A discussion about the implications of interaction in foreign language learning and teaching process

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the implications of interaction in the foreign language learning and teaching process. It aims at contributing to the discussion about the importance of interaction in and out of the classroom. Two perspectives and approaches were chosen to support the work on similar topics. The Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) is presented alongside Stephen Krashen's hypothesis and the Input Hypothesis. An Analysis and some observations are exposed to both papers. The concept of interaction and its relevance in learning foreign languages, followed by the importance of tasks in the interactional process will be addressed. Paiva's perspective (2018) and how she relates it to the classroom environment, and Jauregi et al.'s (2012) interactional analysis will also be presented. Lastly, the work considers the human-machine interaction and the digitalisation of language learning and teaching. Jauregi et al.'s research on the Second Life platform for interactions is also analysed along with the importance of blended learning. The analysis confirms the relevance of interaction in learning foreign languages. It is the essence of communication which is the primary function of languages.

KEYWORDS: Foreign language learning. Classroom interaction. Task-based Language Teaching.

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UMA DISCUSSÃO SOBRE AS IMPLICAÇÕES DA INTERAÇÃO NA APRENDIZAGEM DE LÍNGUAS ESTRANGEIRAS E NO PROCESSO DE ENSINO

RESUMO

Este artigo examina as implicações da interação no ensino e aprendizagem de línguas estrangeiras. O trabalho contribui com a discussão da importância da interação dentro e fora da sala de aula. Dois artigos sobre temas similares foram escolhidos para nortear o texto. O ensino de língua baseado em tarefas é apresentado com as hipóteses de Krashen, bem como a Hipótese de Insumo ou Modelo de Monitor (*Input Hypothesis*). Análises e observações são expostas e delineadas de ambos os artigos. O conceito de interação e sua relevância no aprendizado de línguas estrangeiras são apresentados, seguidos da importância de tarefas no processo interacional. A perspectiva do trabalho de Paiva e seu ponto de vista com relação ao ambiente em sala de aula serão apresentados, bem como seu nexo com a análise interacional de Jauregi *et al*. Por fim, o trabalho considera a interação entre seres humanos e máquina, e a digitalização do processo de aprendizado e ensino de línguas estrangeiras. A pesquisa de Jauregi *et al*. acerca da plataforma *Second Life* (Segunda Vida) também é analisada, assim como a importância do Ensino Híbrido (Blended Learning). A análise confirma a proeminência da interação no aprendizado em línguas estrangeiras, que é a essência da comunicação que é a função primária da linguagem.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Aprendizado de línguas estrangeiras. Interação em sala de aula. Ensino de língua baseado em tarefas. *Task-based Language Teaching*.

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the implications of interaction in foreign language learning and teaching. It aims at contributing to the discussion about the relevance of interaction in and out of the classroom.

In the first place, the work briefly presents and summarizes some supporting theories about Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) and its five concepts. Next, Stephen Krashen's theory is succinctly presented along with the Input Hypothesis. The second part of the paper outlines the analysis and observations of both works. The concept of interaction will be outlined, and its effect on learning foreign languages will be highlighted, followed by the relevance of tasks in the interactional process. The paper also analyses Paiva's perspective (2018) and how she relates it to the classroom environment, and its relevance and nexus to Jauregi et al.'s (2012) interaction analysis.

Lastly, it considers the human-machine interaction and the digitalization of language learning and teaching. The importance of Blended Learning will be discussed alongside the results of Jauregi et al.'s research on Second Life interactions. Here, a question arises: how relevant is interaction in learning foreign languages?

RELEVANT THEORY TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING

According to Richards and Rodgers (2014, p. 174), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is based on using tasks as the main engine in fostering communicative activities. TBLT is defined as 'an approach to language education in which students are given functional tasks that invite them to focus primarily on meaning exchange and use language for real-world, non--linguistic purposes.' Some precepts related to TBLT can guide our analysis. Richards and Rodgers (2014, p. 179) propose some of them:

a) The first concept is that 'language is primarily a means of making meaning'. It includes the objects, environments, and situations that human beings experience by using language;

b) The second precept is that 'language is a means of achieving real-world goals', implying that one does not use language in vain and always has a communicative purpose, the 'real-world' is crucial concerning the authenticity of tasks, communication, and choice of environment for interaction;

c) The third point is that 'lexical units are central in language use and language learning.' The role of vocabulary is pivotal because of its relevance in forming new lexical items and the production/making of sentences. Sustainability of ideas is feasible because of a broad lexical repertoire that influences the quality of the message to be transmitted and the possible desired effects on the interlocutor to be achieved;

d) The fourth idea is that 'spoken interaction is the central focus of language and the keystone of language acquisition', i.e., the conversation is essential to communication attempts while learning foreign languages;

e) The fifth point is that 'language use involves the integration of skills', that is, a holistic view of learning foreign languages, which implies the combination of various skills in different tasks, must be considered by teachers.

In short, communication must be motivated to create meaning authentically. The lexical acquisition has a pivotal role because having a diverse linguistic repertoire improves this communication quality. It is also essential to understand that skills are integrated, and this integration occurs through Speaking in interactions with other human beings. The next point presents an overview of crucial observations about Stephen Krashen's Hypothesis.

STEPHEN KRASHEN'S HYPOTHESIS ESSENTIALS

The theory and observations of Stephen Krashen are central to develop our analysis. Krashen's theory presents five hypotheses: the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, the Monitor Hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis, the Natural Order Hypothesis, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis.

Concerning the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, the acquisition is related to message understanding and creativity, acquired from daily tasks and experience with the language, whereas the formal learning requires mental effort, formal study, and grammar corrections and interventions. This distinction between acquisition and learning should be made clear to teaching professionals. Teachers will outline their educational goals and know the appropriate moment to emphasize certain aspects of their practice avoiding polarization to seek a balance, not treating the language dichotomously. It is not the aim of this work to be extensive regarding this topic.

The Monitor Hypothesis states that learning influences the essence of acquisition with constant policing by grammar rules. This inspection damages the students' self-esteem, which can sometimes hinder the production and acquisitions of foreign languages; the use becomes broken or unsatisfying with so many rules to memorize. Many students quit or abandon their language studies in fear of committing linguistic inadequacies. Despite this fact, people who master and know how to deal well with grammatical rules tend to benefit from learning.

To better explain the Acquisition Process, one can use the Input Hypothesis as an aid. The essential expression in this system is the Comprehensible Input which allows learners to understand what is said and, eventually, acquire the language, but always at a higher level from the student's initial knowledge (i+1). This input relates to the learner's progress

(SCHÜTZ, 2012). The same author states that the input requires context, media resources and body to assist learners in acquiring a foreign language that reinforces their learning experience.

The Natural Order Hypothesis states that 'The hypothesis that children are acquiring their first language, linguistic forms, rules, and items in a similar order. For example, in English children acquire progressive -ing, plural -s, and active sentences before they acquire third person –s on verbs, or passive sentences" (Richards and Schmidt, 2002). Krashen (1980) stated that no relevant difference regarding learning happens in the classroom and learners who are in an informal (outside formal school learning) context.

According to Krashen (1985), people acquire a second language if they are exposed to comprehensible input and if their affective filters are low enough to allow the input (instruction) 'in'. In Krashen's theory, "affect" may include anxiety, attitude, self-confidence, and motivation. These affective factors filtrate the amount of input (information) that students might be able to acquire (take in), *i.e.*, a raised affective filter can block input in the learning process. Consequently, a lower affective filter makes the input to be easily acquired. These factors seem to have an essential role in learning a foreign language (L2) rather than an L1 (first language).

The following section will analyze the articles selected, which are: *'La interacción, elemento clave en el processo de aprendizaje de E/LE.'*by Kristi Jauregi (2012) and *'Interaction and Second Language Acquisition: an Ecological Perspective'* by Vera Lúcia Menezes de Oliveira e Paiva (2018).

ANALYSIS AND OBSERVATIONS

Although there are various definitions for the word 'interaction', it is essential to observe how both authors define this word in their articles. However, it is relevant to contrast their definitions from two dictionaries. According to the electronic *dicionary.com*, 'Interaction' is: 'the reciprocal action, effect, or influence.' This definition is by the *Cambridge Dictionaries Online*, which defines 'Interaction' as: 'an occasion when two or more people or things communicate with or react to each other'.

Jauregi et al.'s (2012, p. 5) begin their paper by delineating the term "Interaction", she defines "Interaction" as "a type of communicative activity carried out by two or more participants who mutually influence themselves in an exchange of actions and verbal and nonverbal reactions." This definition is essential regarding the content of the entire article for dealing with the issue closely. Likewise, Paiva (2018) begins her article, defining what her concept of interaction is, she states it as a mutual activity that requires at least two people, which causes a mutual impact. The author cites the definition used by Ellis (1999) who sees interaction as the communication between two beings whereas Chapelle (2003) affirms that interaction can also happen between a machine and a human being, including machines in the interaction process, it becomes sensibly significant to our analysis.

Spoken interaction is the foundation of language acquisition. There is no acquisition without interaction between two entities, be it a human being or a machine. However, humans interact symbolically with images, books, audio materials, videos, *among other things*. The definitions presented only consider speaking interaction, verbal interaction, or digital interaction. Similarly, when students only study grammatical rules or have artificial contact with a language, they learn not as much as they expected. Thus, students may feel frustrated and demotivated in some cases.

Jauregi et al.'s (2012) use the definition they chose for the word "interaction" to contextualize it in the socio-constructivist scope. She mentions Vygotsky (1978) concerning interaction as a fundamental term in the process of language learning. According to Jauregi et al.'s (2012), not every interactive process can be considered positive since not every task is meaningful to the speakers. Not all human interactions take place in favorable environments to learning. The environment issue will be mentioned *a posteriori*. There is a mutual dependence concerning this interaction, ideological and social complicity.

The author mentions Krashen (1985) as for the ideal conditions for accomplishing tasks that foment the learning of foreign languages, this first premise is that the elements must be comprehensible and contain new or unknown items in a friendly and stimulating environment for learning. Besides, Jauregi et al.'s (2012) emphasizes that it is not only enough just having the input that conforms to these conditions, but also students should have the opportunity to experience genuine and authentic venues for interaction, the use of the target language is crucial in this process.

Similarly, Paiva (2018) states that, in the field of Applied Linguistics, interaction is relevant to research and regards Hatch (1979) and Long (1981) as scientists who have essential views on the topic of interaction. Long's position (1981) is the most relevant to our study since it states that the interaction between native and non-native speakers is beneficial because there is an input from the native speakers that encourage learning. By this statement, Long implies that there is a tendency for us to have (i+1) since the native speaker of a given language not knowing the learner's linguistic idiosyncrasies tends not to resort to the student's mother tongue for communication.

Even the interactions among learners with similar or the same proficiency level because each learner's cultural background may enrich the class. For instance, a student, whose language proficiency might not be evident, but a plane pilot, can contribute more effectively to a conversation about airport procedures and aircraft engineering than, perhaps, the teachers themselves for the mere reason of knowing technical terms. This scenario is common in classes that prepare students for specific tests, such as BEC (Business English Certificates), some students have more technical knowledge than the teachers; however, they might miss normative linguistic knowledge.

One of the critical points in Paiva's article (2018) is the reference to a joint work done by Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991, p. 266) which claims

that Interactionist Theories are more consistent because they combine features that are present naturally in human relations. They consider the environment in which interactions occur in the context of learning foreign languages, the famous Interaction Hypothesis.

Concisely, according to Hall (2011), the Interaction Hypothesis plays a fundamental role in the production process of comprehensible input; therefore, speakers make use of several strategies such as comprehension checks, confirmation checks, clarification requests, and repetition. Hence, the process of interaction takes place by students' efforts to negotiate the meaning in the interactions that result in language acquisition (ALLWRIGHT; BAILEY, 1991).

Regarding the Comprehensible output, the Input hypothesis is related to what is called 'Interaction Hypothesis'. The author states that part of the interaction that does not contribute to language acquisition is the speaker's output (the language acquirer). Furthermore, there is evidence that a robust version of the interaction hypothesis affirms it is necessary for language acquisition, but it is not correct. Then, this hypothesis would deny that acquisition could take place from listening and reading. Evidence shows that these skills can contribute to language development (ELLIS et al.,1994). According to Krashen (1998), the comprehensible output hypothesis has several disadvantages: the scarce contribution to linguistic competence, no robust evidence that CO leads to language acquisition, and some students might not enjoy speaking and might prefer to do so when they wish to.

At this point, it is perceptible that Paiva (2018) changes the focus of the article and examines the ecological view of interaction, which is one of the proposals of her paper, an essential reference made by the author is of Van Lier (2004) which states that actions happen everywhere, as well as the learning that is likely to happen in diverse contexts. Thus, the author compares human relations with ecological relations on a table with the name "Types of Interaction" Paiva (2018, p. 9) that illustrates Mutualism, in which both species benefit; Commensalism, in which one species benefits and the other is unaffected; Competition, in which both species are negatively affected; and Predation, in which one species benefits and the other is disadvantaged.

After this part, Paiva (2018, p.9) draws a parallel with the classroom environment:

> In a classroom interaction, we can also find similar types of interaction, Mutualism, when both partners benefit from interaction; Commensalism, when less proficient ones benefits from the interaction without no benefit for the most competent partners; Competition when the extroverts steal the floor from the shy ones; and Predation when mockery and bullying silence less proficient learners (PAIVA, 2018, p.9).

Similarly, in Jauregi et al.'s paper (2012), the author mentions Stotz (1991) about group interactions in the classroom and states that these interactions are more productive and express more speech acts, as there are more cases

of self-correction and correction by other individuals. Still, on the subject of interaction, Paiva (2019, p. 9) mentions the term 'mediated interaction' that is the relationship that only humans can have with mediatic resources such as letters, computers, telephones, and others resources. She states that 'language is our main communicative resource, it is necessary to learn other languages to interact within our native biome or in other biomes with which we have contact' (PAIVA, 2019, p. 9).

Nevertheless, more relevant to this paper, the human-machine interaction lies in the fact that the computers send messages or signals to decrease users' anxiety. To illustrate this relation, Paiva (2018) mentions the hourglass that conveys how long a download will be complete and an audible signal informs us that an error occurred in the operation we are doing. Another example is the screen in lifts that informs us on which floor the elevator is, some of them emit a computerised voice conveying the same message to visually impaired people. After introducing this issue, Paiva (2018) begins the subject of adequacy in second language teaching contexts discussing human beings' communicative naturalness that propitiates adult learners and children to acquire language.

In their work, Jauregi et al. (2012) mention several scholars (BYRAM, 1997; CHAPELLE, 2003; DOUGHTY; LONG, 2003; ELLIS, 2003; WILLIS, 1996) who write about the conditions that facilitate the tasks and list five characteristics related to activities. According to her, the tasks should foment knowledge to propose the student a multicultural and meaningful input in the target language. This input should be rich, comprehensible, proper, valid, adequate, and related to authentic linguistic interaction situations where there is a cultural and opinionative vacuum. This exchange of ideas and knowledge is crucial to learning and implies strong intercultural interaction, encouraging linguistic negotiation development.

Still on tasks, according to Jauregi et al.'s (2012), the activities must meet the students' very needs, and at the same time, be adequate to individual interests and collective characteristics of learners. As a third point, tasks should promote a positive impact and should be transformative. According to Jauregi et al.'s (2012), all tasks must have a clearly outlined goal to have the expected results. Finally, she claims that the tasks must be operational, *i.e.*, the educational institution must provide learners with appropriate facilities for the tasks to be performed successfully.

In similar terms, Paiva (2018) points out that one of the most significant failures in teaching foreign languages is the lack of classroom interaction, making the classes boring and uninteresting. The author reports learners' experiences who describe some opportunities they had outside the classroom to interact with other speakers of the target language that enriched their learning. We believe that not only equipped classrooms and linguistic laboratories should be provided to the students, but also communicative opportunities out of the classroom should be fomented by the institution, for instance: fairs, festivals, theatrical

(drama) presentations, trial simulations, fetes, among other events. All these initiatives are incredibly positive and allow the students to live and participate in this cultural exchange; the most profitable benefit for the learners is the effective use of the target language. Nevertheless, not every task meets the adequate prerequisites and depending on the group formation (NS-NNS/NNS-NNS)[2], one can have different results.

Even if the students received the input that was by the comprehensibility, as the students share the same mother tongue, there would be a lack of information, which will lead them to communicate using their mother tongue. Consequently, the target language is used artificially. For instance, the expansion of immersion courses has been observed over the past decades mainly focused on orality in English language teaching. Some with predatory practices focused only on accents' market and selling their nativeness (BLOMMAERT, 2009).

These institutions promise authentic environments; some even reproduce the buildings' architecture in Anglophone countries, and their staff only speak English. In some schools, they claim that the teachers are 100% native speakers. One of these schools is 'Little England' which is in Petrópolis-RJ, Brazil. Other centres are in São Paulo-SP (English Camp) and Campos dos Jordão-SP (Language Land), to name a few. Nevertheless, not everyone has the financial conditions to pay for an immersion course; however, there are other alternatives.

Jauregi et al.'s paper (2012) deals with the topic of digitalization. The authors affirm that it is an undeniable reality in the educational field and multiculturalism and multilingualism, especially in larger cities. The authors continue to write about Intercultural Communicative Competence by Byram (1997), the authors state that interculturalism is related to the learners' ability to have their perspective, but also understand the perspective of others, the aim is to add and implement a new identity level to that human being. One must understand their cultural background to understand other people's culture; therefore, it becomes easier to acquire a new language. It is challenging, if not impossible, to dissociate language and culture no matter how technically linguists approach a language.

Jauregi et al.'s paper (2012) also deals with digital interaction in learning a foreign language. It is safe to affirm that digital resources can assist teachers and learners in communication and interaction between foreign language students today. The approach and focus that the author proposes are on "blended learning" which is the combination of what schools usually teach, the possibility that students perform meaningful tasks by digital resources with more proficient or native speakers. The participants were college native speakers who studied language teaching in Jauregi et al.'s research (2012). The author states that including these resources that

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2. Native Speaker–Non-native Speaker (NS-NNS) / Non-native Speaker– Non-native Speaker (/NNS-NNS).

enable interaction with native speakers is intended to promote the tasks' authenticity focused on communicative adequacy. The author uses the digital platform' Adobe Connect', which provides communication between pairs and groups. Another venue is the 'Second Life', a three-dimensional platform that enables synchronous distance interaction by both text and voice, the difference from person-to-person interaction is that users cannot see with whom they are communicating they can see their avatars. The synchronous communication permits actions to be done by the characters to make body movements and interact in social settings like real humans. Jauregi et al. (2012) cite several other authors who claim that "Second Life" is turning into an increasingly important tool in learning a foreign language (MOLKA-DANIELSEN; DEUTSCHMANN, 2009; DEUTSCHMANN *et al.*, 2009; KURISKAK; LUKE, 2009; STEINKUEHLER, 2006; DIETERLE; CLARKE, 2009).

A common practice done by some schools that focus their work on orality will be described. At the beginning of the course, all students must choose a badge with the following information: name, profession, and the city/country where that character lives. From the first class until the last one, students must incorporate those features stated on the badge. Most students are very fond of this method because they are not themselves anymore; they are someone else. They can forget about being themselves during the class and learn the language easier since their affective filter is low. It is incredibly similar to having a 'Second Life'. Jauregi et al.'s (2012) mention the project NIFLAR (2009–2011), which stands for 'Networked Interaction in Foreign Languages and Research', the interaction of networks in the acquisition process. It presents the results of experiments analysed and collected from 400 participants who are students and student teachers from several countries. The author reports that the improvement in learning was observed by native students when the first and last interaction sessions were compared (JAUREGI *et al.*, 2010).

Nonetheless, some negative aspects were highlighted, such as technical problems in data transmission regarding the interaction and the positive impact. (JAUREGI; GRAAFF; BERG, 2011). The authors (2012) also show the data from a collaborative project between foreign languages students and poses three investigation conditions: the experimental group video communication; the 'Second Life' and a control group.

The observation consisted of analysing the oral tests before the project and the subsequent oral tests after the five interaction sessions. The groups were taught the same classes' contents with the same teacher; however, a control group performed the tasks in the room without a native speaker's presence. More communication in the experimental groups, more interaction for a more extended period, and more profound discussion subjectivity were themes. Hence, Jauregi et al.'s (2012) conclude that the conditions offered by video communication and 'Second Life' are excellent for the development of communication skills.

To conclude, Paiva (2018) states that she does not intend to belittle the importance of interaction in the classroom, but she emphasizes the importance of authentic interactions outside the school environment. She finishes the paper with a metaphor of the film Avatar inviting all teachers 'to empower students to abandon their classroom desks and explore other worlds full of interactional opportunities with the help of technology' (PAIVA, 2018, p. 12).

FINAL REMARKS

It is possible to return to check the proposed question in the introduction. The papers analysed indicate that interaction in the process of learning and teaching foreign languages is paramount. It is the essence of language communication that is the primary function of languages.

'Second Life', 'the avatar metaphor', and 'the use of badges' might be associated with a sentence by José Saramago (2016) in the Tale of the Unknown Island: '[...] you have to leave the island to see the island, that we cannot see ourselves unless we become free of ourselves.' This sentence can be interpreted in various ways, making a connection to our work, sometimes students must see themselves from another perspective, perhaps a less judgmental one. To be out of themselves to feel free to explore and play with the language naturally acquire it. Stephen Krashen wisely summaries a significant part of our work by stating that the best methods are, therefore, those which supply 'comprehensible input' in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students want to hear.

One could agree with the former statement; however, one could also agree that there is no such thing as 'the best method', there is the method that works for everyone. Each human being is different and comes from a diverse cultural background. It is possible to affirm that the best method is the one that can teach the target language effectively, without any passion or ideology. It is a question of taste, individuality, or temperament. Nevertheless, that is the beauty of studying languages; there might never be a definite answer to specific questions. Researches have to dare explore the endless quest for the most effective method to teach languages.

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