Lou (1992) describes English language learning process as the interaction between: a) opportunities for language exposure and use of language in instructional activities and social encounters with classmates and b) student's learning preference which was in part attributable to previous learning and cultural experience.

Neilsen (1979), DiPierto (1987), Hawkins (1988), Chaudron (1988), Welch (1988) and Sotillo (1991) studied verbal interaction in second language classrooms and found that there is significant relationship between interaction in classroom and second language acquisition. But none of these studies consider the interaction between learner's cognition and the learning material or the use of strategies by learners to promote interaction. According to Vygotskyan (1978) model of learning, students are regulated by three factors - the object (the forms and structures of the target language), the teacher and others in the class and the learner himself. By engaging in interaction a balance of all three regulating forces is achieved. An argument favouring interaction hinges on a phenomenon known

as "scaffolding", which derives from cognitive psychology and first language acquisition research. In language studies scaffolding refers to the provision through conversation of linguistic structures that promotes a learner's recognition or production of those structures or associated forms. The importance of this concept is that in various conversational or other task related interaction, the 'Vertical discourse' - the sequence of turns taken with conversant aids learners in gradually incorporating portion of sentences, lexical items, sounds, etc., in meaningful ways rather than mechanical repetition or lengthy monologues. Hawkin's (1988) study focussing on scaffolded interaction concluded that the limited English proficient (LEP) children are capable of higher level of cognitive activity when they participated in scaffolded interaction. There is evidence that scaffolded interaction leads to independent problem solving on the part of LEP students. "Scaffolded interaction is more likely to be present when the situation is both cognitively and interactively demanding and such situation is more likely to obtain when there is a sincere reason for interaction" (p.753)

Wardhaugh (1969) states, "Teachers must stimulate the learners to use the language and encourage them to use the innate process of language acquisition that s/he has" (p.9). According to Eggen and Kauchak (1990), effective learning occurs when students are actively involved in organizing and finding relationships in the information they encounter, rather than being passive recipients of teacher delivered bodies of knowledge. This activity results in increased learning and retention of content and improved thinking skills. Teaching based on information processing theory in psychology views learners as active investigators of their environment (Wingfield and Brynes, 1981) This theory is grounded in the premise that people innately strive to make sense of the world around them. Strategies based on this theory require that learners become active participants in the learning process. Joyce and Weil (1990) state that the long-term goal of all information processing models is to teach students how to think effectively. They rest on the thesis that students learning more complex intellectual strategies will increase their ability to master information and concepts. Taken together they represent a full-blown "thinking-skill" programme: helping students learn information, develop hypotheses, and synthesize new ideas and solutions to problems (pp. 107-114). Through interaction, students can increase their language store as they listen to or read linguistic material. Rivers (1987) states. "The brain is dynamic, constantly relating what we have learned to what we are learning" (p.4). The give-and-take of message exchanges enables students to retrieve and interrelate a great deal of what they have encountered. So in a second language situation, both external and internal interaction becomes essential to learn the new language. In this study, the investigator attempts to develop a model, which makes use of both the external and internal interaction mentioned above.

## LEARNING STRATEGIES IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Effective pedagogic interaction, which promotes effective language learning, is possible through the use of strategies. Learning strategies are cognitive operations that the learners apply while in classrooms or other learning situations, Duffy & Rochler (1987) explain strategies as "skills that are used intentionally in order to promote the understanding of text in natural reading situations" (p. 40). Strategies involve a learning plan to be used with flexibility and it also involves the skill use, with the added dimension of conditional knowledge. Hayes (1991) suggests that in order to provide children with effective programmes, "teacher needs to be aware of the effective strategies available to them for teaching reading" (p. 10). Flanders (1970) also favours the use of specific strategies, which facilitate higher cognitive processes for pupils in order to improve the learning process. According to him, in order to "increase the initiative of pupil in thinking, a teacher should facilitate such pupil behaviour by helping them form the cognitive skills" (p.4).

The studies in the field of strategies can be categorized into two. There are studies dealing with identification of strategies and those involving strategy instruction in language learning situations. One of the earliest pieces of research to enquire what learners actually did when asked to perform in class was carried out by Hosenfeld in early 1970s. Hosenfeld (1976) conducted semi-structured interviews with students learning French in New York. The answers revealed a widespread use of sensible strategies by students. Hosenfeld's study was conducted with individual students, not sitting in a class at the time and was not able to observe these strategies in operation in real classes.

Naimoi, Frohlich, Stern and Todesco (1978) in their research efforts concentrating on the characteristics of effective learning observed students and identified strategies reported by students. These efforts show that students make use of learning strategies while learning a second language and these strategies can be described and classified.

In an attempt to investigate a more theoretically motivated set of learning strategies, Bialystok and Frohlich (1978) administered a questionnaire to high school foreign language learners, asking for their use of specific learning strategies - practicing, inferencing and monitoring. But they did not report which strategies had the strongest relationship to achievement.

A study by Cohen and Aphek (1981) attempted to observe and intervene, to find out what the learners could tell them just after something had happened in the class. But such an intrusive research presence certainly could be expected to have reactive effects. Cohen and Aphek complicate their report by

distinguishing between good, neutral and bad communication strategies.

Politzer (1990) had 90 university students of second language French, Spanish and German who rated a variety of descriptions of learning behaviours on a 5-point scale by their perceptions of degree of use. He correlated these ratings with the learners' grade and teacher evaluation of learners' progress, effort and participation. The classroom behaviour scale items had the highest correlation with the evaluation ratings. Willing (1985) and his colleagues administered questionnaires to five hundred and seventeen adult immigrant English Second Language (ESL) learners. Thirty questions were asked to find out their preferences for general strategies of learning grammar and vocabulary.

McDonough (1995) in "Strategy and Skill in Learning a Foreign Language", attempts to layout what is known about strategies with reference to second language learning. A distinction is made between skill areas in terms of the familiar four skills and between process, skill and strategy. The various strategies for listening, speaking, reading, writing and test taking are also discussed separately (pp. 16-78). The rather weak findings for the influence of learner behaviour on learning outcomes reflect inadequate research on the topic. The study of classroom learning strategies is still in early stages of development O'Malley. Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper and Russo (1985) interviewed teachers and learners and observed classrooms in order to develop a classification of learner strategies. They grouped strategies into three types (a) metacognitive (b) cognitive and (c) socio-affective strategies and applied their analysis of students' learning strategies in a training experiment with 75 ESL high school students. The eight-day experiments provided an hour per day of instruction in different combinations of learning strategies for listening, speaking and vocabulary. The results were compared to find whether the students trained in all three types of strategy were superior to those with two types or none. The trend for development on listening tests administered during the training period was in favour of strategy training, but on posttests there was no significant difference. There was significant effect on the speaking posttests scores. Several factors, such as the short duration of the experiment and difficulty in some tasks, may have limited their findings.

Meiser's (1984) research in the composing process suggests that unskilled writers lack strategies and knowledge of the writing process. Thus by focusing on writing strategies and process awareness, instructors may find potential for meaningful intervention into the process. Analyses of the results of the study support the findings for a process approach (p.2018- A).

Vimaladevi (1986) identified the tasks involved in critical reading and developed a strategy that would

help students to perform the tasks involved in critical reading. A survey cum experimental design was adopted. The strategies that were designed and refined were tried on students for promoting critical reading ability. The four factors identified in the factor analysis revealed that critical reading skill was highly related to the four main abilities, namely interpretative, inferential, evaluative and creative Moore (1987) suggests peer-writing conferences as one strategy for implementing a writing process approach within the classroom. This study suggests that teachers will need to help young writers by expanding on peers' comments and providing alternative writing strategies.

Pereyra (1987) identified teacher behaviors, which promote achievement in reading comprehension. The findings showed that the three most significant variables related to student achievement were time during, literal recall and higher-level questions. Pereyra recommended that teachers should provide more independent reading time for all students and use more comprehension behaviour.

Williams (1988) investigated the effectiveness of a delayed speech interactive approach for English second language students. A delayed speech curriculum was evaluated quantitatively and qualitatively through quasi-experimental and participatory research. Williams found that a) meaningful listening leads to increased vocabulary development, b) vocabulary acquisition and comprehension are increased when instruction builds on student's own experiences, c) interactive learning activities promote greater recall of vocabulary and enhance comprehension, and d) multisensory activities facilitate language retention Carrel, Devine and Eskey (1988) relate theory, research and practice in "Interactive Approach to Second Language Reading". The interaction between top-down and bottom-up processes in second language reading is examined from the perspectives of theory, research and instruction. They clarify what the nature and role of background knowledge, topic of discourse, schemata and inferencing. At the same time importance of such factors as vocabulary recognition, syntactic recognition, text structure, as well as the contribution of language proficiency are examined. They outline an agenda both for further research as well as experimentation and designing of classroom materials and instructional strategies (pp.233- 60). Carrel, Devine and Eskey adopt an interactive view of reading, in which the reader, who taps the relevant schemata to reconstruct the meaning intended by the author, creates the meaning of the text. They propose teaching a number of comprehension strategies designed for non-native readers to become interactive readers. In discussing these classroom suggestions, comprehension strategies are classified into two groups: (a) those designed to teach students to make effective use of bottom-up processing mode and (b) those designed



to teach students make effective use of top-down processing mode (p.239) According to them, effective reading demands an effective interaction of both processing modes Although the suggestions made by Carrel, Devine and Eskey are based on theoretical, empirical and experimental research for the most part they have not been subjected to classroom-based, pedagogical research. "The list of strategies suggested for top-down and bottom up processing is by no means exhaustive" (p.240).

Richard and Patricia (1988) discuss the theory and practice in second language instruction and focus on ways of providing opportunities for meaningful interaction in language classrooms. They explore a variety of classroom teaching methods and activities, including: total physical response and the role of audio-motor units of commands, the natural language approach, use of jazz chants, music and poetry, story writing, role play, drama, games and affective activities.

Eggen and Kauchak (1990) discuss how the teacher can plan for individual lessons, incorporating the content of the lesson into previously established schemata. They describe how to construct advance organizers, structure content and plan for the use of progressive differentiation and integrative reconciliation in the lesson using Ausubel's interactive model. In addition to the teacher-student communication, there is the interaction of students with new content, plus the connections made in the activity between what students already know and the content to be learned. This model serves two purposes. It could be used to organize a lesson, unit, or course, and it serves to help learners form schemata by finding relationships among concepts and generalizations. Though the description of Ausubel's interactive model by Eggen and Kauchak stimulates the thinking about teaching in general and teaching procedure in particular, the effectiveness of the model is not supported by empirical studies. Moreover, the model is described with focus mainly on teaching procedure; and the role of pupils and their strategies are not emphasized. Circurrel (1991) describes an interactive approach to teaching French second language reading. The method emphasises involving the readers in the comprehension process and encouraging them to draw on prior learning to create hypotheses about the text's content. Bennet (1991) studied the effectiveness of varied interactive visuals on students' ability to achieve on tests measuring different educational objectives. The results were found to be supportive of the use of the generative strategies like interactive visuals. It encourages interaction and also facilitates information processing, thereby influencing the level of achievement.

Murray (1991) investigated if text-interactive instruction improved the reading comprehension and writing performance of students enrolled in developmental reading at a Florida community college. Text

interactive instruction supposes that the meaning and structure of a text are created from interaction among text, readers, teacher, peers and content. Prediction questions were used to help students to predict, infer, analyse and evaluate Results indicated that students' receiving text-interactive instruction improved significantly higher in writing performance.

Cook (1991) states that language learning is an active process involving background schemas. Both 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' processing are involved in the comprehension process. So strategies that promote both 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' processing should be made use of while learning a second language.

Scanlon, Gallego and Reyes (1992) in their article present, 'interactive semantic mapping' as an interactive instructional strategy developed from multiple theoretical basis to aid reading comprehension in students with learning disabilities. It involves students in predicting relationships among concepts and sharing knowledge to facilitate comprehension of text-related concepts.

Echevarria (1994) examined the effects of an interactive approach called 'institutional conversations' (IC) on the language and concept development of Hispanic students categorized as learning handicapped, by comparing traditional instruction (basal reading approach) with instructional conversations. For the IC lessons the teacher formulated her own questions to generate maximum discussion. The lessons were conducted with five limited English proficient students (ages 7-9) in Spanish Results indicated higher levels of discourse and greater participation with IC than with a basal approach. Overall results show trends suggesting that the discourse style of IC may provide linguistically rich learning opportunities for culturally diverse learning handicapped students.

Meiser (1984) and Moore (1987) focused on writing skill, while Vimaladevi (1986), Pereyra (1987), Carrel Devine and Eskey (1988), Circurrel (1991) and Scanlon, Gallego and Reyes (1992) focused on reading skill Murray (1991) studied the effect of text-interactive instruction on the reading comprehension and writing performance of the students. The review of literature shows a lack of integrated skill approach A learner can be said to have acquired a language only when he/she has mastered all the four language skills. There are very few studies on the effect of strategy instruction using an experimental approach that would isolate the independent effects of training. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) state, "there were no instances in which training in learning strategies in second language acquisition was performed in a natural classroom instructional setting"(p.7). Chaudron (1988) suggests, "there is a need for more controlled research on classroom learning strategies, especially in the form of experimental training of

learners to employ selected strategies, in order to determine learning effects"(p.1 16).

The few studies conducted in classroom settings lack typical class size groups. Most of the studies concentrated on isolated strategies, single sessions or simple tasks like vocabulary learning. And finally, very few studies have been done with students studying English as second language. Though Carrel, Devine and Eskey (1988) suggest a number of comprehension strategies to help non-interactive readers, she states that "these suggestions have not been subjected to classroom-based, pedagogical research and where they have been tested in classrooms, they have not been tested in wide varieties of pedagogical settings" (p.240). While the above- mentioned studies support the interactive approach and schema theory, they do not give us clear guidance on the best ways of accomplishing this teaching. As definitive pedagogical research is lacking, the best the classroom teachers can do is to experiment with a number of strategies that promote the learner's interaction with the 'earning environment to enhance achievement.

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