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ORAL INTERACTION AND ITS IMPLICATION IN THE LEARNING AND TEACHING PROCESS IN EFL

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ABSTRACT: Current researches of oral interaction, following the socio-interactional line of discourse, make us reevaluate our teaching practice, especially directed to the oral performance in the classroom. But how can we take advantages from these studies in order to teach effectively? The purpose of this work is to provide a brief overview on oral interaction studies focusing on, and reflecting upon the researchers' claims related to the learning process of English as a Foreign Language.

Key-words: oral interaction, teaching, learning.

RESUMO: Pesquisas recentes em interação oral, seguindo a linha sócio-interacionista do discurso, nos faz reavaliar nossa prática docente, especialmente voltada para o desempenho oral na sala de aula. Mas como podemos nos beneficiar destes estudos para ensinar de forma mais eficiente? O objetivo deste trabalho é apresentar um breve percurso sobre os estudos em interação oral focalizando, e refletindo sobre os relatos dos pesquisadores voltados para o processo de aprendizagem e ensino de Inglês como língua estrangeira.

Palavras-chaves: interação oral, ensino, aprendizagem.

Introduction

Until the present moment, studies in the area of oral interaction have received influence of the socio-interactional strand of discourse by showing that the socio-cultural aspects, implicit in the speech act of participants, are present in the negotiation of meaning in the classroom context. As so, some of these researches have revealed that the teachers and students' discursive practices tend to reflect the social nature of the school system (Figueiredo, 2006), as well as the communicative intentions of such participants in the negotiation of their images (Tavares, 2006). Other studies looked into how the teachers' discursive practices lead to the learning difficulties in terms of content and the ones with regard to interpersonal relationship among students (Consolo e Vani, 2006). It was observed that the informality in the teacher-student interaction and the interest in the subject taught favor both the oral development of students as well as the learning as a whole, guiding us

for reflections upon the teacher's oral performance and its implication for the teaching and learning of foreign languages.

This work, therefore, attempts to provide some brief overview on oral interaction studies focusing on, and reflecting upon the researchers' claims related to the learning-teaching process of English as a Foreign Language (EFL henceforth). More specifically, the studies described below promote reflection on the dialogic process in classroom settings between teacher and students emphasizing that it is through the talk and all factors which surrounds it (cognitive, cultural and social) that the construction of meaning thus effective learning emerges.

Oral Interaction research and its pedagogical implication on EFL classroom setting

To observe, analyze and interpret moments of talk have been the concern of various researchers on Sociology, Anthropology and Linguistics as to verify the ways participants of the speech exchange (speakers/listeners) make use of conversational processes to construct and reinforce social identities, negotiate meaning, and cooperate to each other to establish a dialogue under certain socially organized oral activities. These activities, named organization of turn-taking in conversations, can vary in accordance with what, how and where the conversation takes place. A seminar, a conference, an interview , for instance, present three different ordering of moves since each of them has specific types of social organization that interferes in the way the participants talk and interact to each other (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1978; Marcuschi, 1991).

The analysis of conversation (AC) is not primarily worried about the structural organization of speech moves, i.e. the models on the organizational systems of turn-takings for conversation, but with how these models can be interpreted with a scientific eye. What indeed matters is the investigation of how people understand each other in a variety of daily situations where natural conversation develops such as a dialogue between two friends in a bar, a doctor and a patient in a hospital, and a teacher and his/her students in a classroom context. Sacks et al. (1978) reports two types of speech exchange systems, called local management system and interactionally managed system, to explain that there

are two basic turn-taking organization of conversation. The local management system deals with "the single transitions at a time" (p.40). Under this system only two participants interact to each other allowing the turn order and the turn size to vary. The turn-taking system of this sort functions when one talks at a time, and the 'next turn' is passed from one person to another. This is the case of interviews, seminars and classroom interaction. One has a time to speak. The interactionally system, on the contrary, occurs when more than two participants has the right to decide what to talk, when to talk, i.e. it is not party-administered. Daily conversations are the most recurrent example of this sort of turn-taking system.

The classroom has been notably investigated over the decades as a place where all sorts of knowledge come into play, particularly from the oral interaction perspective. Knowledge created by and derived from discursive practices, both by the teacher and the students, has been one of the concerns of the oral interaction studies. This educational practice, grounded on socio-interactionist strand of discourse analysis, has seen the classroom discourse as a mirror for the social nature of school and its function to socialize verbal interaction (Figueiredo, 2006), and to see how teachers and students' interaction reflect their communicative intentions as to overcome their difficulties of relationships, maintain a cooperative learning and, thus, negotiate their images (Tavares, 2006; Consolo and Vani, 2006).

Other studies on oral interaction have emphasized the importance on looking into the nature of dialogic face-to-face relation in the light of the situational perspective (Goffman in Ribeiro and Garcez, 2002). Goffman asserts that when thinking of oral analysis, one must consider the extralinguistic elements (gestures and affective aspects of language) influence toward the verbal linguistic ones, in special to the speech act. That is, cognitive, social and affective aspects as well as gestures with their social attributes interfere in the production and interpretation of speech act.

To reinforce the link between extralinguistic and linguistic elements in oral interaction, Consolo and Vani's study (2006) noticed that the amount of speech act by the students increases in the classroom context, for example, as a result of a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere provided by the teacher. It is not only what the teacher does but how

he/she mixes up their linguistic choice in accordance with the informal way of teaching that oral interaction takes place, and the learning of the content studied in the class, consequently, tends to improve (Hall, 2003; Consolo and Vani, 2006).

With regard to verbal interaction within the pedagogical context, theoretical tendencies on conversational analysis have received influence on the socio – interactionist perspective of discourse for the analysis and interpretation of verbal interaction (Tavares, 2006). Considering that all signs of language (gestures, words or any sign that contains meanings) are culture-determined, classroom research on verbal interaction between the participants involved in that pedagogic event reflects the social thus cultural beliefs implicit in the speech act and how these views can be interrelated in the negotiation of meaning. The analysis is, then, grounded on the way the participants interact and negotiate meanings in so far they can be adapted to the situation itself.

Tavares (2006) recently investigated how teacher and his/her students interact to each other in the EFL classroom to keep an atmosphere of cooperation and motivation observing the way they negotiated their images. Trying to decipher the communicative intentions of the participants through contextualized cues such as style, pause, intonation, gestures and face, the author divided the participants speech moves into five types of strategies: contact, institutional, pedagogic, cooperation and spontaneous. Among all these strategies, she found out that there was a mixture of strategy uses between the participants. Whenever the teacher started with the cooperation strategy, students answered with the contact and vice versa. Therefore, the negotiation of images could be better applied for interpersonal relations between the participants rather than probing teaching/learning of the target language. That is, oral interaction tended to occur more when the pedagogic and institutional strategies were not at stake but of the contact and of spontaneous type, the ones that favor humor, affection, thus a more friendly and informal interaction between teacher and students.

Observing students oral interaction in written texts corrections, Figueiredo (2006) analised how verbal interaction took place between students and its effect on the students' process of learning. Based on Vygostky sociocultural theory which values the dialogue as a crucial aspect for cognitive development, Figueiredo also believes that oral correction

among peers can benefit them to negotiate meanings for their texts from their dialogic interaction. By making suggestions to improve the writing in terms of content, structure, vocabulary, Figueiredo found out that although the focus of the activity was to improve the written text, learners could exercise the English language orally.

In Figueiredo (2006) study as well as in Tavares (2006) and Consolo and Vani´s (2006), verbal interaction among learners tend to occur in a more informal relationship. Common interest of the subject when that is linked to the learners' needs and to an atmosphere which probes a relaxed and affective relationship among them are the key words for the learning process. It is not 'what' the teacher, as an institutional representative, offers that promote verbal interaction but 'how' the pedagogical aim is passed on. If the teaching objective is organized as a ruled-based principle - with reference to the textbook or the grammar exercises, as pointed out by Consolo and Vani (2006) – the class becomes boring and, consequently, learners turns out shy and with no motivation to share their knowledge among them. Sometimes, it is quite hard to associate the pedagogical aims with strategies that lead to interpersonal relationship as noticed by Tavares (2006). Nevertheless, Figueiredo (*op.cit.)* showed that it is possible to link pedagogical with interpersonal strategies when learners feel motivated to accomplish the task such as oral corrections of written texts.

The studies described above have been primarily concerned in analyzing what goes on in teacher-students or/and students-students oral interaction according to different classroom tasks as to verify to what extent this interaction leads to an effective learning of the target language. It is interesting to notice that the definition of 'learning' shifts from teacher to students. What's more, it depends on the learning perception that teacher and students consider as important, the strategies that one and another uses to accomplish the learning, and the focus that each of them tends to address on inside the classroom setting (Hall, 2003; Consolo and Vani, 2006).

But how do teachers react toward the students' speech act? And to what extent these reactions contribute to the development of oral language? Thinking on these issues, Cajal (2003) investigated the way two teachers reacted toward the children talks in the pre-schooling level in Cuiabá to see whether these children exercise their oral language or

not, and if the teacher's talk and actions contribute for this to happen. Observing what exactly people do when talking and considering that in the classroom setting the speech acts reflect different pedagogic objectives - it is through the talk that the teacher orients, motivates students to learn, complains, takes their doubts, calls their attention to something relevant - the author found out that inside the same interactional context, the two teachers addressed different learning perspectives based on their respective type of talk.

In the teacher/student interaction, the two teachers' talk contributed differently to promote the evolvement of oral language in children. The first teacher in one school seemed to be very much worried with what children have to learn, the pedagogical objective itself, therefore all out-of-class questions posed by the students were avoided by the teacher. Consequently, the children exercise of oral language was restricted to either answer the teachers' questions or to accomplish the tasks oriented by the teacher. On the other hand, the second teacher in another school seemed to be more receptive to any children talk either if that was connected or not with the teaching objective proposed by the teacher. The aim was to talk even about topics not related with the school context. Cajal (2003) concluded that the construction of oral language by the children seemed to develop better in a more confident and open teacher/students relationship as seen in the second teacher classroom context.

Conclusion

As presented in this work, all instances of oral interaction as revealed in the researches described above have emphasized that both teaching and learning are interactive processes which require a dynamic participation of teacher and students. That is, by sharing social, cultural and institutional conventions within an specific pedagogical aim, they are not only exchanging information from the subject taught but also actively taking part of the whole process of learning. This work, therefore, might help Brazilian teachers of EFL understand how to be aware of the interactional aspects of communication needed to improve the learners' oral performance in Brazilian institutions.

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