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CLASSROOM INTERACTION AND LEARNING ENGLISH

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The article focuses on the problem of classroom interaction in the process of learning a foreign language. The concept of classroom interaction is analyzed and learning strategies are described.

The idea that classroom interaction should take place in the classroom is becoming more popular in the foreign language classroom. Studies have revealed that through classroom interaction knowledge is constructed and skills are developed. Therefore, students are supposed to be given opportunities to use language naturally rather than only remembering dialogues.

It is usually a mistake to plan a conversation into a lesson. Planned conversations usually degenerate into silence or involve only a small number of students. This is inevitable – if the topic is too general it will not excite interest, if it is too specific some students will be interested, and others not. The natural conversation outside the classroom is spontaneous and different people communicate in different ways. Some people are naturally talkative, while others are naturally quiet. For these reasons, it is unwise to expect similar contributions from all students in a classroom conversation. As far as possible, the features of natural conversation should be included in the classroom activity.

Classroom conversation will be most effective if it arises naturally and spontaneously from the text, an example, a remark made by a student or something which happens during the lesson. The noise of a heavy lorry passing the window is more likely to stimulate comment from the class than any discussion which you have decided in advance. Spontaneity is not a recommendation for classroom conversation, it is essential [1, p. 118].

In most face-to-face conversations people interact with each other and adapt what they are saying to the listener's reactions. Some situations, however, give one participant a more directive role than the others; one person can be the 'leader' who takes the initiative, the others are 'followers' who respond to it. For example, an interviewer has the right to guide the conversation and to ask questions that would be out of place in other situations. 'How old are you?' addressed to an adult is unthinkable except in an interview. In the classroom this overall 'leader' role falls to the teacher. The exchange of turns between listeners and speakers is under the teacher's overall guidance, overtly or covertly. So, not surprisingly, a teacher's talk makes up about 70 percent of classroom language [2, p.156].

A classroom exchange has three main moves: (a) *initiation* when the teacher takes the initiative by requiring something of the student, say through a question such as 'Can you tell me why you…?' The move starts off the exchange; the teacher acts as a leader; (b) *response* when it is the student who does whatever is required, answering the question. So the move responds to the teacher's initiation; the student acts as a follower; (c) *feedback* when the teacher does not go straight on to the next initiation but says whether the student is right or wrong. The teacher evaluates the student's behaviour and comments on it in a way that would be impossible outside the classroom. This three-move structure of initiation, response and feedback – or IRF as it is known – is very frequent in teaching [2, p.157].

It should be noted that even in lectures, teachers sometimes use feedback moves with comments such as, 'That was a good question.' Some styles of language teaching rely heavily on this classroom structure. IRF was, after all, the format of the classic language laboratory drill. Other styles of teaching, such as the communicative, may discourage it because it is restricted to classroom language rather than being generally applicable. In other words, the classroom seems as something artificial rather than being a real situation for its participants and teaching styles of interaction using IRF may interfere with ordinary communicative interaction.

The literature on teaching foreign languages presents several terms to refer to conversation in the classroom, but the two that have been widely used are *interaction* and *negotiation*. This term generally refers to conversational exchanges that arise when participants try to accommodate potential or actual problems of understanding, using strategies such as comprehension checks or clarification checks. Such an exercise is also perceived to promote the learners' processing capacity specifically by helping them with conscious noticing required to convert input into intake [3]. Characterizing such a definition of interaction as limited and limiting, it is beneficial to isolate three interrelated dimensions of interaction using Halliday's macrofunctions of language: textual, interpersonal, and ideational. In the context of classroom communication, we should talk about

interaction as a textual activity, interaction as an interpersonal activity, and interaction as an ideational activity [4, p.66].

If interaction as a textual activity focuses on formal concepts, and interaction as an interpersonal activity focuses on social context, then interaction as an ideational activity may be said to focus on ideological content. If the first enables learners to modify conversational signals, the second encourages them to initiate interactional topics, the third empowers them to construct their individual identity. If first measures quality of interaction in terms of gains in linguistic knowledge, the second measures it in terms of gains in sociocultural knowledge. The three types of interaction produce three types of discourse: (a) *interaction as a textual activity* produces instructional discourse resulting in better conversational understanding; (b) *interaction as an interpersonal activity* produces informational discourse resulting in superior social communication; and (c) *interaction as an ideational activity* produces ideological discourse resulting in greater sociopolitical consciousness. These three types of activities, however, should not be viewed as hierarchical, that is, they should not be associated with the traditional levels of proficiency – beginning, intermediate, and advanced. From a language-acquisitional point of view, they make it easier for learners of various levels to notice potential language input, and recognize syntactic-relationships embedded in the input, thereby maximizing their learning potential [3, p. 75].

Foreign language learning is aimed at educating a person who manages to communicate in all sorts of unlikely situations. Language learning is not an easy task. Therefore, both teachers and students should take responsibility for learning. The teachers should encourage the students to develop independence inside and outside the classroom. The students are able to assess how well they are doing themselves. Students can master a language in different ways. It is a well-known fact there are good language learners (GLLs) and not so good ones. There seem to exist six strategies shared by GLLs.

A GLL strategies include 6 steps: (1) finding a learning style that suits you: some GLLs supplement audio-lingual or communicative language teaching by reading grammar books at home, others seek out communicative encounters to help them compensate for a classroom with an academic emphasis; (2) involving yourself in the language learning process, e.g. listening to the news in the second language on the radio or going to see foreign films; (3) developing an awareness of language both as a system and as a communication process: GLLs do not treat language solely as communication or as academic knowledge, but as both; (4) paying constant attention to expanding your language knowledge, e.g. making guesses about things they do not know or checking whether they are right or wrong by comparing their speech with the new language they hear, etc.; (5) developing the second language as a separate system not relating everything to their first language; (6) taking into account the demands that learning a foreign language imposes: it is painful to expose yourself in the classroom by making foolish mistakes and a GLL perseveres in spite of these emotional handicaps [2, p. 114-115]. The most frequently used techniques by GLLs include having contact with native speakers; listening to the radio, TV, records, movies, commercials etc.; reading anything: magazines, newspapers, professional articles, comics, etc.; repeating aloud after teacher and/or native speaker; making up bilingual vocabulary charts and memorizing them; following the rules as given in grammar books or textbooks and having pen-pals.

Summing up, what the students are doing in a classroom may be quite different from the 'natural' ways of learning language they would experience in an uncontrolled situation. The classroom, at best, exploits this natural learning, and at worst puts barriers in its way. What happens in class has to be as 'natural' as possible. A teacher plays a big role in facilitating students' language learning. Teachers should not only provide students with a list of learning strategies, but also teach them in an appropriate way. It is particularly important to plunge themselves into the language, 'pushing' themselves into the foreign language as often as possible. Training students to use particular learning strategies indeed improves their language performance.

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