RESEARCH ARTICLE

INTERACTION APPROACH AND SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This article overviews the issue of interaction and its role in second language acquisition (SLA). The role of interaction in L2 learning and in second language classrooms has long been a controversial issue. The article first introduces some definitions of input and interaction hypothesis and then reviews the studies and researches concerning the interaction theory, its role in second language acquisition and its application in second language classrooms. Finally, a number of recommendations are presented to create the right kind of classroom interaction for the second language acquisition.

INTRODUCTION

The word interaction consists of two parts, the prefix 'inter', which implies togetherness, reciprocity, and the noun 'action'. So, interaction is a bilateral activity which requires at least the involvement of two persons and which causes mutual effect. Interaction is defined by Ellis as "the social behavior that occurs when one person communicates with another" (1999, p.1). He also states that it "can occur inside our minds,both when we engage in the kind of 'private speech' discussed by Vygotsky (1978) and more covertly, when different modules of the mind interact to construct an understanding of or a response to some phenomenon". Ellis focuses on interaction as an interpersonal and intrapersonal phenomenon, but Chapelle proposes that interaction can also occur "between person and computer" (2003, p.56). Chapelle offers a table where she synthesizes the basic types of interaction in the light of three different SLA theoretical perspectives discussed by Ellis (1999): interaction hypothesis (Hatch, 1978; Long, 1996), sociocultural theory (Lantolfand & Appel, 1994) and the depth of processing theory (Craik & Lock hart, 1972). We can add other benefits of interaction to Chapelle's table, such as identity construction and motivation.But no matter how many the benefits are, the fact is that as Lee *et al.* (2009) posed, it is a basic human instinct and it occurs in a multimodal way through oral and written media.

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Since the late 1970s, second language acquisition has been an independent research discipline. Sue Gass (1978) was the first one who studied second language acquisition. After that Gass & Selinker (1994), Pit Corder (1967) wrote about different issues of second language acquisition. But it was Mike Long in his ph.D thesis, input, interaction and second language acquisition (1980) who proposed that input and intake may be brought back together through interaction. Long's interaction hypothesis proposed that language acquisition is strongly facilitated by the use of the target language. Similarly to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, the Interaction Hypothesis claims that Comprehensible Input is important for language learning. In addition, it claims that the effectiveness of comprehensible input is greatly increased when learners have to negotiate for meaning (Ellis, Rod. 1997. pp.47-48). Interactions often result in learners receiving negative evidence (Richards, 2002 & Eliss, Rod. 1997). That is, if learners say something that their interlocutors do not understand, after negotiation the interlocutors may model the correct language form. In doing this, learners can receive feedback on their production and on grammar that they have not yet mastered (Eliss, Rod. 19997). The process of interaction may also result in learners receiving more input from their interlocutors than they would otherwise (Richards, 2002). Furthermore, if learners stop to clarify things that they do not understand, they may have more time to process the input they receive. This can lead to better understanding and possibly the acquisition of new language forms (Eliss, Rod, 1997). Finally, interactions may serve as a way of focusing learners' attention on a difference between their knowledge of target language and the reality of what they

are hearing; it may also focus their attention on a part of the target language of which they are not yet aware (Gass & Selinker, 2008).

Second Language Acquisition Theories on the Role of Interaction

Language acquisition theories have traditionally focused on 'nurture' and 'nature' distinction, advanced by social-interactionists and nativist camps respectively. Social-interactionists see language as a rule-governed cultural activity learned through interaction with others, while nativists perceive language ability as innate capacity to generate syntactically correct sentences. Interactionists, in other words, believe in environmental factors as more dominant ones in language acquisition, while nativists believe in inborn factors as more dominant ones. Vygotsky is a pioneer in writing about interactional views of language acquisition. According to him social interaction plays a salient role in the learning process. He proposed the Zone of Proximal development (ZPD), where learners construct the new language through socially mediated interaction (Brown 2000, p.287).

Nativists such as Krashen, on the other hand, assume that natural internal mechanisms operate upon comprehensible input which leads to language competence. That is evident in Krashen's input hypothesis of second language acquisition. Although Vygotsky and Krashen can be categorized into distinct positions, the application of their theories to second language teaching shares a number of similarities. According to Krashen's input hypothesis, language acquisition takes place during human interaction in the target language environment. The learner is then exposed to rich comprehensible input in the target language. However, in order for acquisition to take place, the input would need to be slightly beyond the learner's current level of linguistic competence. Both Krashen and Vygotsky put great emphasis on the role of interaction in second language acquisition. Long is also an interactionist who believes in the importance of comprehensible input as a major factor in second language acquisition; however, he also believes that interactive input is more important than non-interactive input. In addition, Long stresses the significance of interactional modifications which occur in the negotiating meaning when communication problems arise (Ellis, 1994). There's a major distinction between interactionist and nativist theories of second language acquisition.Nativists such as Krashen emphasizes comprehensible target language input which is one-way input but, interactionists acknowledge the importance of two-way communication in the target language (Ariza & Hancock, 2003).

Input and Interaction hypothesis

Long (1983) defines input as "the linguistic forms (morphemes, words, utterances) – the streams of speech in the air-directed at the non-native speaker" (p.127), where as "the analysis of interaction means describing the functions of those forms in (conversational) discourse" (Long, 1983, p.127). The input and interaction hypothesis combines an argument regarding the importance of comprehension to second language acquisition (Krashen's input hypothesis) and an argument for the value of modifications to discourse structure for learner comprehension (Long's interaction hypothesis). The interaction hypothesis states that interaction facilitates second language acquisition because conversational and

linguistic modifications that occur in discourse provide learners with necessary comprehensible linguistic input. This approach is credited to Long (1996), who searched for a way to bring together two major approaches in second language acquisition: Hatch (1978) recognized the importance of conversation on the development of grammar. Krashen's (1985) input hypothesis is a cognitive theory that stresses the importance of linguistic input in the target language that is slightly more advanced than what the learner has mastery of. The current state of learner's rule-based linguistic knowledge is designated as 'I' while the slightly more advanced input is 'i + 1'. Krashen sees the relevance of social contextual factors as conversational gambits in securing more input for the learner, which eventually relate to the notion of an affective filter that is said to determine what input gets through to the brain's central language acquisition mechanism (Allwright, 1995).

Concerning comprehensibility of input, Long believes that what makes input comprehensible is modification or negotiation of meaning. In Krashen's input hypothesis, comprehensible input itself remains the main causal variable, while Long claims that a crucial element in the language acquisition process is the modified input that learners are exposed to and the way in which other speakers interact in conversations with learners (Lightbown & Spada, 1993). Long (1983, cited in Gass, 2002) investigates conversations between a native speaker and non-native speaker and proposes his interaction hypothesis as follows: Negotiation for meaning, and especially negotiative work that triggers interactional adjustments by the native speakers or more competent interlocutor,facilitates acquisition because it connects input, internal learner capacities particularly selective attention,and output in productive ways (Cited in Gass, 2002, p.174). In other words, interactional adjustments make input comprehensible and comprehensible input promotes acquisition, thus interactional adjustments promote acquisition (Lightbown & Spada, 1993, p.30). Long believes that when meaning is negotiated, input comprehensibility is usually increased and learners lead to focus on salient linguistic features (Ariza & Hencock, 2003)". Carrel (2001) also summarizes Long's interaction hypothesis as follows: This feedback draws the learner's attention to mistakes between the input and the learner's output (p.291).

Lee *et al*. (2009) use the phrase 'interactional instinct' as something important for language acquisition when they say "crucial for language acquisition is what we'll call an "interactional instinct". This instinct is an innate drive among human infants to interact with conspecific caregivers. Ellis (1999) also sees interaction as "the primary purpose for our species-specific language capacity" and Tomasello (2003, p.2), reminds us that it "takes many years of daily interaction with mature language users for children to attain adult –like skills, which is a longer period of learning with more things to be learned- by many orders of magnitude- than is required of any other species on the planet".

Second Language Classroom Interaction

The importance of interaction for second language acquisition has been emphasized in applied linguistics. Hatch (1978) and Long (1996), for instance, consider that interaction is essential for second language acquisition. Hatch doesn't agree with the idea that learners first learn structures and then use them in discourse.She considers the reverse possibility, "one learns how to do conversation,one learns how to interact verbally,

and out of this interaction syntactic structures are developed (p.404). Based on an empirical study, Long (1981) observed that, in conversations between native and non-native speakers, there are more modifications in interaction than in the input provided by the native speakers. He doesn't reject the positive role of modified input, but claims that modifications in interactions are consistently found in successful second language acquisition. Long suggests that "negotiation for meaning 'especially negotiative work that triggers interactional adjustments by the native speaker or more competent interlocutor, facilitates acquisition because it connects input, internal learner capacities, particularly output in productive ways" (1996, p.451-2). Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991, p.266) argue that the interactionist views are more powerful than other theories "because they invoke both innate and environmental factors to explain language learning". It is also worth mentioning that the interactionist hypothesis conceives language not only as a set of syntactic structures but also a discourse.

Lots of works done in this connection emphasize the importance of interaction for second language acquisition. Kelly Hall (2000, p. 292) for example concludes that the works in her book offer persuasive findings on classroom interaction. He also explains that the role of interaction is not just a matter of gathering "individuals to work toward a common goal that leads to transformation" (2004, p.611). She adds that "Rather, it is the actual interactional relationships that are developed with the methods-the interactional procedures-by which talk is accomplished in these relationships creating the object of knowledge and at the same time, the tools by which that knowledge is known".

Recommendation

A number of recommendations are presented here to create the right kind of classroom interaction for second language acquisition (SLA): Classroom interaction is very necessary for SLA and it is one the teachers main responsibilities. Teachers are advised to create opportunities for students to receive input outside the classroom.In our opinion, we teachers can collaborate to enlarge our students' world by putting them in touch with learners or speakers in their environments via the internet. Teachers should vary their techniques technics to motivate learners and stimulate their interest which in turn encourages students' participation in class interactions. Planning meaningful activities for the learners not only makes the concepts tangible for them but also helps in lowering the learning affective filter. Direct and overt negative evaluation of learner's linguistic errors cause embarrassment and de-motivate their participation. Teachers should employ different patterns of interaction such as pair or group work to extend opportunities for output and lead to negotiation of meaning which accordingly enhance SLA. As a concluding statement, we invite teachers to encourage their students to abandon their classroom desks and explore other worlds full of interactional opportunities with the help of technology.

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