

Classroom Negotiation and Learner Participation

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It is believed that L2 classrooms in which there is negotiated interaction between students and teachers result in more language learning, because it produces the linguistic conditions for classroom learners to access comprehensible input and produce comprehensible output. The present study, using a three-fold model of negotiation, describes the features of teacher-student negotiated interaction in Chinese college English classrooms and asks whether the linguistic environment arising from the process of negotiation is favorable to learner participation. The study reveals that on the whole, the linguistic environment produced in the investigated classes is not favorable to language learning, but some modifications do facilitate students' interlanguage use.

Negotiation is defined as discussion aimed at reaching an agreement or settling an argument (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 1993). In L2 studies, the term is applied to the special characteristics of communication between speakers one or more of whom is speaking a second language. In SLA research, it can be interpreted as the process whereby speakers attempt to achieve mutual understanding, or generate more accurate L2 forms, or produce more information related to a certain topic (Long, 1985, 1996; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Rulon & McCreary, 1986; Van den Branden, 1997).

It is widely believed that negotiated interaction between teachers and students in L2 classrooms facilitates language acquisition. Negotiation is claimed to be responsible for linguistic conditions for classroom learners allowing them to access comprehensible input and to produce meaningful output and to progress toward greater comprehensibility (e.g., Long, 1983, 1985, 1987, 1996; Pilar, Mayo, & Pica, 2000; Swain, 1995, 1998). Because of its importance, negotiation in classroom learning has attracted much attention from researchers over the past two decades.

NEGOTIATION IN L2 CLASSROOMS: CONCEPTS AND ROLES

Three types of negotiations have been identified by researchers: negotiation of meaning, negotiation of form and negotiation of content (Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Rulon & McCreary, 1986; Van den Branden, 1997). Drawing on van Lier's (1988) distinction between conversational and didactic repair, Lyster and Ranta (1997) distinguished between two functions of negotiation: a conversational function and a didactic function. The conversational function involves negotiation of meaning and the didactic function involves negotiation of form.

Negotiation of meaning refers to communication in which interlocutors focus on resolving a communication problem in an attempt to achieve mutual understanding (Gass, 1997). It is opposed to communication in which there is a free-flowing exchange of ideas. Among a number of researchers, Long (e.g., 1985, 1996) notably began a series of studies that contribute to understanding the relationship between negotiation of meaning and learners' linguistic needs, which led to a theory known as Interaction Hypothesis (IH). The earlier version of IH, motivated by Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, suggests that conversational modifications serve a role in providing comprehensible input needed for successful L2 learning.

In contrast to negotiation of meaning, negotiation of form is not prompted

by non-comprehension, but by inappropriate or inaccurate language forms. In the negotiation of form, while mutual understanding is sustained, one interlocutor tries to “push” the other towards producing a formally more correct and or appropriate utterance (Van den Branden, 1997, p. 592). Therefore, negotiation of form is actually a type of corrective feedback, that is, indirect or covert correction of errors. As Lyster and Ranta (1997, p. 42) put it, negotiation of form serves as the provision of corrective feedback that encourages self-repair, leading to accuracy and precision. Van den Branden (1997) agrees distinguishing negotiation of form from overt corrections by the fact that it invites students’ active participation in repair.

Besides negotiation of meaning and negotiation of form, a third type, namely negotiation of content is identified by some researchers (Rulon & McCreary, 1986; Van den Branden, 1997). Van den Branden distinguished between negotiation of meaning and negotiation of form on the one hand and negotiation of content on the other hand. Negotiation of meaning and negotiation of form have in common that they refer to exchanges in which both interlocutors are dealing with the communication problem or language problem, without creating new information (Van den Branden, 1997, p. 592). By contrast, in negotiation of content, interlocutors’ main focus doesn’t lie on the communication problem or language problem, but elicits additional information to carry the conversation forward. For example, hearing “He didn’t attend the conference yesterday”, an interlocutor asks “why didn’t he attend it?” to elicit another response. According to Van den Branden, the response can be seen as negotiated on the content level. From him, negotiation of meaning and negotiation of form are regarded as “side-sequences” to the main flow of conversation, while negotiation of content continues the flow.

Negotiation is not only a facilitator of L2 input comprehension, but also that of interlanguage production and modification. Theoretical interest in output as a source of language acquisition is stimulated by Swain (1985), who argues for the utility of what she has called “comprehensible output,” and advances the idea that conversational interaction pushes learners to

impose syntactic structure on their utterances. She identifies three functions of output, the noticing function, the hypothesis testing function and the metalinguistic function. How can learners modify their inappropriate output in the routines of negotiation? Ellis (1999) has claimed that “whether learners do in fact modify their output as a result of meaning negotiation depends to a considerable extent on the nature of the indicating move (p. 544)”. The indicators which can serve to direct learners’ attention to potential problems of their interlanguage might drive them to produce the enhanced output that has been grammatically modified as a result of pushing (see Takashima & Ellis, 1999). Nobuyoshi and Ellis’s study (1993) suggests that, for some learners at least, the opportunity to produce enhanced output aids acquisition.

In addition, negotiation is a joint activity, which needs to activate both interlocutors’ cognitive process to achieve mutual comprehensibility. Long (1996) maintained in a modified version of IH that environmental contributions to acquisition are mediated by selective attention and the learner’s developing L2 processing capacity, and that these resources are brought together usefully, although not exclusively, during negotiation for meaning. This modification highlights the contribution of the learners’ internal mechanism, namely, learner participation. In the process of negotiation, modification devices used by students are good indicators of their participation. As Tsui (1995) puts it, it is more likely that the input will be made comprehensible when students use these conversational modification devices. This presumably also applied to achieving comprehensible output.

RELATED STUDIES

Following Long, most empirical studies concentrate on studying negotiation of meaning, comprehensible input, and conversational modification devices used by teachers (e.g., Long & Sato, 1983; Pica & Long, 1987; Zhou Xing & Zhou Yun, 2002). In general, these studies show that there is a shortage of the conversational modification devices which are considered very important

to L2 acquisition.

However, there is a growing body of research on other aspects of negotiated interaction, such as negotiations of form and of content, comprehensible output, and modification devices used by students, which have been found of vital importance to L2 acquisition as well. Lyster and Ranta (1997) showed that negotiation of form could yield more student engagement in the process of error correction. Rulon and McCreary (1986) earlier showed that there are more content negotiations in small group interaction than in teacher-fronted discussion and that negotiation of content does facilitate L2 acquisition. Xie He and Ellis (1999) established that modified output facilitates comprehension, recognition and production of new words better than modified input. Takashima and Ellis (1999) found that comprehensible output is beneficial to L2 acquisition. As for modification devices used by students, Musumeci (1996) claimed that signals by students that they did not understand could make teachers modify their speech. Nevertheless, Ellis, Heimbach, Tanaka and Yamazaki (1999) find that few conversational modification devices are used by students.

In China, only one study has looked at the issue. Zhou Xing and Zhou Yun (2002) investigated teacher talk and found that there were more confirmation checks used by teachers than comprehension checks and clarification checks in the routines of negotiation of meaning.

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Classroom L2 learning studies in general and classroom negotiation in particular have been dominantly conducted by western researchers; in China, however, there have been very few such studies, in spite of the fact that most Chinese learners learn English in classroom settings.

In China, EFL classroom teachers are usually non-native speakers of English, who themselves lack exposure to native English speakers. Second, Chinese traditional culture characterized by respect of authority has a strong

impact on students' learning attitude and behaviors. Third, school education in China is teacher-centered one, so students are typically passive listeners rather than active participants even in subject matter classes.

What are the characteristics of negotiated interaction in Chinese EFL classrooms? To what extent do such characteristics facilitate or hinder L2 learners' active participation in such settings and ultimately affect their L2 acquisition? To contribute to understanding the complex phenomena and relationship, we describe the features of teacher-student negotiated interaction in Chinese college English classrooms and examine the relations between negotiation features and the student engagement in classroom interaction. We do this by following the three-dimension model of negotiation: negotiations of meaning, form, and content; and also by taking such perspectives as comprehensible input, comprehensible output and conversational modification devices used by both teachers and students.

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

The study is designed to investigate classroom negotiation and learner participation in order to find out whether the linguistic environment arising from the process of negotiation in the investigated classes is favorable to learner participation. The research questions are:

1. What is the distribution of three negotiation types in the routines of negotiation?
2. What is the effect of conversational modifications on students' immediate output?
3. To what extent do students take the initiative in using conversational modifications during the process of negotiation?

Participants

The subjects for this study were students and teachers in six College English classes in Nanjing Normal University. The students and teachers were first language speakers of Chinese. There was an average of 54 students per class. The students were second-year non-English majors, studying for their Bachelor's degrees. Their ages ranged from twenty to twenty-four, the average being twenty-two. They had four intensive English classes per week. Most of them had learned English for seven years, so they were regarded as intermediate English learners. There were six teachers involved in this study; four of them were males and three of them had over five years of experience as English teachers. All the teachers had been teaching the students involved in this study for about one and a half years.

Data Collection

Eighteen classes (a total of 720 minutes) were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed, with each teacher involved in three types of activities: teaching new words, reading new articles, and checking exercises. The transcription used standard orthography (the conventions appear in an appendix). All of teachers used the same teaching material-----*Twenty-first Century College English* (2000, volume 3). The lessons were not especially prepared for the research. Although the teachers were aware of recording, they did not know the purpose of the research. One of the authors attended each class and made field notes. The lessons were all predominantly teacher-fronted, and impressionistically, they seemed typical of many College English classes in China. We also talked with students to learn their opinions of classroom interaction after recording their classes.

Coding of Negotiation

Negotiation Sequences

All negotiation sequences were isolated and assigned to one of the three categories: negotiation of meaning, negotiation of form and negotiation of content, following the model developed by Varonis and Gass (1984), which consisted of a trigger, an indicator, a response, and finally an optional reaction to the response. For example,

- (1) (Class 1: discussing equality between men and women)
- | | |
|---|-----------|
| F5: And I think in the family, or in the society, men have more responsibility. | Trigger |
| T: Yeah, do you mean, er, men have more responsibility for family, to support family? | Indicator |
| F5: Yeah, of course women also have responsibility, for example, er, they must look after her family. | Response |
| T: Um. | Reaction |

The present study mainly focuses on investigating the effect of indicators on responses, that is, the effect of conversational modification devices on immediate output.

Three Types of Negotiation

Negotiation of meaning refers to communication in which interlocutors attempt to achieve mutual understanding by checking and clarifying problematic utterances. For example,

- (2) (Class 1: they are discussing the equality between men and women)
- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 M1: I don't think men and women are equal. I think in some, in some part, in some aspects, er, women have more enjoyment. | |
|---|--|

- 2 T: Women have more, *do you mean women enjoy more priorities?* Yeah?
3 M1: Yeah.

In the extract, the teacher fails to understand the student's initial utterance and then opens a routine of negotiation of meaning with a confirmation check ("do you mean women enjoy more priorities") to make sense of what the student says.

Negotiation of form is different from negotiation of meaning in that during the process, one interlocutor tries to push the other to produce formally more correct utterances, so the focus is language form, not meaning. For example,

(3) (Class 1: translation of a sentence)

T: So, F4, can you? 他因考不及格, 非常沮。 (*He is very depressed because of the failure in the exam*)

F4: He depresses

T: Er, 他, 他垂的, 他是沮的, (*He is depressed*) *so actually you should use adjective.*

F4: Depressed

T: Depressed, er.

In the conversation, negotiation is triggered by the grammatical error (depresses) in the student's reply. There is no doubt that the teacher understands the message, but she opens a negotiation of form with a metalinguistic feedback ("so actually you should use adjective") to push the student to produce the correct language form.

The difference between negotiation of content and negotiation of meaning/form lies in that while the latter, so called "side-sequence", only deals with communication problems about the original information, the former pushes the flow of conversation forward by creating additional information, so negotiation of content enriches interaction. For example,

(4) (Class 1: discussing equality between men and women)

T: Would you please? M2, what, what do you think about that?

M2: In my opinion, men do housework more than women.

T: Oh, men do, men do more housework than women? Than women? ***That is in your family, do you mean your father does more housework than your mother?*** Is that so?

LLL: [laugh]

M2: Yes.

In the above extract, M2's first utterance appears to be understood by the teacher, although there is a grammatical error. Then the teacher goes on to open a negotiation of content with a confirmation check ("that is in your family, do you mean your father does more housework than your mother") to make the student provide additional personal information. Therefore, we can say the student is pushed on the content level and the main flow of conversation moves on.

Frameworks for the Relationship Between Indicators and Responses

For conversational modification devices and their effects on students' immediate output, we adapted frameworks for the three types of negotiation on the basis of the existing frameworks used in the field of SLA (Long 1983; den Branden 1997; Tsui 1991). The three frameworks are summarized in the following tables.

TABLE 1
Framework for Negotiation of Meaning

<p>1. Indicator</p> <p>a. Comprehension check¹: It is used by the speaker to ensure that he / she gets the message across. For example, “Do you understand?”</p> <p>b. Clarification request: It is used by the hearer for clarification to ensure the right understanding. For example, “Pardon?”</p> <p>c. Confirmation check with trigger unmodified: The hearer repeats the trigger literally with a rising intonation so as to ensure the right understanding.</p> <p>d. Confirmation check with trigger modified²: The hearer modifies the wrong trigger with a rising intonation so as to ensure the right understanding.</p> <p>2. Response</p> <p>a. Repetition of trigger: to repeat what one has said</p> <p>b. Modification of trigger: to modify the wrong trigger</p> <p>c. Affirmation or negation of indicator: to agree or disagree the indicator</p> <p>d. Inability to respond: unable to respond, e.g. saying “I don’t know”, or keeping silent</p> <p>e. Ignoring indicator: to talk about something else which doesn’t relate to the indicator</p>
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¹ The remarks after which there was no interval time for students to think and answer were not coded as comprehension checks. For instance,

(5) (C4: explaining a text)

T: I don’t even know one bird from another. That means I can’t even tell the differences between birds. *Do you understand?* I can’t even tell the differences between birds.

After the words, “*do you understand*”, there was no interval time for students to think and answer and hence no students’ reaction from our observations. Perhaps it was the teacher’s habitual utterance, or it might only function as an attention seeking device, tantamount to “Are you listening to me?” (Reviewer1 of the paper). So it cannot achieve its prime function, that is, eliciting students’ responses and make sure students have gained comprehensible input. Therefore, such utterances were not coded. But it is striking that 418 such kinds of utterances were found in the collected data.

² This type of modification device has been subsumed under the heading “recast” in other publications (e.g. Long, Inagaki & Ortega, 1998; Mackey & Philp, 1998). However, this term “recast” is not used for this context in which only meaning is negotiated. And in view of the context of the present study, teachers’ English translation of students’ Chinese words is considered as one type of confirmation check with modified trigger.

TABLE 2
Framework for Negotiation of Form

1. Indicator
a. Clarification request: The hearer requests the speaker to correct the inaccurate form (trigger), for example, “Would you please correct that?” In view of the condition of investigated classrooms, the request for speaking English in stead of Chinese is coded as clarification request, too.
b. Confirmation check with trigger unmodified: The hearer repeats the inaccurate form that the speaker has said with a rising intonation.
c. Confirmation check with trigger modified: The hearer modifies the trigger with a rising intonation.
d. Prompt: The hearer says part of the intended utterance in order to stimulate the speaker to correct the wrong form, e.g. “S: He like birds. T: He...”
e. Metalinguistic feedback: The hearer uses language knowledge to reflect on language to stimulate the speaker to correct the language form, e.g. “The tense is not right.”
2. Response
a. Repetition of trigger: to repeat the inaccurate form that one has said
b. Modification of trigger: to modify the wrong form
c. Affirmation or negation of indicator: to agree or disagree the indicator
d. Inability to respond: unable to respond, e.g. saying “I don’t know”, or keeping silent
e. Ignoring indicator: to talk about something else which doesn’t relate to the indicator

TABLE 3
Framework for Negotiation of Content

1. Indicator
a. Clarification request: The hearer requires the speaker to clarify some information
b. Confirmation check with trigger unmodified: The hearer repeats the information that the speaker has provided with a rising intonation
c. Confirmation check with trigger modified: The hearer modifies the information that the previous speaker has provided with a rising intonation
2. Response
a. Additional information provided: to give more information
b. Repetition of trigger: to repeat the information that one has provided
c. Modification of trigger: to modify the previous information
d. Affirmation or negation of indicator: to agree or disagree the indicator

- e. Inability to respond: unable to respond, e.g. saying “ I don’t know”, or keeping silent
 - f. Ignoring indicator: to talk about something else which doesn’t relate to the indicator
-

RESULTS

Distribution of the Three Types of Negotiation

Table 4 compares the three categories of negotiation.

TABLE 4
The Frequencies and Percentages of the Three Negotiation Types

Negotiation of meaning	Negotiation of form	Negotiation of content	Total
88(72%)	10(8%)	25(20%)	123(100%)

We can see that, by and large, negotiation of meaning is the most common of the three types of negotiation, while negotiation of form the least.

Negotiation of Meaning

Table 5 reveals that 61% of comprehension checks get no students’ response. 37% of clarification requests yield modification of trigger. As to confirmation checks with trigger unmodified, 50% give rise to affirmation or negation of trigger, and only 35% yield modification of trigger. The clarification request is then the most effective way of eliciting modification of trigger.

TABLE 5
Indicator-response Combinations in Routines of Negotiation of Meaning

Indicators	Responses					Total
	Repetition of trigger	Modification of trigger	Affirmation or negation of indicator	Inability to respond	Ignoring indicator	
Comprehension check	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	10 (33%)	18 (61%)	0 (0%)	30 (100%)
Clarification request	13 (45%)	11 (37%)	0 (0%)	4 (14%)	1 (4%)	29 (100%)
Confirmation check with trigger unmodified	2 (15%)	5 (35%)	7 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	14 (100%)
Confirmation check with trigger modified	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	10 (68%)	2 (13%)	2 (13%)	15 (100%)
Total	16 (18%)	18 (20%)	27 (31%)	24 (27%)	3 (4%)	88 (100%)

Negotiation of Form

Negotiation of form is relatively more effective at eliciting a modification of trigger. Table 6 shows that 50% of conversational modification devices yield modification of trigger except confirmation checks with trigger modified.

TABLE 6
Indicator-response Combinations in Routines of Negotiation of Form

Indicators	Responses					Total
	Repetition of trigger	Modification of trigger	Affirmation or negation of indicator	Inability to respond	Ignoring indicator	
Clarification request	2 (50%)	2 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (100%)
Confirmation check with trigger unmodified	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	0 (0%)	2 (100%)
Confirmation check with trigger modified	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (100%)
Prompt	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (100%)
Metalinguistic feedback	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	0 (0%)	2 (100%)
Total	3 (30%)	5 (50%)	0 (0%)	2 (20%)	0 (0%)	10 (100%)

Negotiation of Content

As shown in Table 7, clarification requests account for 68% of the modification devices used in the routines of negotiation of content, and 53% of them are effective in eliciting more information. Confirmation checks with trigger modified also promote more information given by students (75%). However, confirmation checks with trigger unmodified only lead to affirmation or negation of trigger.

TABLE 7
Indicator-response Combinations in Routines of Negotiation of Content

Indicators	Responses					Total	
	Additional information provided	Repetition of trigger	Modification of trigger	Affirmation or negation of indicator	Inability to respond		Ignoring indicator
Clarification request	9 (53%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (35%)	1 (6%)	17(100%)
Conf. check with trigger unmodi.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4(100%)
Conf. check with trigger modi.	3 (75%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (25%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4(100%)
Total	12 (48%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	5 (20%)	6 (24%)	1 (4%)	25(100%)

Note: "Conf. check with trigger unmodi." refers to "confirmation check with trigger unmodified". "Conf. check with trigger modi." refers to "confirmation check with trigger modified".

Conversational Modifications Made by Students

From Table 8, we learn that the students only employ the conversational devices four times in the routines of meaning negotiation: one clarification request, one confirmation check with trigger unmodified, and two confirmation checks with trigger modified. One confirmation check with trigger modified leads to the teacher's modification of trigger, while the other one and the confirmation check with trigger unmodified give rise to the

teacher's affirmation. Clarification request leads to repetition of trigger. None of modification devices used by students is found in routines of negotiation of form and content.

TABLE 8
Frequencies and Percentages of Conversational Modification
Devices Used by Students in the Routines of Negotiation of Meaning

Indicators	Responses					Total
	Repetition of trigger	Modification of trigger	Affirmation or negation of indicator	Inability to respond	Ignoring indicator	
Comprehension check	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (100%)
Clarification request	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)
Confirmation check with trigger unmodified	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)
Confirmation check with trigger modified	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (100%)
Total	1 (25%)	1 (25%)	2 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (100%)

DISCUSSION

Teachers and Students Make Greatest Effort to Achieve Mutual Understanding

Table 4 above suggests that both teachers and students make efforts to achieve mutual understanding. Excerpt (6) seems to prove the effectiveness of negotiating for meaning in L2 learning.

(6) (Class 6: discussing their favorite sound)

- 1 F18: I like their /meld/ sound.
- 2 T: *You like what sound?*
- 3 F18: /meld/
- 4 T: /meld/ sound, /meld/, *what's the /meld/?*

- 5 F18: M-I-L-D
6 T: ***M-I-L-G?***
7 F18: L-D, oh, the /maild/.
8 T: Oh, mild.

We can see from the excerpt that the teacher employs conversational modification devices (turn 2, turn 4 & turn 6) to attain understanding of the student, and simultaneously to provide scaffolds upon which the student can build, so that the student produces correct and comprehensible output (/maild/ in turn 7). Thus, in the collaboration between the student and the teacher, a higher level of performance becomes possible.

Conversational Modifications are Ineffective in Eliciting Learner Participation in Negotiating Meaning

In contrast, Table 5 shows the relative ineffectiveness of the conversational modifications in routines of negotiation of meaning. Here is an example,

- (7) (Class 3: explaining the word---faculty)
- 1 T: Here, some faculty. We don't say some faculties.
Are you clear?
- 2 LLL: [no response]
- 3 T: ***Clear?***
- 4 LLL: [no response]
- 5 T: Yeah, now next one.

Such episodes often occur in classroom conversations, especially when the teacher is speaking to the whole class. From excerpt (7), we can see acquisition of the word "faculty" is uncertain, for no responses follow comprehension checks. So the scanty response might affect the quality of input. Furthermore, as Tsui (1985) argues, the scanty response indicates a very passive role of students, which also deprives them of a chance for output.

With respect to the lack of students participation, there might be several factors contributing to it. First, classroom anxiety might be responsible for it. In interviews, 80% of students admitted that they were too shy and timid to actively participate in class, for fear of making mistakes, although 78% of them thought that teachers should offer abundant opportunities for them to practice. Another underlying factor could be social-cultural influence. By and large, school education in China has been teacher-centered and students tend to regard teachers as “authority.” Therefore they are inclined to accept the knowledge teachers impart instead of questioning the knowledge and actively participating in learning process (Fang Lan, 1999; Tsui, 1995). Another factor contributing to student reticence might be that the teachers do not know much about negotiation. In the above excerpt, the teacher repeats comprehension checks monotonously, failing to elicit any student responses. Thus it seems that there is a need to teach teachers about negotiation and encourage them to use a variety of conversational modifications to engage students in interaction.

Clarification Requests are Effective in Yielding Enhanced Output in Negotiating for Meaning

Table 5 demonstrates that the other three devices are more effective in bringing about student participation than comprehension checks. In particular, the clarification request is the most effective way of yielding modification of trigger, which is consistent with den Branden’s (1997) finding. It is assumed that clarification requests provide students with more opportunities to experiment with new forms and structures. Theoretical claims have been made (Swain, 1985, 1995, 1998) that learners can make their initially unclear message become meaningful and grammatical if they gain opportunities to develop their productive capacity in the second language. For example,

(8) (Class 6: discussing the favorite sound)

- 1 F4: Um, I would feel, er, entertainment, er, I would-----
- 2 T: You feel, *you will feel what?*
- 3 F4: Feel entertained.

The above piece of data shows that, pushed by clarification request (turn2), the learner produces enhanced output (turn3), something assumed to be beneficial to L2 acquisition.

Not all student responses to clarification requests lead to the successful modification of language form. As the following excerpt (9) shows, when pushed, the student resorts to L1 to express his idea (turn 7). The advantage of this resort lies in the maintenance of the process of communication, but it may obviate the need for students to acquire certain morphosyntactic features.

Confirmation Checks are Mainly Followed by Confirmation or Negation of the Trigger

In contrast to clarification requests, confirmation checks, especially with trigger modified, are usually followed by affirmation or negation of the trigger. For example,

(9) (Class 1: discussing the equality between man and woman)

- 1 M3: Every time, we, we go out, er
- 2 T: Every time, you go out
- 3 M3: by bus
- 4 T: by bus
- 5 M3: Er, all seating, all seating, are given to xx
- 6 T: *All what?*
- 7 M3: 座位都 女孩坐的 (all seats are given to the girls).
- 8 T: *Oh, all seats are given to the girls, is that so?*
- 9 M3: Yeah.

In this extract, the student confirms the English version of his intended utterance (turn 9). The acknowledgement indicates his comprehension of input, but does not show the interlanguage development at a syntactic level.

Negotiation of Form is Effective in Pushing Students to Produce Enhanced Output

Unlike negotiation of meaning, negotiation of form explicitly requires students to pay attention to language form. For example,

(10) (Class 6: discussing the favorite sound)

- 1 T: If you could spend a month completely alone in a beautiful natural setting, how would the experience benefit you? You might answer the question in one sentence, or more than one sentence.
- 2 F1: I am sorry.
- 3 T: Ok, no mind. Sit down, please. Yeah, would you please?
- 4 F2: Er, er. I think I can escape from worried.
- 5 T: Er, sounds nice. Be happy. You can escape from worried. **Worried?**
- 6 F2: Oh, worries.
- 7 T: Yes, ok, fine.

In the above extract, the teacher first shows his satisfaction at F2's answer by saying "sounds nice", which indicates that he understands what F2 says. Then he opens a routine of negotiation of form with confirmation check with trigger unmodified, which helps the student to notice there is a divergence between her current language form and the target language form. Then the student actively retests the hypothesis about the target language and produces enhanced output (worries in this example). This confirms the argument by Lyster and Ranta (1997) that negotiation of form invites active student participation.

Yet it is surprising and disturbing that there are few sequences of

negotiation of form in the present study. Does this show the relative ignorance of language form in the classroom teaching? An investigation of teacher questions that we carry out shows that it is not the case, for most of questions are about language form. The fact indicates that negotiation of form is not a major type of corrective feedback employed in the classes investigated.

There is More Students' Linguistic and Cognitive Involvement in Negotiation of Content

Negotiation of content enriches the content of interaction, and involves more student participation; in addition, it engages students in subject-matter thinking or even creative thinking.

- (11) (Class 1: discussing the equality between men and women)
- 1 F1: Women in some aspects are better than men. But the boss has to equal the ..., to keep the balance. He, he prefers to, prefers to employ man, and, to woman.
- 2 T: He prefers to er, he prefers to employ, er, sorry, he prefers to employ man rather than woman.
- 3 F1: Rather than the woman.
- 4 T: Just to keep the balance?
- 5 F1: Yes.
- 6 T: ***What, what kind of balance?***
- 7 F1: Er, man, and 男女比重, 就是 (that is, the percentage between men and women)
- 8 T: The percentage, do you mean?
- 9 F1: Yeah.
- 10 T: The percentage. ***Do you mean, er, they employ men in order to keep the percentage instead of the abilities, instead of women's abilities?***
- 11 F1: This is, er, man, oh, women get married, they have some, er,

- they have so many---
- 12 T: This is the disadvantages of women, that, is that so? They have to get married, and they will be pregnant.
- 13: F1: And give birth to a baby.
- 14: T: Yeah, give birth to a baby. Yeah.
- 15: F1: So sometimes they always prefer to employ men. [laugh]

Through a clarification request (turn 6) and confirmation check (turn 10), the teacher pushes the conversation on, for more information is given by the student (turns 7, 11 and 13). It is assumed that the stretching of interaction is likely to drive students to achieve more comprehensible input and comprehensible output so as to develop language competence. As Table 7 shows, the devices—clarification requests and confirmation checks with trigger modified, are quite effective at eliciting information. Furthermore, negotiation of content is more challenging than negotiation of meaning and form, for it can trigger not only a language process, but also a general cognitive operation. That is, the students should not only know how to express themselves in English, but also know what to say. It is clear, however, that not all conversational modification devices yield more information in English, for students may resort to L1, as is seen in turn 7. Despite this, the routines of negotiation of content provide opportunities for potential language learning, as the extract above shows (turn 8).

It is worth noting that the three types of negotiation are not separate from each other. The more negotiation of content there is, the more opportunities for negotiation of meaning and negotiation of form occur.

Scanty Conversation Devices are Used by Students

Turning to conversational modification devices used by students, it is a striking fact that only four devices can be found used by the students in the routines of negotiation of meaning. These are instances:

(12) (Class 1: analyzing the sentence structure)

- 1 T: How about F1? Would you please have a try? Now have you caught the sentence?
Now I want you to analyze the structure.
- 2 F1: Er, they...the...
- 3 T: Um?
- 4 F1: **是不是分析句子成分** (*analyze the sentence structure*) ?
- 5 T: Yeah.

(13) (Class 3: asking students to recite the text)

- 1 T: I asked some of you to recite paragraph 1, recite paragraph 1. Er, now who can, who can have a try? F6, have a try, paragraph 1, yeah, would you please?
- 2 F6: ***I beg your pardon?***
- 3 T: Oh? Text A, text A. I'm sorry. Text A of unit 1, yeah, try to review, er, recite it. Paragraph 1.
- 4 F6: ***Remember it?***
- 5 T: Yeah, memorize it. I asked you to memorize paragraph 1 and paragraph 2.
- 6 F6: ***Just paragraph 1?***
- 7 T: Yeah.

In both episodes, the students use conversational modification devices to achieve the understanding of the teachers' demands, or questions. The few devices (italics) reflect the students' initiative in the language learning process. Simple as the process is, it demonstrates that the students are aware of using language to communicate. For example, by using "remember it" to attempt to understand the teacher, the student is able to obtain accurate and comprehensible input—"memorize it." Tsui (1995) emphasizes the importance of devices used by students in the negotiation of comprehensible input in the classroom. However, conversational devices used by students here are disappointingly rare, and the context is limited. We believe that students will

be able to produce more beneficial environments if they take more initiative in the routines of negotiation. Perhaps what is most important is to let students recognize the personal value of active involvement in second language learning.

In sum, by and large, the linguistic environment created in the classes investigated was not favorable to language learning, although some conversational modifications did facilitate interlanguage use (defined as immediate output here). Social-cultural background characterized by respect of authority and fear of losing face and the teacher-centered education background are likely to be responsible for the undesirable results. In addition, teachers are non-native speakers of English, who lack opportunities to communicate and negotiate with native speakers, and they lack knowledge of negotiation.

CONCLUSION

By using the three-fold analytic model of negotiation: negotiations of meaning, form and content, the study has described features of negotiation in Chinese college English classrooms and has found some relationships between the negotiation features and student participation. The major findings include:

- 1) In terms of negotiation of meaning, conversational modifications employed by the observed teachers are ineffective in eliciting enhanced output.
- 2) Few sequences of negotiation of form are found, although it proves to be effectual to give rise to enhanced output.
- 3) Negotiation of content is found to be effective in eliciting learner participation, but there are very few such negotiation sequences.
- 4) Very scanty use of modification devices on the part of the students is observed, although it is an indicator of learner participation.
- 5) In the routines of negotiation of meaning, clarification requests are evidenced to be the most effective way of pushing learners to produce

enhanced output.

The features of negotiation in current Chinese EFL classrooms as revealed by the study are not favorable to learner participation in classroom interaction and facilitating L2 acquisition. Therefore some suggestions can be made for classroom pedagogy.

- 1) A wide variety of negotiation types should be employed, especially negotiation of content, for it can not only create more opportunities for students to access comprehensible input and produce comprehensible output, but also involve more cognitive engagement.
- 2) In the routines of negotiation of meaning, the teacher may use more clarification requests to push learners to produce more accurate output.
- 3) The teacher may employ more negotiation of form as corrective feedback.
- 4) It is highly recommended that learners be encouraged and taught to use conversational modification devices, so that they can actively participate in the language learning process and take responsibility for their own learning.

In a word, the teachers are recommended to use more negotiation of various types so that learner participation can be maximized and better environment for L2 acquisition can be created.

The study has some limitations. First, only six teachers from one institution were involved in the study, so the results may not be generalizable; second, no effort was made in the study to elicit teachers' knowledge and beliefs about negotiation, which might have helped explain their behaviors. Nevertheless, as an effort to contribute to understanding EFL classroom realities in China-specific context, the study has achieved its purpose by depicting how negotiation is actually taking place in such classrooms and verifying how negotiation affects learner participation.

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APPENDIX

Transcription Conventions for Classroom Discourse

- T: teacher
- M1: identified male learner, using numbers M1, M2, etc.
- F1: identified female learner, using numbers F1, F2, etc.
- M: unidentified male learner
- F: unidentified female learner
- LL: unidentified subgroup of class
- LL: unidentified subgroup of class speaking in chorus
- LLL: whole class
- LLL: whole class speaking in chorus

- {T use curly brackets to indicate simultaneous speech
{LL
- S-----: use dash to indicate the incomplete sentences (interpreted by others)
- []: use square brackets to represent the transcriber's gloss and the words on the blackboard
- (): use parentheses to indicate the uncertain transcriptions
- / /: use oblique line for phonemic transcription instead of standard orthography
- xx: incomprehensible speech, probably one word, or a phrase
- xx xx: incomprehensible speech beyond phrase length

Note: it is based on Leo Van Lier (1988, p. 243).