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## **The Role of Social Interaction in Second Language Learning**

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### ***Abstract***

This paper will give a brief overview of second language acquisition (SLA), highlighting the importance of social interaction in language learning. The purpose of this article is to explore how social interactions influence second language acquisition, drawing on research and practical examples. Research involves some theories of language acquisition, and the impact of social interaction on SLA. The paper will also discuss the types of social interaction in language learning, and the challenges and barriers to social interactions in SLA. Finally, the paper will examine strategies to maximize social interaction.

### ***Introduction***

The process of acquiring a second language after mastering the first is known as second language acquisition, or SLA. It may also be used to describe the scientific investigation of this process.

“Second language acquisition, or SLA, has two meanings. In a general sense it is a term to describe learning a second language. More specifically, it is the name of the theory of the process by which we acquire - or pick up - a second language. This is mainly a subconscious process which happens while we focus on communication. It can be compared with second language learning, which describes how formal language education helps us learn language through more conscious processes (Hoque, 2017, p.1)”.

Through the years, second language acquisition scholars and teachers have observed that social factors directly affect language learning. As Morales (2017) points out, many researches indicate that social variables tend to influence language and its process of learning. Therefore, social interaction is crucial for language learning as it provides a dynamic environment where learners can practice applying linguistic knowledge in real-time, receive immediate feedback, and naturally acquire the nuances of language through authentic communication with others, which is essential for developing fluency and understanding cultural context; essentially, it allows learners to learn language as it is naturally used in everyday situations, enhancing comprehension and fluency beyond simply memorizing grammar rules. As Jeong and Li (2020) argue, the learning of a remote dialect through word affiliation and language structure rules contrasts with child dialect learning which extends in socially intuitive settings.

Social interaction in language learning refers to the process of acquiring a language through meaningful interactions with others, where learners actively engage in conversations, exchange information, and practice linguistic skills in a social context, allowing them to not only learn vocabulary and grammar but also understand cultural nuances and appropriate language usage within different social situations; essentially, learning language by actively communicating with others. “The core constructs of interaction are input, negotiation for meaning, and output (Loewen and Sato, 2018, p. 1)”.

### **Overview of some Theories of Language Acquisition and Social Interaction**

Among the second language learning theories, two stand out: Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory, and the Krashen’s Input Hypothesis and the role of meaningful communication.

The work of Lev Vygotsky (1934, 1978) has become the foundation of much research and theory in cognitive development over the past several decades, particularly what has become known as sociocultural theory. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory states that cognitive development is primarily driven by social interaction and cultural context, meaning children learn most effectively through interactions with more knowledgeable others within their society, acquiring knowledge and skills through collaborative experiences and internalizing them over time; essentially, learning is a social process deeply influenced by the culture surrounding the learner (Vygotsky, 1978).

The necessity of information scaffolding is emphasized by the sociocultural theory of learning. In other words, teaching is done to gradually increase knowledge and skill. Under supervision, learners practice it and receive guidance to enhance their skills. This might happen in cycles until the learner can individually practice the full skill. The sociocultural theory of cognitive development explores the influence the world has on individual development. It asserts that learning is a mostly social process whereby development occurs through interactions with people who possess more knowledge or skill than the learner (Vygotsky, 1978).

Krashen's Input Hypothesis posits that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to language input that is slightly beyond their current level of competence, referred to as 'i+1'. This theory emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input in language learning, suggesting that understanding messages in a second language facilitates natural language acquisition. The focus on input helps inform methods of teaching that prioritize exposure to meaningful communication over rote memorization. Luo (2024) argues that "among all the hypotheses of the Input Theory, the most fundamental and well-known one is the Acquisition-Learning Distinction. This hypothesis is built around the distinctions between "acquisition" and "learning" and how each plays a part in the development of second language ability (p. 130)".

Social interaction is closely connected to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Krashen's input hypothesis, as both highlight the importance of engaging with others, especially those who are more knowledgeable, in promoting learning and language acquisition. The main idea is that meaningful interaction with language input that is just above one's current level is essential for growth.

### ***The impact of social interaction on SLA***

Literature in the field of language learning has indicated that social interactions are crucial for language learning. This can be perceived through the way in which children learn a language. As Nelson (1985) suggests, "language learning takes place within the framework of social interaction" (p. 109). In fact, children are exposed to language in social settings with parents and caregivers from the beginning (Bloom, 2001; Clark, 2003). The notion that a social environment is essential to communicative learning in both humans and animals is becoming more and more popular. It has been proposed that language acquisition in humans is based on a vibrant social environment. Numerous studies examining this assertion in the lab have produced convincing proof that social environments offer information, such as eye-gaze following, that gives more details about the speakers' objectives and aims, as well as motivation in the form of enhanced attention and social arousal. In non-social environments, these social context characteristics are not as prevalent. Studies that are currently being conducted with the aid of contemporary neuroscience techniques should provide deeper theoretical explanations of how social circumstances affect communicative learning (Lytle & Kuhl, 2018).

The effect social interaction has on SLA occurs through enhanced comprehensible input; opportunities for practice and production, motivation and confidence building, and cultural immersion and understanding. In the process of learning a second language, interaction and input are equally important.

It seems to reason that the process of learning a second language could be impacted by varying input or interaction treatments. More often input that isn't accompanied by enough interaction might not be very beneficial for learning a second language. On the other hand, interactionally changed input might lead to improved second language acquisition (Maharsi, 2011).

When it comes to L2 acquisition, input acts as "an obligatory entry point" and is therefore crucial. L2 learners couldn't succeed in learning the language without it. As a result, different L2 acquisition inputs will presumably result in different outputs. Ellis (2003) suggests that input frequency and intelligible input are two factors that affect L2 acquisition. Accurate and thorough input appears to lead to improved L2 acquisition. Conversely, fewer types and numbers could result in inadequate L2 acquisition (p. 269). Put differently, L2 learners will show up in the output more often the more input they receive (Ellis, 2003; Mitchell and Myles, 2004). Thus, Social context influences the ways in which we use language, and we have been socialized to follow implicit social rules like those that guide the flow of conversations, including how we start and end our interactions and how we change topics.

However, it is the job of educators to provide opportunities for practice and reinforcement for students to practice their social skills. Educators can do that through group work, collaborative projects, and peer mentoring programs. They should also provide feedback and reinforcement to reinforce positive behaviors. Johnson, David W.; And Others (1994) emphasize the importance of collaborative learning experiences in educational settings, which enhance not only academic skills but also social competencies like communication, problem-solving, and teamwork.

Peer interactions, teacher-student interactions, cooperative learning, collaborative learning, and group projects are just a few of the types of social interaction that take place in educational contexts. Peer interactions include students cooperating on assignments, exchanging ideas, exchanging criticism, and working together.

Opportunities for practice and production also include peer feedback. Peer feedback is a tactic that both eliminates that power dynamic and strengthens social collaboration. Asking pupils to recognize their mistakes and then revise is an essential metacognitive skill. Students' reading, writing, and communication skills all increase when they learn how to give feedback to others. As Hattie and Timperley (2007) point out, Peer feedback is a tactic that both eliminates that power dynamic and strengthens social collaboration. Asking pupils to recognize their mistakes and then revise is an essential metacognitive skill. Students' reading, writing, and communication skills all increase when they learn how to give feedback to others.

Another key factor that impacts social interaction on SLA is motivation and confidence building. Social environments provide motivation through authentic communication. Peer relationships generate emotional support and build learner confidence. Emotional support is essential for learning English because it improves communication skills, student motivation, and comprehension of linguistic nuances, all of which contribute to a more successful and fulfilling educational process (Thao & others, 2023).

Cultural immersion and understanding also contribute to the impact of social interaction on SLA. Language enhances learning by serving as a medium for cross-cultural communication. Additionally, social interactions help students better grasp linguistic intricacies by exposing them to a variety of cultural situations. Many cultural, linguistic, and technical aspects have a significant impact on language learning in today's globalized society (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002; Kramsch, 2014). The extensive use of technology and cultural interconnection have changed language instruction, presenting teachers with both opportunities and challenges. Teachers should employ these factors to enhance the language learning process in addition to acknowledging their influence as they traverse this ever-shifting landscape (Byram et al, 2002).

### ***Types of Social Interaction in Language Learning***

Peer interactions, including group projects, conversations, and language games, as well as teacher-student interactions, can take place in the classroom. Varonis and Gass (1985) discuss the significance of peer interaction in language learning, particularly in the context of classroom settings, making it a relevant reference for the idea of peer interactions occurring both inside and outside the traditional classroom.

However, social interactions can also happen outside of a classroom. This is true of virtual language meetups, internet forums, and language exchange programs. In some of these situations, it's critical to emphasize how crucial technology is to promoting particular forms of communication. Additionally, there are unofficial social attractions, such as community involvement and casual discussions with native speakers. Furthermore, the chance to live in a foreign nation and experience daily attractions is unquestionably a fantastic opportunity for social interaction. Sato and Ballinger (2016) explore the use of online platforms for language learning, highlighting the potential of virtual environments for peer interactions and language exchange.

### ***Strategies to maximize the Benefits of Social Interaction***

Teachers must establish a conducive learning atmosphere in order to optimize the advantages of social contact. In addition to providing options for peer-to-peer engagement and cooperation, they should establish a conducive learning atmosphere in order to optimize the advantages of social contact. In addition to providing opportunities for in-person contact, they ought to promote teamwork and peer engagement in the classroom or conversation in the actual world. Peer interaction makes learners get to talk more. Also, learners get to experiment and learn from their mistakes.

Because learners have more control over the interaction when working with a peer, they can create space to question their use of language and to try out new language forms they are learning. Learners get to consolidate what they have learned, and get a chance to socialize. Moreover, they get low anxiety language practice (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2018).

Teachers should gradually have students interact in order to gain confidence. They can achieve this by gradually increasing their exposure after beginning with low-stakes interactions. All the strategies cited above help in removing or minimizing anxiety, which is considered one of the greatest obstacles to learn a second language. (Horwitz, 2001) discusses the negative impact of anxiety on language learning and provides some of the insights above into how to minimize it.

As part of the strategies to maximize the benefits of social interactions in the classroom, teachers must be aware of some of the difficulties students have while attempting to engage socially in the classroom. This awareness should also include cultural awareness and sensitivity.

### ***Conclusions***

Undoubtedly, social interaction plays a key role in second language acquisition. Through more intelligible input, practice and production possibilities, motivation and confidence building, and cultural immersion and understanding, social interaction has a positive impact on SLA. Both input and interaction are crucial to the process of acquiring a second language. It makes sense that different input or interaction treatments could have an effect on the second language acquisition process. More commonly, input may not be particularly helpful for learning a second language if it is not accompanied by adequate interaction. However, interactionally altered input may result in better acquisition of a second language.

To maximize the benefits of social contact, educators must create a favorable learning environment. To maximize the benefits of social contact, they should provide a supportive learning environment in addition to offering opportunities for peer-to-peer cooperation and involvement.

They should encourage collaboration and peer interaction in the classroom or in real-world interactions, in addition to offering chances for face-to-face interaction. Peer contact encourages increased conversation among students. Additionally, students have the opportunity to try new things and grow from their errors.

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