

## “Interaction” – Discussion and Implications on Language Teaching

Lien To Trinh<sup>(1)</sup>, Nguyen Van Nhan<sup>(2)</sup>

<sup>1</sup>(School of Foreign Languages, TraVinh University, Viet Nam)

<sup>2</sup>(School of Foreign Languages, TraVinh University, Viet Nam)

**ABSTRACT:**The ultimate goal of learning a language is to effectively communicate with other people who speak the same language with which you are studying. However, to do it successfully requires much effort from learners and especially teachers. This article reviews the ‘interaction’ teaching principle that could be applied to English instruction for communication skills. This principle puts an emphasis on the importance of interaction, mainly classroom interaction in teaching English for communication skills. This article claims that the interaction principle should be adopted in teaching English speaking skills to learners.

**Keywords:**communicative teaching, context, interaction, learners, principle.

### I. INTRODUCTION

How to teach a second language effectively is still a debatable issue. Through many decades, many attempts have been done in order to formulate a number of general principles for second language instruction. Many teaching methods have been found out in order to improve second language teaching. However, they have not been successful for learners because the objectives of the language learning have been changing with circumstances. Therefore, methods and approaches are not panacea for all teaching situations. They are not prescriptions that can treat a certain disease. In Stenhouse’s view, principles should be considered in the view of “Provisional specifications” (Stenhouse, 1975, as cited in Ellis, p. 248). That means principles are a kind of argument and reflection for teachers who need to employ the principles in an appropriate way. This review will discuss the adoption of the interaction principle along with barriers that is focused on communicative teaching.

### II. AN OVERVIEW ABOUT THE ROLE OF INTERACTION

The *interaction* principle mainly indicates that learners can develop their second language proficiency when they have opportunities to interact in the target language. It goes without saying that practice can make perfect. It is really helpful when learners have a chance to practice the language they are learning. Therefore, interaction is very important in second language learning and serves as a form of mediation, which enables learners to construct new forms and perform new functions collaboratively (Lantolf, 2000, as cited in Ellis, 2008, p. 4). Hatch (1978) claims that a person learns how to do conversation and he or she also learns how to interact verbally and out of the interaction syntactic structures will be developed (Hatch, 1978, as cited in Ellis, 2008, p. 4). From this view, Ellis (2008) believes that interaction does not only serve as a means of automatizing what learners already know but also help them acquire a new language. Long (1996) claims in the Interaction Hypothesis that when a communication problem occurs and learners participate in discussing for meaning, interaction promotes acquisition (Long, 1996, as cited in Ellis, 2008, p. 4). This can help learners have more opportunities to practice using the target language in oral communication, which improves their fluency and proficiency. Five principal requirements for interaction were identified in order to create an acquisition-rich classroom, which helps improve learners’ proficiency in the target language (Ellis, 1999; Johnson, 1995, as cited in Ellis, 2008, p. 5). The first one is that teachers should provide learners with contexts of language use where

learners have a reason to engage in the language. For this requirement, teachers can create different activities which support learners to perform their target language in different situations. Teachers, for example, give different scenarios in which learners have a chance to practice using the target language in real life. One thing that teachers should be careful is that the activities must be interesting for learners to be involved in. The second requirement is that learners are given opportunities to start topics and control the topic development. In so doing, they can feel comfortable and easy to use the target language to express their own thoughts. Teachers, for instance, give students some freely-controlled topics and ask them to work in pair or in group. This can help enhance students' confidence in oral communication, which furthers their language proficiency. In order to apply this principle, pair work and group work should be developed to create more opportunities.

**III. Implications of the *Interaction* principle on language teaching**

Traditional teaching, especially in Viet Nam lacks the interaction, even the teacher – learner interaction. In our teaching experiences in TraVinh University, Viet Nam, giving students or learners an opportunity to interact with each other practising speaking the language they are learning is beneficial to the teaching and learning instruction. In an interview with 30 students (who are learning General English), over 80% of the students state that they should have a chance to take part in any learning activity that requires the interaction with other members. They explain that they can remember the learned language if they are given an opportunity to speak the language with any member in the classroom. Interaction includes not only the teacher – learner interaction but also learner(s) – learner(s) interaction. However, in order to apply the principle successfully in teaching, teachers should study it carefully and try to apply it several times in classroom practice so that they can accumulate more experiences. Interaction in the classroom frequently includes *Teacher – learners, Teacher - learner/a group of learners, Learner-learner, and Learners-learners*(Dagarin, 2005). It is obvious that learners can develop their second language proficiency when they have opportunities to interact in the target language.

TEACHER CONTROLLED		
WHOLE CLASS ACTIVITIES		
A C C U R A C Y	<b>A</b> Drills Games Controlled conversation Listening Writing	<b>C</b> Conversation Discussion Simulation Games Story-telling Listening Writing
	<b>B</b> Exercises Controlled conversation Role play Games Questionnaires Listening Writing	<b>D</b> Discussion Games Role play Project work Listening Reading Writing
PAIR WORK ← → GROUP WORK		
LEARNER DIRECTED		
F L U E N C Y		

*A model for classroom interaction (Byrne, 1987, 106, as cited in Dagarin, 2005)*

The *interaction* principle will enhance learners' fluency and effectiveness in oral communication. Learners can develop their fluency and effectiveness in oral communication when they are provided with opportunities for active communicative interaction among them. First, teachers can give them some scenarios and ask them to

work in group. They, for instance, ask learners to role-play a TV talk show in which groups of three or four can participate in. One learner is the master of ceremony and the other two or three are the guest speakers. Learners role-play the TV talk show like a real one and the teacher observes and gives them feedback. This activity gives learners a chance to interact with each other and practice using the target language, which improves their fluency. In addition, teachers can give learners topics related to their interests and their jobs. For example, teachers give them the topic “what is an ideal job?” and ask learners to work in groups of four discussing the topic. In order to promote the effectiveness of group work, the teacher should assign one learner to be the group leader, one the secretary and the others participants. Each of them has to take turns expressing their opinions about the given topic. When learners finish taking turns sharing their views about the topic, teachers can call them to present their ideas in front of the class. Language learners are sometimes afraid of speaking in front of many people when learning a second language. They are afraid of making mistakes. Through the activity, learners can build their confidence when speaking in front of many people and improve their presentation skills. It means that learners can know how to communicate effectively with other people through the activity if they have opportunities to work in group and present in front of the class. It can be obvious that interaction among learners can improve their fluency and effectiveness in oral communication. Pica and Doughty (1985) found that interaction among students can enhance their development of second language fluency (Pica and Doughty, 1985, as cited in Hadley, 2000, p. 96). They also suggest that group work gives students an opportunity to hear some grammatical input and to receive feedback on how effectively they communicate. Paired work activities should be promoted in case teachers give some situations that learners can work in pair and role-play the conversation. Teachers, for instance, ask learners to work in pair to role-play a conversation between a customer and waiter in a restaurant in front of the class.

**In a local restaurant**

Waiter: Good evening, sir. What would you like?

Customer: Good evening. Can I have a menu?

.....

*A sample conversation designed by the authors*

Another activity is that the teacher can design a questionnaire and assign students to role-play the interview. This activity can help students practice asking and answering questions, thereby promoting stimulus-response process. One important thing is that the teacher should ask each student/learner to report what he/she collected through the questionnaire. Teachers try to check the language structures and give learners certain prompts in case they find it hard to express their ideas.

Names of interviewee	What is your name?	What do you like to do in your free time?	What activity do you NOT like to do in your free time? Why?

*A sample questionnaire designed by the authors*

This activity enhances learners to build up their fluency and proficiency in oral communication. Teachers should help them to check their language input to make sure that they can learn from their mistakes. In brief, interaction plays a major role in developing fluency and effectiveness in oral communication for second language adult learners.

#### **IV. Difficulties and Recommendations in the adoption of the *Interaction* principle in teaching practice**

##### **1. Difficulties**

Classroom interaction plays a vital role in teaching English for communication, especially in teaching speaking skills. Creating a language learning environment in which learners have as many opportunities to take part in each classroom activity as possible would encourage learners to learn and practise speaking the learned language effectively. However, a number of factors might have an impact on the adoption of the *interaction* principle. Jia (2013) revealed several factors which affect classroom interaction, as follows:

### **1.1 Teachers' beliefs**

According to Jia (2013), teachers' beliefs indicate that the teachers get the accumulation of experiences and they are not willing to change. This leads to the fact that teachers find it hard to make changes of their beliefs to the current situation of what is true in the classroom.

### **1.2 Teachers' questions**

In teaching English speaking skills, questions raised by the teachers should be comprehensible to learners. Therefore, depending on learners' proficiency levels, teachers should choose questions fitting different proficiency levels of learners. Also, questions should attract learners in terms of their interests and language levels.

### **1.3 Differences in language levels among students/learners**

Dealing with students of different levels in classroom may cause teachers a number of difficulties. The most difficult thing is to design activities or tasks that can meet all learners in the same class. Teachers can flexibly make changes or modifications to tasks or activities in each textbook as to create an opportunity for all learners to engage in each activity. It is recommended that there should be a placement test in order to put learners of the same level in each class.

### **1.4 Good and trusted relationship among teachers and students/learners**

Creating a friendly learning environment in the classroom is critical to encourage learners to actively engage in classroom activities. A good teacher-learners relationship can help to motivate learners to participate in all the activities that the teacher gives to learners. The teacher-learners relationship should be built on the mutual respect and trust so that learners can feel free to interact with the teachers and their peers in the classroom. Also, the teacher should be responsible, thoughtful and helpful inside and outside the classroom, which helps learners to promote their creativity. One more important thing is that the teacher should balance between giving either positive and negative compliments or feedbacks to learners.

### **1.5 Classroom Anxiety**

A number of factors can make learners feel anxious as they are required to engage in classroom activities. The first element can be learners' language levels, which cause learners difficulties in dealing with the teacher's tasks or task-related questions. Another factor is learners' cultural background. It is claimed that language and culture are interrelated and there are close relationships and impact among them. It is, therefore, several learners can feel difficult and reserved when expressing their own ideas with their teacher and peers.

## **2. Recommendations**

In order to effectively apply the Interaction principle in language teaching, Jia (2013) suggests a number of strategies to promote the role of classroom interaction, as follows:

### **2.1 Adopting appropriate questioning techniques**

It is believed that learners have different levels of language in the same class and they come from different cultural backgrounds. Thus, teachers are supposed to employ different strategies for questioning. Questioning techniques should be varied and simplified depending on language levels and cultural backgrounds of the learners. It is recommended that learners of lower levels should be encouraged to answer questions from the teacher and they should be given equal opportunities to build up their self-confidence and self-esteem.

### **2.2 Making adjustments up to language levels of learners**

The most important thing is that teachers should be careful when choosing the appropriate language in order to suit different learners of different levels in the classroom. It means that the teacher should use simple and easy language for low-level students and more complex language for high- and advanced-level learners.

### **2.3 Encouraging group-work activities**

In order to bring learners from different backgrounds and levels together, they should be involved in different group-work activities in which learners can develop social skills through the activities. Furthermore, learners have an opportunity to accept and value individual differences when they engage in different activities with their peers.

### **2.4 Building Positive Teacher-learner relationship**

Classroom atmosphere can be a positive way to encourage learners to take part in the activities given by the teacher. In order to get learners to be involved in each activity, a positive relationship between teachers and learners should be encouraged. The teacher should get to know his/her learners well and the more important

thing is to provide them with necessary support and give those feedbacks in need. Also, teachers and learners should show their mutual respect and responsibilities within their own roles.

### 2.5 Alleviating Classroom Nervousness

Mainly beginner learners or learners at the low level of language encounter difficulty expressing their ideas or opinion with the teacher or even with their peers in an English-speaking class. It is, therefore, the teacher's responsibility to create various activities that can meet personality types and cultural backgrounds of different learners. Another important thing is that the teacher should design activities to suit learners' interests and attempt to encourage learners to overcome their anxiety when participating in a number of classroom speaking activities.

In addition to the above recommendations, Gebhard (1998) suggests that all the activities in the classroom should be learner-centered, not teacher-centered. It means that the leading role of the teacher in the classroom should be reduced. Also, learners should be provided with many opportunities to express themselves in a significant and effective way.

Generally, in the adoption of the principle *interaction*, the teacher should be a facilitator of learning, which includes the following (Little Wood, 1981, 92 as cited in Dagarin, 2005):

- A language instructor, who presents new language, manages, gives feedback and corrects learners' performance.
- A consultant or adviser, who helps learners whenever they are in need of assistance.
- A general overseer of learning, who designs the activities which help learners to make gradual progress.
- A classroom manager, who adopts activities into lessons and manages them in the classroom.
- A 'co-communicator', who sometimes talks with the learners without taking their main role in each activity.

In teaching practice, no method or principle is the best; therefore, teachers should incorporate as many methods and principles as possible to make a friendly and effective learning environment for learners.

## V. Conclusion

This article reviews the role, difficulties and recommendations of *interaction* in language teaching, especially in the classroom context. Overall, interaction plays a crucial role in helping learners become better in their second language learning, specifically their fluency and effectiveness in oral communication. However, in order to apply this principle effectively, the teacher should be flexible with his/her role and be dependent on the teaching context, personality types and cultural backgrounds, and language levels of learners.

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