

## Research on Negotiated Interaction in EFL Classroom Teaching

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**Abstract.** In EFL learning environment, teacher's speech in shaping the students' belief and understanding of the subject has been widely accepted in many education communities. Interaction between the teacher and the students can create a natural setting for the acquisition of the target language. Through negotiated interaction, the teacher can make modification to satisfy the learners' cognitive level, push the learner to make more output and make contribution to the learners' language study.

### Introduction

In China, English, as a foreign language, is learned in the classroom setting, which differs from the natural target language environment. In the English as foreign language (EFL) learning environment, teacher talk is almost the only input available for the learners. The learners have few chances to speak English outside class. Therefore, teacher's speech in shaping the students' belief and understanding of the subject matter has been widely accepted in many education communities. Classroom setting shouldn't be ignored.

The way ideas are exchanged in the classroom is known to send overt and covert message, which needs classroom interaction between the teacher and the students. The active interaction between the students and the teacher can create a natural setting for the acquisition of the target language. Just as Karen E. Johnson(1985) verified that : the patterns of communication between the teacher and the students created the opportunities for students to use language for classroom learning and second language acquisition. The classroom as a language learning and acquisition environment has been recognized in the foreign language teaching. Classroom interaction has triggered greater interests of many researchers and educators. The interaction features have an effect on the quality and quantity of students' participation in the classroom. Classroom is the main place to acquire the basic communication skills for most foreign language learners. Only input is not enough and output is also required for the acquisition of the target language(Swain, 1983).

As to negotiated interaction, Boulima(1999) defined it as the interaction which violates the basic function of teaching exchange, namely IRF patterns. Negotiated interaction has a more complex structure. The present study only investigates the teacher's initiation of negotiation, which takes place after a student's response, in need of modification or further information, Besides that, in order to test whether or to what extent teacher's promotion is effective, student's immediate output, containing corresponding modification or further information, will also be investigated.

### Theoretical Framework

**Krashen's Comprehensible Input Hypothesis.** Krashen is the most influential figure in the field of second language learning research. The input hypothesis claims that humans acquire language in only one way by understanding message, or by receiving "comprehensible input"(Krashen, 1985:2). The input hypothesis attempts to explain the language learning through the structure of "i+1", "i" refers to the current level of linguistic competence. "1" refers to some item a little beyond the learners' cognitive level. "i+1" refers to the next stage along the natural order. It is a level a little higher beyond our current linguistic competence with the help of context, extra-linguistic

information, our knowledge of the world or previous linguistic competence.

In the language classroom, the teacher must provide the students with sufficient comprehensible input to ensure the acquisition of the target language.

**Long's Interaction Theory.** The Interaction Hypothesis (IH) mainly draws on the work which examines how native speakers repair breakdowns in communication. Michael Long (1980, 1983a) agreed with Krashen's opinion on the importance of comprehensible input, however, he emphasized the role of interactionally modified input. Long's view has been under serious criticism from many researchers(e.g. Krashen 1985; Sharkwood Smith 1986; Faerch and Kasper 1986). To address the criticism, Long (1996) updated IH, which emphasized that the role of negotiation is to facilitate the kinds of conscious "noticing ". The later version of IH seeks to account for how interactionally modified input contributes to acquisition by specifying the learner internal mechanisms that are involved. Interactionally modified input works for acquisition when it assists learners to notice linguistic forms in the input and the forms that are noticed lie within the learners' "processing capacity"

In the classroom, teachers who follow the new version of IH can use more interactional devices to assist comprehension and help students notice the "gap" between their interlanguage and the target language.

**Swain's Comprehensible Output Hypothesis.** Swain(1985) provides evidence of output. To ensure that native-speaker levels of grammatical accuracy are attained, learners need the opportunity for meaningful use of her linguistic resources. Theoretical interest in output is a source of language acquisition. For Swain, comprehensible output is needed in learning a language rather than comprehensible input. As she (1985:248) argues that "One learns to speak by speaking." In other words, only through producing output that is comprehensible to the interlocutors can learners acquire grammatical competence.

"Pushed output" is a term used by Swain to indicate the fact that faced with communicative failures, the learners are "pushed" to make the output more precise, more coherent and more appropriate. Swain(1993)later argued that an important component of the output hypothesis is pushed-output. Learners need to be pushed to make use of their resources and they need to have linguistic abilities stretched to their fullest.

Comprehensible output is necessary esp. in classroom interaction after the interlocutor or teacher has initiated negotiation. In order to respond the teacher, the learners have to make some adjustments. Hence the communication between the teacher and the students helps the acquisition of the target language.

**Social Interactionist Theories.** An influential interactionist view was the socialcultural theory of human mental processing held by the psychologist Lev Vygotsky. His theory assumes that all cognitive development, including language development, arises as a result of social interaction between individuals(Patsy M. Lighbown & Nina Spada:2002:44). It also holds that interaction between the learners and the interlocutors can create the best cognitive and affective environment for the learners' participation. Through participation by oneself, the learners can acquire the target language. Mediation is the key construct of Vygotsky's interaction theories. Mediation can take the form of conversational interaction which includes teachers' questions, teacher's feedbacks towards students, teacher's strategy to elicit more output, teacher's ability of topic management. The secret of effective learning lies in the nature of the social interaction between two or more people with different levels of skills and knowledge.

Vygotsky's most widely known concept is probably the notion of Zone of Proximal Development(ZPD), a terminology developed by Vygotsky(1978) to refer to the area of learners' potential development. Working together with another person who is more knowledgeable or more advanced in cognitive development is the best way to improve one's skills and knowledge. Teacher's help can activate learners' cognitive process and encourage their active participation in the learning process. The social interactionist theory, especially the concept of mediation emphasizes the teacher's role to help the students to learn a language better. Teacher talk is the main domain of the present research to enhance teacher's awareness.

## Research Methodology

The present study attempts to describe the main characteristics of the teacher-student interaction in the language classroom. Through the description of the interaction, we can know about the teacher's teaching styles. Through a four-step process of Recording-listening-transcribing-analyzing, the author analyzes the interaction features of the language classroom.

Step 1 record a complete lesson. The author tries to be present.

Step 2 listen to the tape carefully and identify the teacher's speech and the students' response

Step 3 transcribe a lesson

Step 4 analyze the tape and check the transcript.

Altogether 18 lessons (720 minutes) are audio-recorded, transcribed and analyzed

## Data Analysis and Findings

### The Distribution of Negotiated Interaction.

Table 1. The Distribution of Negotiated Interaction

T item	T 1 a	T1 b	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	T10	T11a	T11b	T12	T13	T14	T15	T16
TNN	16	7	9	8	13	10	10	5	17	5	8	2	0	0	0	4	3	1
TNI	37	24	37	38	57	34	30	33	35	13	26	34	55	18	47	41	47	39
PNI	43	29	24	21	23	29	33	15	49	38	31	6	0	0	0	10	6	3

Notes: TNN=total number of negotiation TNI=total number of interaction PNI=percentage of negotiated interaction

The above table tells us that different teachers use different number of negotiation in the classroom. The largest number of negotiation is 17 while three teachers never used negotiation in their classroom. Compared with the total number of interaction, the largest number is 49%. This result is in accordance with most of the previous relevant studies (like Pica & Doughty 1985, Pica & Long 1986, Zhou Xing & Zhou Yun 2002), which claim that less negotiation in instructional classroom settings than found in natural conversational settings(cited from Qian Weiwei, 2005).

**Negotiation and Learners' Immediate Output.** It is necessary to evaluate the learner's immediate output modified or pushed by the teacher. Teachers pushed the students to make output in classroom through negotiation. We can see it from the following excerpt.

### Excerpt

In this excerpt, the teacher gives clues to the student to talk about Martin Luther King's dream in order to reach a deep understanding. The learner answers in 28 words. In Turn 6, the learner translates the model sentence in 30 words. The learner gives more output to meet the teacher's satisfaction. Such meaning-oriented negotiation may ultimately result in transmission of the intended knowledge.

1. T: Yes, *they still are not free. Don't have freedom. Ok, the second King dreamt the day when his four children .next.*
2. M15: *When his four children will live in the country where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.*  
(28 words in length)
3. T: Yes. Can you translate it?
4. M15: 就是, 我, 我, 马丁路德金他的愿望是有一天, 他的四个孩子能够生活在一个..只
5. T: 生活在一个国家里, 这个国家呢?
6. M15: 它不是由你的肤色来看待一个人, 而是通过他的品行来看待一个人。  
(30 words in length)
7. T: 人格魅力

Figure 1. Excerpt

**Negotiation Contributes Mutual Understanding and Information Acquiring.** We can see this point from the following examples.

1. T: *Anything else? What can we do with peanut?*
2. T: *Eat, eat in what way? ...*
3. T: *Do you know?*
4. SSS: *Fried.*
5. T: *What? Fried, fried peanut. And we also have...what 's this?*
6. SSS: *Butter.*
7. T: *Butter, what is butter? Butter?*
8. SSS: 黄油
9. T: *Butter, we may have peanut butter, peanut butter.*
0. SSS: 花生油
1. T: *Yeah,花生油? peanut oil is 花生油. Peanut butter, what? 花生酱, yeah, 花生酱. So we can make peanut oil, peanut butter and also we can fry them, cook them, and eat them. So do you think peanut is very important?*

Figure 2. Negotiation Contributes Mutual Understanding and Information Acquiring

In this excerpt, the teacher presents peanut, and then he pushes the students to use their general knowledge to blurt out the cooking method. In the students' knowledge repertoire, they know the general usage of peanuts and butter. The students not only gain understanding of the text, but also acquire more comprehensible input as they modify their language with the teacher's train of thought. In this way, the teacher provides additional information for the students, e.g. in the last turn of this excerpt, the students know peanut oil and peanut butter clearly. More input has been presented to the learners, which is in support of Krashen's Input Hypothesis.

#### **Ratio of T-Initiated and S-Initiated Negotiation.**

Table 2. Ratio of T-Initiated and S-Initiated Negotiation

T-initiated negotiation		S-initiated negotiation		Total	
79	100%	0	0%	79	100%

In the process of the classroom teaching, pupil-initiated negotiation is zero, which is not a surprising result. Perhaps this result reflects an asymmetrical power in classroom. Only when the learners want to clarify teacher's instruction of certain exercises will they initiate a negotiation. Here teacher's encouragement, patience and perseverance are more needed to elicit more students' negotiation.

## Conclusion and Suggestions

Teachers who use more negotiation can attain mutual understanding with the students. Besides that, the teacher can scaffold the students to acquire more comprehensible input and check learner's world knowledge and content understanding.

The present study shows that teachers should overcome the limitation of the traditional exchange structure of IRF. More group work and pair work should be used to encourage interaction in the classroom. Good interpersonal relationship can kick off the hurdles in communication, which guarantees transmission of knowledge and fostering of communication competence.

Still the present research has some limitations, e.g. small samples. I hope in the future research more teachers' classroom teaching can be analyzed.

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