

INTERACTION IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Annotation: *The focus in this article is on the nature of classroom interaction and how teachers can influence the kind of interaction that occurs in their own classrooms. These issues will be explored through examining the teacher's action zone within the class, learners' interactional competence, learner's interactional styles, and the effects of grouping arrangements on classroom interaction.*

Key words: *action zone, Whole-class teaching, Interactional competence, classroom interaction, individual and collaborative work, Learner interactional patterns;*

ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЕ НА КЛАССЕ ВТОРОГО ЯЗЫКА

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Аннотация: *В этой статье основное внимание уделяется природе взаимодействия в классе и тому, как учителя могут влиять на тип взаимодействия, которое происходит в их собственных классах. Эти вопросы будут изучены путем изучения зоны действия учителя в классе, навыков*

взаимодействия учащихся, стилей взаимодействия учащихся и влияния организации групп на взаимодействие в классе.

Ключевые слова: *зона действия, общеклассное обучение, интерактивная компетенция, взаимодействие в классе, индивидуальная и совместная работа, паттерны взаимодействия учащихся;*

A common theme underlying different methods of language teaching is that second language learning is a highly interactive process. A great deal of time in teaching is devoted both to interaction between the teacher and the learners, and to interaction among the learners themselves. The quality of this interaction is thought to have a considerable influence on learning. [1] The focus in this article is on the nature of classroom interaction and how teachers can influence the kind of interaction that occurs in their own classrooms. These issues will be explored through examining the teacher's action zone within the class, learners' interactional competence, learner's interactional styles, and the effects of grouping arrangements on classroom interaction.

The teacher's action zone - The following notes were written by a teacher after teaching a lesson. Today I taught a lesson around a discussion on an environmental issue. The lesson went very well first; I introduced the topic by talking about environmental problems in our city and got students to give examples of the major environmental problems we face. This got lots of comments from the class and everybody had an opportunity to say something and express an opinion. After ten minutes I divided the students into small groups and asked them to come up with a solution to one of the problems we talked about.

During this time I moved around the class, monitoring the students' language use and giving feedback. After twenty minutes I got the group leaders to report their groups' recommendations and I wrote key points on the board. The following comments on the same lesson were written by an observer:

- ✓ When you were speaking to the whole class, the students in the middle front row seats answered most of your questions. When you moved around the class you spent much more time with some groups than with others.

These different perceptions of a lesson highlight the fact that despite a teacher's best intentions, teachers sometimes interact with some students in the class more frequently than others. Although teachers generally try to treat students fairly and give every student in the class an equal opportunity to participate in the lesson, it is often hard to avoid interacting with some students more than others. This creates what is referred to as the teacher's action zone. An action zone is indicated by:

- those students with whom the teacher regularly enters into eye contact;
- those students to whom the teacher addresses questions;
- and those students who are nominated to take an active part in the lesson.

These students are located within the teacher's action zone and are likely to participate more actively in a lesson than students who fall outside the action zone. In many classrooms, this zone includes the middle front row seats and the seats up the middle aisle. If a teacher is teaching from the front of the class, students seated there are more likely to have the opportunity to participate actively in the lesson because of their proximity to the teacher. [2]

However, teachers often have their own personal action zones. For example, a teacher may:

- ❖ look more often to the right hand side of the class than to the left;
- ❖ call on girls more often than boys;
- ❖ call on students of one ethnic background more often than those of another;
- ❖ call on students whose names are easy to remember;
- ❖ call on brighter students more often than others, or in a mainstream class containing students with limited English proficiency;
- ❖ tend to focus attention on the first language speakers in the classroom and to make relatively few demands on the others. [3]

A teacher's action zone as recorded by an observer who marked on a seating plan the number of times the teacher addressed the whole class and individual students in the class, as well as the number of times individual students interacted with the teacher. Although a teacher may feel that all the students in the class have an equal opportunity to participate in the lesson.

During this lesson, the teacher addressed the whole class nineteen times and interacted with only twelve of the twenty-two individuals. It also seems that the teacher overlooked the students sitting in the right and left rows, and had an action zone located in the center of the room. If active participation is important in learning, then those students not within the teacher's action zone are at a disadvantage.

Interactional competence - While teachers need to be able to manage their interaction with the class in a way which allows all students equal opportunities to participate, learners also need to learn how they are expected to interact in the classroom. This has been described as a learner's interactional competence which involves learning particular patterns of interaction and behavior both vis-a-vis the other students in the class as well as with the teacher. Interactional competence includes several dimensions of classroom behavior. [4]

Knowing the etiquette of classroom interaction - Teachers establish their own rules for appropriate classroom behavior. For example, in some classrooms, when the teacher enters the room at the beginning of a lesson, students stand at attention, greet the teacher in unison, and sit down to wait for instructions. When they wish to ask a question, they raise their hand. When asked a question, they stand to give the answer. At the end of the lesson, they wait for the teacher to dismiss them before leaving the room. In other, less traditional classrooms, however, students are often engaged in classroom tasks before the teacher enters the room. If so, the teacher waits for a suitable moment to introduce a new teaching point. Students do not raise their hands when asking a question, but get the teacher's attention by calling out, "Excuse me." When students wish to leave their desk to consult another student, they do so without asking the teacher's permission. At the end of the lesson, students leave when they

have completed their assignments, without waiting for a formal dismissal from the teacher.

Knowing the rules for individual and collaborative work - Students also need to know when they should work individually on a task and when it is appropriate to seek other students' assistance or cooperation. Individual teachers establish their own rules and procedures for class work. However, when students are unclear as to what the teacher's rules are, they may behave in ways that the teacher finds inappropriate.

This is seen in the following comments by a teacher:

- ✓ Some of my students can be a problem because they like to get up and wander around the room when I ask them to do an assignment.
- ✓ They seem to be more interested in talking to other students about their assignments than in getting help from me.

While some teachers establish expectations and procedures for appropriate classroom behavior very early on with a new group of students, others do not make their expectations clear, which can lead to confusion on both the teacher's and the learners' parts.

Knowing when to ask and answer questions - Teachers generally expect learners to ask questions during a lesson, although the extent to which they encourage active student participation may differ from one teacher to another and from one culture to another.

On entering a new class, a priority for learners is to establish what their expected level of participation is and when and how they should interrupt the teacher to ask questions. Teachers may have their own preferences for when students should or should not ask questions. For example, some teachers prefer setting aside a particular question segment within a lesson, rather than allowing the flow of the lesson to be interrupted by questions. Other teachers prefer students to ask questions as they arise. Students may also have different expectations about how to answer questions from their teachers. In some cultures, students are expected to wait until called on and to answer only when they are sure of being right.

In language classrooms, however, students are generally expected to participate actively, since answering questions is often regarded as a way of practicing the language. Successful students seemed to be aware of when they needed help as well as how to get it.

Knowing appropriate rules for displaying knowledge - Although classrooms are places where students are expected to learn, there are rules which govern how one should display the result of what one has learned. Some teachers, particularly teachers from a Western culture, encourage learners to display what they have learned in front of their peers. When a teacher asks a question and a student in the class knows the answer, the teacher normally expects the student to answer the question. However, students from some cultures may feel that publicly displaying one's knowledge in this way would be seen by their peers as showing off; hence, they might avoid answering the question. Public display of knowledge, however, was found to be highly valued by some students in the reading class studied by Bondy. She found that public demonstration of the ability to read was a source of status for some students in the class. They made comments in front of other children which drew attention to the fact that they could read and successfully engage in reading activities. "Reading seemed to be an activity done for praise, reward, and public recognition".

The process of arriving at a shared understanding of the appropriate rules for displaying knowledge in a classroom is clearly an important issue for teachers and learners. It may take some time for teachers and students to discover what assumptions govern the other party's behavior.

Learner interactional patterns - The concept of interactional competence refers to the rules that students are expected to follow in order to participate appropriately in lessons. However, because of individual differences in learners' personalities and their individual cognitive styles, different patterns of interaction can often be observed among learners in any one class.

Good and Power describe six different interactional patterns. The first four of these can be seen to reflect how the four cognitive styles discussed in the article above, three can lead to particular patterns of classroom behavior. The last two interactional styles describe negative reactions to schooling and hence cannot be linked to the four cognitive styles discussed earlier.

Task-oriented students - These students are generally highly competent and successful in completing academic tasks. They enter into learning tasks actively and generally complete tasks with a high degree of accuracy. They enjoy school and learning. They seldom need a teacher's help, but if they feel they need it they do not hesitate to ask for it. They are cooperative students and create few discipline problems.

Phantom students - These students may not often be noticed or heard in the classroom, although they are generally good students who work steadily on classroom tasks. However, they participate actively in lessons only infrequently, and rarely initiate conversation or ask for help. Because they do not disrupt the class or other students, teachers and other students do not know them very well.

Dependent students - These students need the teacher's support and guidance to complete class tasks and tend not to maintain engagement on tasks without frequent reinforcement and support. They need structure and guidance in completing tasks and tend not to work well in large groups. They often depend on the teacher or other students to tell them if their learning has been successful and if not, how to remedy the problem.

Isolated students - These students set themselves apart from others and withdraw from classroom interactions. They may avoid learning situations by turning away from activities such as peer or group work. They show reluctance to sharing their work with others or allowing others to respond to it. Consequently they tend to be less proficient in completing learning tasks.

Alienated students - These students react against teaching and learning and are often hostile and aggressive. They create discipline problems and make it difficult for

those around them to work. They require close supervision, and their learning problems are often related to personal problems.

While classifications such as these capture some useful generalizations about student interaction patterns in the classroom, most systems of this kind are somewhat arbitrary, and students may not be classified easily in one category or another. They may favor one interactional style for one particular learning task and then adopt a different style for a different task, for example. The usefulness of classification systems such as this is simply to serve as a reminder that individual students may favor different interactional styles and that there is no single interactional style that can be regarded as ideal for all students.

Grouping arrangements - While learners may have individual preferences for the kind of interactional style they favor in the classroom, the interactional dynamics of a classroom are largely a product of choices the teacher makes about the learning arrangements he or she sets up within a lesson. Most teachers use the following learning arrangements depending on the kind of lesson they are teaching, though teachers use some more frequently than others.

Whole-class teaching - The teacher leads the whole class through a learning task. For example, the teacher conducts a class discussion of an article from a newspaper, asking questions about it and eliciting comments around the class.

Individual work - Each student in the class works individually on a task without interacting with peers or without public interaction with the teacher. For example, students complete a grammar exercise by going through a worksheet.

Pair work - Students work in pairs to complete a task.

Group work - Students work in groups on learning tasks.

Choosing grouping arrangements that are appropriate for specific learning tasks is an important decision. Some of the factors which affect grouping arrangements will now be considered.

Whole-class teaching - Research on teaching suggests that whole-class instructional methods are the most commonly used models in public school teaching,

particularly for the beginning of a lesson. In whole-class activities the teacher typically begins a lesson by reviewing prerequisite material, then introduces and develops new concepts or skills, then leads the group in a recitation or supervised practice or application activity, and then assigns seatwork or homework for students to do on their own.

The teacher may occasionally teach small groups rather than the whole class and may provide a degree of individualized instruction when "making the rounds" during individual seatwork times. [5]

Researchers of classroom interaction have developed observational systems to describe and classify patterns of student-teacher interaction in teacher-led whole-class activities. A well-known observation scheme developed for observing teacher-student interaction in mainstream classes uses seven categories for describing verbal exchanges:

Individual work, or "seatwork," is generally the second most frequently used teaching pattern in classrooms. It includes such activities as completing worksheets, reading a comprehension passage and answering questions, doing exercises from a text or workbook, and composition and essay writing. Among the advantages of individual work are:

- It provides learners with the opportunity to progress at their own speed and in their own way.
- It provides learners with opportunities to practice and apply skills they have learned.
- It enables teachers to assess student progress.
- It enables teachers to assign different activities to different learners based on individual abilities and needs.
- It can be used to prepare learners for an up-coming activity.

Among the disadvantages are:

- ✓ It provides little opportunity for interaction, both with the teacher and with other students.

- ✓ It is sometimes difficult to monitor what students are actually doing during individual work.

Pair work - Despite the need for whole-class teaching and individual work in language classrooms, it has often been emphasized that without other kinds of interaction, students are deprived of many useful and motivating opportunities for using and learning the new language. Various alternatives have been proposed which emphasize the use of pairs and small groups in the classroom.

Through interacting with other students in pairs or groups, students can be given the opportunity to draw on their linguistic resources in a nonthreatening situation and use them to complete different kinds of tasks. Indeed, it is through this kind of interaction that researchers believe many aspects of both linguistic and communicative competence are developed.

If you teach Classroom Actions through listening, you shouldn't give a test that requires the students to write out the classroom action commands. This is not authentic to how they will use English in the real world or classroom, and does not reflect what you taught. On the other hand, if you teach Folklore through reading exercises, a reading comprehension quiz on the stories you studied would be appropriate. [6]

In summary, to teach students for real communication, you should pay attention for choosing right content, suitable grammar themes and exercises.

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