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(TEFL)

Function of Negotiation in the Acquisition of Vocabulary by Iranian EFL Students

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Abstract

Negotiation is believed to play a key role in language learning in general and vocabulary learning in particular. The present study aimed at investigating the effect of types of instructions (negotiation, non-negotiation, or in isolation) on learning and recalling of new words by Iranian learners. Using a quasi-experimental research design, 39 EFL students of a secondary school were sampled and assigned into three experimental groups: the input plus negotiated group (IPN), the input without negotiated group (IWN), and the elaborative, un-instructed input group (EUI). The first group had the chance for negotiated interaction; the second one received the input without any negotiation with their instructor and the last group received elaborative input without any interaction with their instructor. The groups were rated on their degree of comprehension and the acquisition of vocabulary items. The results revealed that negotiation had a non-significant effect over non-negotiation tasks. However, the results indicated that negotiation was significantly effective against un-instruction input. Thus, in acquisition and retention of new vocabulary, IPN group was not significantly different than IWN group, but they outperformed those learners who didn`t have any interaction with their instructor to acquire new vocabularies (EUI).

Keywords: Vocabulary Acquisition, Acquisition of vocabulary, Negotiated Input , Premodified Input, Elaboration, Enhancement**.**

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Overview

The trend in SLA research has moved from linguistic properties to the learning process underlying L2 development, so interaction becomes important for L2 development; as Long(1980) stipulates: “Interaction implies the use and constant refinement of both linguistic and pragmatic knowledge”. In 1978, in the field of second language acquisition (SLA), Evelyn Hatch was one of the first researchers who brought a brand-new approach for the research of language learning and interaction. Hatch in her papers in1978 encouraged a reversal of assumptions on the nature of the learning process, as she urged researchers to turn their attention away from questions about how L2 structure learning led to the learner's communicative use of L2, and instead to examine how the learning of L2 structure evolved out of communicative use (as cited in "research on negotiation" by Pica).

In 1980, the work of Michael Long enriched and guided Hatch’s research all along. Michael Long in his ‘*Interaction Hypothesis*’ proposed that learners cannot solely listen to input, they must be instead, active conversational participants who collaborate to negotiate the meaning of the input they hear in order to acquire language. He also argued that SLA takes place through conversational interaction, unlike Krashen ‘*Input Hypothesis*’ which only claimed that just input is enough for learning. Long (1983) emphasized that input was not the only player in the process of acquisition; “what learners need is not necessarily simplification of the linguistic forms but rather an opportunity to interact with other speakers, working together to reach mutual comprehension.

Since then, over the years, many researchers have continued to take on Hatch and Long's work, by focusing on a specific type of interaction, which has become to be known as '*Negotiation*'. This term can help make input comprehensible to learners, help them modify their own output, and provide opportunities for them to access L2 form and meaning which brought pedagogical research into a new era. However, the need for greater insight into how negotiation is connected to learning outcomes and learners` memory is necessary.

1.2. Background

A major concern in vocabulary research is the inability of L2 learners to increase and enhance their knowledge of vocabulary in L2 classrooms because of the absence of adequate meaningful input, which subsequently makes learners mark difficulties in their overall academic performance (Swan, 2005). So, the important issue to be considered is about acquisition of vocabulary which is at the heart of language teaching in terms of organization of syllabuses, the evaluation of learner performance, and the provision of acquisition resources (Candlin, 1988). Everybody can understand that vocabulary acquisition is crucial to students' language skills which are reading, writing, and listening. Listening, reading comprehension, and writing would be inefficient without enough vocabulary possession. As also Wilson (1986) stated, "without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (p.7). As Azam puts it, "vocabulary is essential to language acquisition. Vocabulary in every person acts like his communication toolbox: every word is a tool, ready to be used at the right time. The more tools learners master, the better their chances of finding the right one for the communication task at hand" (2009,2). But having a huge stock of words is not the ultimate goal. Every time a learner learns a new word, he/she should

know how to remember the right word at the right time in order to have an effective communication.

Studying the history of SLA development in learning a new language also shows that SLA began its disciplinary studies by theories of Krashen in 1980. In his theory, which is known as the "*Input Hypothesis*", Krashen(1980) suggested that language acquisition is driven solely by "*Comprehensible Input*", which implies the 'acquired system' or 'acquisition' is the product of a subconscious process, very similar to the process children undergo when they acquire their first language. He also adds that, SLA requires meaningful interactions in the target language -natural communication- in which speakers is concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding. This hypothesis requires meaningful interaction in the target language - natural communication - in which speakers are concentrated not in the form of their utterances, but in the communicative act. Krashen in his hypothesis explains that input should be comprehensible (Krashen, 1985); to make this hypothesis more clear, we can look at Gass's (1997, p.81) explanation about this hypothesis: "in Krashen's opinion the input should be bit of that language that is heard or read and that contains slightly ahead of a learner's current state of grammatical knowledge". Krashen explains that without comprehensible input, the second language learner is left with a group of words that are perceived as incomprehensible noise and cannot be processed. Krashen believes that language structures that are way ahead of a learner's current knowledge are not useful. He also adds that a learner does not have the ability to do anything with those structures. Krashen (1985) suggests a learner's current state of knowledge as i and the next stage as i+1. So, the input a learner is exposed must be at the i+1 level in order to be of use in terms of acquisition. This opinion explains that without understanding, no learning can take place and only certain type of input is relevant (Gass, 1997).

The 1990s was a host of new theories to the field , such as Long's '*Interaction Hypothesis*' which claims that acquisition is facilitated when learners obtain comprehensible input and negotiation sequences have the potential to provide learners with opportunities to access linguistic data about what is acceptable and what is not acceptable in the target language. Long (1983) also believes that negotiated interaction is useful to direct learner's attention towards a mismatch between target language and his own interlanguage system. It is also assumed that through negotiation, learners receive additional input from their teachers (Tanaka, 1994). So, they will incorporate new items into their interlanguage system. So, negotiation plays an important role for learner and teacher to overcome the communicative difficulties which are likely to arise as a result of the learner's limited L2 resources. But how does interaction help such goals to be achieved? Long's (1981) '*Interaction Hypothesis'* seems to best describe interaction and its contribution to language learning. He (1996) has also argued that negotiation for meaning contributes to second language learning in a number of crucial ways. First, negotiation often provides learners with modified or more comprehensible input and also pushes learners to produce output that is comprehensible to their interlocutor. Furthermore, learners often reformulate or modify their non target-like utterances in response to interactional feedback moves such as clarification requests, confirmation checks, and recasts. This process of repairing communicating breakdowns often draws learners' attention to linguistic form, and may specifically trigger learners' "noticing" of mismatches between their own interlanguage and the target-like forms of their interlocutors. In his Interaction Hypothesis, Long (1996) proposed that negotiation for meaning, and especially negotiation work that triggers interactional adjustments by the NS or more competent interlocutor, facilitates acquisition because it connects input,

internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention, and output in productive ways (p. 452).

Interaction, as one of the main components of communicative classroom's activities, serves a two-fold purpose for language learners: achieving automaticity and receiving feedback which provides a means for hypotheses testing (Swain, 1995).Comparing the two mentioned hypotheses with each other, it could be construed that input hypothesis of Krashen views acquisition in a linear perspective , which not only establishes a cause and effect relationship between input and acquisition but also states that the grammatical structure is acquired in a predictable order and it could be seen that his theory does not go beyond the acquisition of grammatical structures. Krashen's model also lacks research evidence. As Cook (1993: 65) points out "it makes sense in its own terms but is not verifiable". "On the other hand the interaction hypothesis views language not only as a matter of syntactic structures but also as a matter of discourse; because they invoke both innate and environmental factors to explain language learning"(Menezes, 1995, p.34).

In consensuses with mentioned hypotheses empirical research done by Pica and associates (Pica, Holliday, Lewis & Morgenthaler, 1989) have also shown that learners can and do notice features of the target language when they are doing negotiation for meaning . The studies have reported immediate gains for new vocabulary and shown that learners perceive syntactic elements as units when they segment or manipulate them during the negotiation process. In addition, according to Long (1985, 1996) input can be made comprehensible through interactional adjustments. These are attempts by learners and their conversation partners to overcome comprehension difficulties so that incomprehensible or partly comprehensible input becomes comprehensible through meaning negotiation.

The trend in SLA research shows that the learning process has moved from linguistic properties to underlying L2 development, and this caused several new hypotheses to be put on test, hoping that researchers in this field can reach better ways to overcome the unpredicted problems; as Long (1991:227) states: “it is my contention that none of these attempts to explain SLA present a thorough explanation for the phenomenon. Like any other type of learning, language learning is not a linear process, and therefore cannot be deemed as predictable as many models of SLA have hypothesized it to be”. Countless theories have been developed to explain SLA, but most of such theories focus merely on the acquisition of syntactic structures, and ignore other important aspects. However, by looking at the emergence of these theories, one can realize that these theories have been moved towards the development of interaction between learners. Interaction hypothesis become important for L2 development because it implies the use and constant refinement of both linguistic and pragmatic knowledge.

The other issue in this field is the importance of conversation to second language acquisition which only recently has been the major focus of analysis (Long, 1980, 1981; Pica, 1986, 1987; Gass, 1985, 1989). An earlier view of acquisition held that learners learned grammatical rules and practiced them by conversational settings; classroom drills, classroom interactions in order to reinforce grammatical rules. As Gass (1997, p.104) puts it: “Within the current research studies, conversation is not only a medium of practice; it is also the means by which learning take place. In other words, conversational interaction in second language acquisition forms the basis for the development of syntax; it is not merely a forum of grammatical structures”. Through this development, now the role of conversational interaction or negotiation has been investigated.

Therefore, this study tries to examine the effects of different strategies on acquisition of vocabulary; how negotiation can be effective on long term memory while effective learning happens with the exchanges between learners and interlocutors, in order to assist learners "to check out the vocabulary" and to foreground background information (Hatch 1978, p.431).

1.3. Statement of the Problem

Vocabulary acquisition is not just memorizing abstract words (Long, 2008). Words should be put in long memory and they also should be accessible at the time of need which means communication. So, recalling and accessibility of acquired words are very important. As De la Fuente explains, much of SLA research has given its attention to an examination of the conditions that are necessary for acquisition, and factors that can facilitate opportunities for negotiation in learning a new language as a whole but limited attention has been given to the study of the relationship between negotiation and vocabulary acquisition (2001).

In this study acquiring new vocabularies through negotiation is emphasized which on theoretical bases, will evaluate previous theories about interaction. Previous ones were based on negotiation between native speakers and non- native speakers (NS-NNS). In this study negotiated interaction will be analyzed through instructor- student negotiations, both of which are non- native speakers (NNS-NNS) who due to having familiar background may understand the negotiation process better.

Based on practical part, previous studies paid attention to immediate impact of negotiation interaction as a facilitative way to acquire vocabulary but there is little done on the effect of types of instruction on effect of time on memory of learners. To help fill this gap with

respect to vocabulary acquisition, this study is designed to show the impact of vocabulary acquisition through negotiation on retention and long term memory.

1.4. Significance of the Study

1.4.1. Theoretical contribution

This study aims at investigating the effect of negotiation in the acquisition of vocabulary; specifically the effect of types of instructions (negotiation, non-negotiation, or in isolation) in acquiring new vocabulary items. The significance of the study on the theoretical part, tries to evaluate the Interactionists position, meaning how interaction creates condition to facilitate language acquisition and also the role of negotiation on facilitating the conscious “noticing” during learning vocabulary. Interactionists like Long(1996) and Ellis (1999) elaborate upon the notion of comprehensible input explaining that interaction, constructed via exchanges of comprehensible input and output, has at least an enhancing effect when meaning is negotiated and support structures are used. The results of previous studies also provide guidelines for restructuring interaction in the classroom to serve learners' needs for comprehensible input. These people also believe that learner internal mechanisms modification of interaction promotes language acquisition and development. However the part that was not investigated thoroughly was about the effect of interaction on the long term memory which this study tries to analyze this matter thoroughly.

Another issue in the process of SLA development is that most of the theories developed based on just considering the learner as a the only important part of the learning situation but Interactionists position tries to demonstrate that conversational adjustments such as confirmation checks and clarification requests which serves as a mechanism for NS modification of input can

aid comprehension in the L2. So in the theoretical part of this study, the emphasis is on the negotiated interaction which will be demonstrated its effect on comprehension.

1.4.2. Pedagogical and practical contribution

In terms of practical implications of the thesis for learners, this study tries to find out the degree that learners may benefit from negotiated activities; meaning how much classroom negotiation contributes to language development and can have effects on storing appropriately the negotiated input in long-term memory by providing target language practice opportunities. This study hopefully will help learners to become more skillful in the process of acquisition of a new language as well as more active participants. In addition, the effect of negotiation on teachers would be, finding out ways to create the suitable context for negotiation which promotes learning opportunities for a productive teaching technique. The material developers also may use the results of this thesis to design carefully classroom interaction activities which make learners become skilled at actually doing the things they have been taught about.

1.5. Research Questions and Hypotheses

For the purpose of the study, the following questions were formulated:

Question 1: Do groups with negotiation activities outperform the non- negotiated groups in acquisition of vocabulary.

Question 2: Do types of instruction have any effect on acquisition of L2 vocabulary?

To examine the above-mentioned questions, the following hypotheses were formulated: