Research on Non-English Majors' Interaction and English Learning in the Chinese EFL Classroom

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Abstract. This study examines the relationship between interaction and English learning in the Chinese classroom context and identifies how interactive approach may enhance English learning. Accordingly the aims designed are as follows: 1) to do the research about whether Chinese learners engage in appropriate meaning negotiations in English class and in which type of class they are more likely to engage in meaning negotiations; 2) to study whether interaction promotes learners' mastery of learning materials; 3) to identify whether the interactive approach is superior to the traditional teaching method in developing learners' overall English proficiency.

Introduction

English language teaching (ELT) in China has its own characteristics. [1] [2] Chinese foreign language teaching is conducted in a big country where there is no English-speaking community. [3]English teaching in China has to prepare the students to pass various kinds of exams and develop their communicative competence in English as well. [4] It's obvious that the traditional teaching method based on behaviorism can't accomplish both of the two aims while the interactive teaching approach, which is based on constructivism, humanism and social interactionism and has aroused the interest of many linguists, is good enough to do this challenging task. [5]

Methodology

A. Research Questions

This study is to see whether interaction can promote students' English learning in the Chinese classroom context. Accordingly, questions investigated are: 1) whether Chinese learners are engaged in appropriate meaning negotiations in class and in which type of class they are more likely to engage in meaning negotiations; 2) whether interaction promotes learners' mastery of learning materials; 3) whether the interactive approach is superior to the traditional teaching method in developing learners' overall English proficiency.

B. Subjects

The subjects include 90 students (56 males, 34 females) Management majors. The average age was 20.2 ranging from 19 to 21 belonged to two classes, Class 1 and Class 2, with 45 students in second-year years.

C. Instruments

As Hopkins(1993 cited in McDonough 1997) describes, observation is considered the best to collect required information when the researcher is more interested in the behavior than in the perceptions of the individuals (Kumar 1996). The students' classroom behavior in different class types is what I am interested in. Therefore, this study employs observation as a major source for data collection.

Table 1 Students average scores in the final exam of the first semester and results of t-test

	Final exam (full score 100)	S.D	t-test	P
E group	70.4	7.9	0.068	0.946
C group	70.5	7.6		

(Note. E group=the experimental group; C group= the control group)

Table 1 shows that there is no significant difference in terms of their final exam, indicating that the subjects from the experimental group and the control group were at almost the same level of English proficiency.

Table 2 Four items based on the learning materials and results of t-test

	III. Vocabulary 7.5% IV. Structure 7.5% V. Translation from Chinese to English 30% VI. Translation from English to Chinese 5% (full score 50)	S.D	t-test	P
E group	35.7	5.2	.180	.857
C group	35.5	5.3		

The independent sample t-test was used to measure the significant differences in the subjects' average scores. P= .857, which means that there is no significant difference in terms of the items concerning the learning materials, indicating that the subjects from the experimental group and the control group were of almost the same level as to the mastery of their learning materials.

Results and Discussion

A. Interaction and meaning negotiations

Table 3 Number of meaning negotiations as% of total c-units

		C-units	C-units (Total)	Meaning Negotiations		Meaning Negotiations (Total)	Negotiations/ C-units %		Negotiations/ C-units (Total) %
E group, 1st Period		61	61		4	4	6.6		6.6
E group, 2nd Period	Task1	128		Task 1	15		Task1	14.1	
	Task2	91		Task 2	9		Task2	9.9	
	Task3	130	675	Task 3	11	61	Task3	8.5	9.0
	Task4	102		Task 4	10	57	Task4	9.8	10.6
	Task5	111	614	Task 5	12		Task5	10.8	
	Follow-up activity	52		Follow-up activity	0		0		0
C group 1st Period		11	37		1	1	3.8		2.7
C group 2nd Period		26			0		0		

The first period of the experimental group and the first and second period of the control group are in whole-class settings. Four meaning negotiations are produced and the incidence of meaning negotiations in the first period of the experimental group is 6.6%.The incidence of meaning negotiations in the control group is 2.7%. During the two Periods of time, the experimental group

produce is 61meaning negotiations and the incidence of meaning negotiations is 9.0% while The control group produces one meaning negotiation and the incidence of meaning negotiations is 2.7%.

B. Interaction and the mastery of learning materials

Table 4 Tasks and the academic aims

Task	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5
Academic aims	1) words and expressions 2) sentence structures	Listening comprehension	Words	1) words and expressions 2) patterns of giving suggestions 3) letter writing	1) words and expressions 2) comprehension of implied meanings

Table 6 displays that the general curriculum, the contents of the course, the textbooks and even the speed of teaching are all determined. Therefore teachers are much constrained when they try to design interactive activities. They should base the activities strictly on the textbooks or else they will not finish their teaching tasks.

C. The increased use of the target language

Table 5 Number of C-units from the E and C groups

	C-units		C-units (Total)	
E group, 1st Period	61		61	
E group, 2nd Period	Task1	128	614	675
	Task2	91		
	Task3	130		
	Task4	102		
	Task5	111		
	Follow-up activities	52		
C group 1st Period	11		37	
C group 2nd Period	26			

Table 5 shows that the Experimental group produces altogether 675 c-units while the control group produces 37 c-units during two periods of time. It was during the study of their learning material that they made the output and found their linguistic problems and reformulated their utterances. Therefore the increased use of the target language can be of great help to their mastery of the learning material.

D. Errors in the subjects' output

Table 6 Errors in the subjects' output in whole-class settings

Group	E group	E group	C group	C group
Time	1st period	2nd period Follow-up activities	1st period	2nd period
Errors	29	3	10	8

Errors in the subjects' output in whole-class settings are displayed in Table 8. The second period of the control group made the least errors while the first period of the experimental group makes the most.

Table 7 Errors in the subjects' output in group-work settings

	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5	Total
Errors	73	31	51	42	75	272

In group-work settings, the fewest errors while the as shown in Table 9, the group doing Task 2 group doing Task 5 makes the most. Altogether 272 errors are made during the group activities.

Table 8 Number of errors as% of total c-units of E and C groups

	Errors	c-units	Errors/c-units %
E group 1st Period	29	61	47.5
E group Group work	272	562	48.4
Follow-up activities	3	52	5.8
C group 1st &2nd Period	18	37	48.6

The incidence of errors in whole-class settings and in group-work is displayed in Table 10. The percentages are shown in the right column. The percentage of group-work is 0.2% lower than that of the control group. The percentage of the follow-up activities is the lowest (5.8%).

E. Error treatment

Table 9   Error treatment in whole-class settings

	Errors	Corrected errors	corrected errors / errors
E group 1st period	29	18	78.3%
E group 2nd period Follow-up activities	3	2	66.7%
C group 1st period	10	9	90%
C group 2nd period	8	8	100%

Table 9 shows the number of errors and the number of corrected errors in whole-class settings. The percentages of corrected errors to errors are listed in the right column. The errors in the second period of the control group are all corrected while most of the errors are corrected in other cases.

Table 10 Error treatment in group-work settings

	Errors	Noticed errors	Noticed errors / errors
Task 1	73	38	52.1%
Task 2	31	12	38.7%
Task 3	51	19	37.3%
Task 4	42	36	85.7%
Task 5	75	18	24%
Total	272	123	45.2%

Table 10 shows the number of errors, include: errors corrected by the speaker himself or the other partners; errors which the speaker himself or the other partner has noticed but failed to give proper corrections. The percentages range from 24% to 85.7%.

F.   Post-test of the overall English proficiency

Table 11 Students average scores in the final exam of the third semester

	Final exam (full score 100)	S.D	t-test	P
E group	72.7	7.7	3.119	.002
C group	68.0	6.4		

Table 11 shows that in the subjects' average scores of the third semester, P= .002, which means that there is a significant difference in terms of their final exam, indicating that after two terms' study with different ways of teaching, some changes have taken place. The interactive approach seems superior to the traditional method in improving students' overall English proficiency.

Conclusion

The interactive approach can promote learners English learning in the Chinese EFL classroom. It is the different ways of teaching that have made that difference.   English learners in China do engage in meaning negotiations, but they perform very differently in different types of class. Interactive activities in the EFL classroom are based on the learning material. They provide more opportunities for learners to use their learning content in a certain context. The results of the post-test suggest interaction can promote learners' mastery of learning materials.   If it is confirmed that interaction can enhance English learning in the Chinese EFL classroom, it is advisable for teachers to make use of the findings concerning interaction and create more opportunities for learners to participate in interaction in their language classroom. By doing further studies, the relation between interaction and English learning in the Chinese classroom context will hopefully become clearer and it will attract more and more attention from both teachers and learners.

Acknowledgement

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