

# The Essential Role of Negotiation in the Communicative Classroom

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This paper reviews theory and research on the role of negotiation in second language (L2) learning, with application to the communicative classroom. What is shown with respect to L2 learning is that when learners and interlocutors engage in negotiation to resolve impasses in their communication, they signal and respond in ways that enhance their comprehension of input, provide them with feedback on form and meaning, assist their production of modified output, and thereby facilitate the process of L2 learning.

本稿は、第二言語学習における交渉の役割に関する理論的、実証的の先行研究と、コミュニケーションカティブな授業への応用を概観する。学習者と対話の相手がコミュニケーションの行き詰まりを打開するために交渉を行う時、インプットの理解を促進し、意味と形式に関するフィードバックが提供され、学習者のアウトプットの変更を助けるようなやりとりが行われ、結果として、第二言語の学習が進むということが示される。

Debates, discussions, and disagreements about how best to teach languages, always with us, are alive and well throughout the discourse on language education. I say alive and well because I believe the diversity and range we represent in our views is good for everyone concerned—teachers, researchers, and students alike. It is what brings us to conferences, conventions, and colloquia, and what compels us to keep up with the journals. Debates about language teaching have also sustained a liveliness and curiosity that spans universities, schools and private language institutes and cuts across contexts in the U.S., Japan, and world-wide.

For some, the debate centers on whether to keep the language curriculum focused on literary scholarship or grammar study, or to re-direct and restructure it toward the more functional and communicative aspects of everyday social interaction. Yet, for others, who *have* moved from literature or grammar focused curricula to a more communicative approach, but have been disappointed with the results, the debate is over whether a *return* to text appreciation and grammar practice is in order.

From another camp, educational theorists and policy makers, who often debate more among themselves than with their field-based colleagues, are advocating a "best of both worlds" approach, which emphasizes communication, and uses communication tasks to talk about texts, though not always literary ones, and to focus on grammar, though seldom through drilled production. There has been increased effort on that front through the work of Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1990). Many of the studies have been carried out in Japan (Ellis, Tanaka & Yamazaki, 1994; Fotos & Ellis, 1993; Nobuyoshi & Ellis, 1993; Ushimura, 1992). However, what I have found is that creating valid and effective grammar-based communication tasks requires a great deal of ingenuity and has in itself presented an overwhelming task for researchers.

Issues surrounding the contributions of communication to language learning are thus central to our current debates about language classrooms and curricula. It is within the context of these issues that discussion can occur about the communicative classroom and the essential role of negotiation therein. For several years now, there has been an increasing acknowledgment of language learning *for* communication and an increasing application of this notion to the classroom (cf. Brumfit & Johnson, 1979; Rivers, 1981; Savignon, 1972, 1983; Widdowson, 1978; Yalden, 1983). We have come to acknowledge that many people study a language so that they can use it in communication.

But where controversy continues to remain is over whether there should be an emphasis on language learning *through* communication as well. Although a number of innovative classroom experiences have come out of such communication-centered programs of language study (DiPietro, 1987; Prabhu, 1987), many educators who endorsed communication as a *goal* have remained undecided as to whether communication is also the *process* by which this goal is best achieved. Such controversy was raised early on in the field of language pedagogy (Brumfit, 1980; Valdman, 1980; Higgs & Clifford, 1982) from both theoretical and observational points of view. Recent research has made it all too clear that communication activities are important, but not sufficient, if learners are to master L2 form (cf. Day & Shapson, 1991; Harley, 1989; Lightbown & Spada, 1990, 1993; White, Spada, Lightbown & Ranta, 1992).

Our uncertainty about the role of communication in language learning is characterized by our questions. We ask whether we might be pushing students too soon into getting their messages across, no matter how imprecise their grammar might be. We question whether we are spending so much time on providing them with meaningful, comprehensible input that we are limiting their access to the grammatical structures they need for

competent language use (Swain, 1985). We wonder whether we are trying so hard to replicate what goes on *outside* the classroom while we are still in fact *inside* the classroom, that we are turning out students who can understand and convey the basic content of a message, but find it impossible to go beyond these rudiments (Pica, 1992a).

As we turn for answers to research that has been carried out on the communicative classroom, largely from immersion programs for children and adolescents in Canada and the United States, even the most committed communicative teachers among us must acknowledge some justification for the current concerns in our field. Researchers have found that immersion students' comprehension is good and they are often quite fluent, but their accuracy lags behind, particularly when they try to produce complex structures or draw from complex systems—verb tense and aspect, for example (Plann, 1977; Swain, 1985; Lightbown & Spada, 1993). Students who are in communication-oriented, but not necessarily immersion programs, have also been found to have similar imprecisions (Wong-Fillmore, 1992).

Excerpts from typical communicative activities shed some light on this problem. In excerpt (1), a class of students is working with its teacher on a decision-making task about which one of a list of parents has the qualifications to adopt a child. In (2), we find a group of four students working on a similar task, deciding on which one of five patients should be given the heart available for transplant. These excerpts are typical of the many hundreds that have been examined over the past few years in studies on classroom language learning. (See Chaudron, 1988 for a review of representative studies.)

(1) **English Native Speaker (NS)  
Teacher**

all right how about the fourth family?  
now I must remind you about the seriousness of our job...  
Guillermo

**Five English as a Second Language (L2)  
Learners (nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)**

1: I know is a good relation one man and two women  
  
laughter  
2: yes I know is your wife too and your sister the application my wife and my sister  
3: no  
1: no, the male is not married to neither of the womens  
2: OK  
4: maybe there are three family persons there

OK any comments about this  
 this third family? this fourth  
 family of three?

3: three company  
 2: is good I think is more than the last  
 family

5: I think is very important family  
 because they are one president of an  
 oil company

1: but no no is maybe they are rich or  
 they are a lot of money

(Pica, 1993, p.457)

(2) English L2 learner English L2 learner English L2 learner English L2 learner

I think they  
 Elena-  
 I think he isn't  
 old, and he isn't  
 young

but what?... I think-  
 I don't know is  
 very difficult but I  
 think is Elena  
 Rodriguez too  
 because she is very  
 young

is singer  
 but is sing in  
 the Metropolitan  
 Opera

OK go go to um

look look in your  
 family

um no?  
 the second  
 maybe OK Elena  
 singer in the  
 Metropolitan  
 Opera

this- no-  
 everybody ok?

OK

(Pica, 1993, p.  
 458)

What is seen in (1) and (2) is that the emphasis placed on facilitating and insuring communication during discussion, in decision-making, and problem solving, has left little room for work on language itself, or on the cognitive and social processes considered important for language learning. There was a great deal of communication, but the students' numerous inaccuracies in syntax, pronunciation, and lexical choice went unchecked by the teacher and by the students themselves.

Although arguments have been made that such experiences are sufficient evidence for the need to rid the classroom of communicative approaches, it is important to note that studies on other types of classroom environments have shown that all approaches have their shortcomings. For example, in many classrooms, students can be found to engage successfully in pronunciation drills and sentence practice, with considerable accuracy, but with little application beyond the present moment. In other classrooms in which a priority is placed on accuracy of form over communication of meaning, students have reported feeling pressured to offer a public performance that leaves them anxious, embarrassed, and hopelessly competitive. Diary studies have been all too revealing in this area (cf. Bailey, 1983; Bailey & Oshner, 1983; Matsumoto, 1987).

Ultimately, what has come to be acknowledged is that no method guarantees standard language competence or language learning confidence. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that no method should be held totally responsible for classroom outcomes, either failures *or* successes. As Skehan's (1989) exhaustive review and analysis have shown, numerous factors come into play, including the learner's own attitude, aptitude, motivation, developmental readiness, and, perhaps most serious of all, time spent on language learning and use.

Yet, we must acknowledge that students are learning quite a bit of language in communicative classrooms. Studies by Spada (1986, 1987) and Montgomery and Eisenstein (1986) attest to that. As classroom surveys reveal, students whose previous classroom experience has centered around drill and practice or grammar-translation, but are now in communicative classrooms, report a greater sense of relaxation and confidence about their language studies (Boyd-Kletzander, in preparation).

So communicative classrooms are working. They are just not doing everything we would like them to do. We would like them to provide an environment in which using the L2 for communication becomes both the learner's goal and the learner's *process* for reaching that goal. But how can this be accomplished? Right now, we look toward communication activities in which, for example, students extend invitations to parties, make complaints about products, deliberate the possible solutions to a problem, or brainstorm the answers to a reading assignment. Sometimes we make available samples of actual discourse as models for appropriate use. The goals of these activities are consistent with important communicative functions and have strong motivational appeal. However, the kinds of actual communication that students use in order to carry out these activities do not appear to engage them *in the kinds of* communication they need to advance the learning process.

Research on L2 acquisition would seem to suggest it is time for methodologists to move on—to concentrate on identifying and assisting the cognitive and social processes needed for language learning. We may not desire another bandwagon, but if there is such a thing as a communicative bandwagon, I do believe it could use a tune-up, a tune-up which is implemented, at least in part, with a good dose of negotiation. For what research has shown is that processes related to the comprehension, feedback, and production needs of language learners are possible during uninterrupted communication, but that it is during negotiation that these needs are much more likely to be served.

### Theoretical Background on Negotiation as a Construct in L2 Learning

Negotiation is communication, but it goes much deeper than the fluent, unbroken sequences of message exchange which characterize the usual concept of communication. In fact, it is when the even flow of communication is broken, or is on the verge of breaking down due to the lack of comprehensibility in a message, that we see negotiation arise. When interlocutors negotiate, they engage in any or all of the following activities: 1) they anticipate possible communication breakdowns, as they ask clarification questions and check each other's comprehension, 2) they identify communication breakdowns for each other, and 3) they repair them through signals and reformulations. If we aim for communication in a classroom, but do not build in a need to anticipate, identify, or repair breakdowns, not only is negotiation unnecessary, but processes relevant and helpful for language learning are unlikely to occur.

Most language learning scholars and researchers who write on negotiation trace their roots to ethnomethodology and conversational analysis, particularly Garfinkel (1967), where the term was used to refer to the ongoing process by which interlocutors structured their social relationships through interaction, taking turns at talking and communicating meaning to each other. This ethnomethodological perspective on negotiation as a social process has contributed substantially to studies on interaction, interactional modification, and repairs as a means for L2 learners to access L2 input and produce and modify their interlanguage output (cf. Doughty & Pica, 1986; Gass & Varonis, 1984, 1985, 1989; Goldstein & Conrad, 1990; Hatch, 1978a, 1978b; Long, 1980, 1981, 1983, 1985; Pica, 1987a, 1987b; Pica, Doughty & Young, 1986; Pica, Young & Doughty, 1987; Schwartz, 1980; Varonis & Gass, 1982, 1985a, 1985b; Day 1986).

Interest in negotiation among L2 researchers also grew out of earlier work on a special register for NS-NNS interaction known as "foreigner

talk." The challenge to examine the properties of foreigner talk for evidence of L2 learning processes was articulated by Hatch (1978a, 1978b), who argued that research on learner discourse could yield not only insight about social aspects of speech to learners, but also about linguistic and cognitive features of the L2 learning process. To do this, Hatch told researchers that they needed to reverse their assumption that the nature of the learning process was one in which L2 structure learning *led to* the learner's communicative use of the L2. Instead, their work should focus on how the learning of L2 structure *evolved out of* communicative use.

With the studies of Long (1980, 1981), the empirical work needed to address Hatch's challenge was undertaken. Long (1980) described and quantified features of negotiation in the social discourse of NNSs and their NS interlocutors, and identified negotiation as a process which included requests for clarification and confirmation of message meaning and checks on message comprehensibility. These features, which he referred to as interactional modifications, served to identify negotiation as a type of communication highly suited to L2 learners' needs and requirements in the learning process. The studies that have followed further described negotiation as a social process and connected it to linguistic and cognitive processes of L2 learning. Such connections may be observed in excerpts (3) to (5), taken from communication tasks in which NSs and learners of English took turns describing a picture for the other either to draw or to select from a group of pictures. Some of the communication went smoothly, with mutual understanding about the pictures. Descriptive information was conveyed successfully and when information was sought, questions were responded to fluently and quickly. At other times their communication triggered negotiation about the meaning of the information conveyed or sought about the picture. As interlocutors, they expressed their lack of understanding through a variety of signals, shown in *italics* below. Responses to other's signals are shown **sans serif**. These signals for lack of understanding and responses to signals are what characterize the negotiation process.

- |                                      |                     |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| (3) English NS                       | English L2 Learner  |
| it's a rectangular bench             | <i>rectangular?</i> |
| yeah it's in the shape of a          |                     |
| rectangle with um you know           |                     |
| a rectangle has two long sides       |                     |
| and two short sides                  |                     |
|                                      | <i>rectangle?</i>   |
| re-rectangle it's it's like a square |                     |

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>except you you flatten it out<br/>uh a rectangle is a square<br/>except a square has four equal<br/>sides a rectangle has two sides<br/>that are much longer and two<br/>sides that are much shorter</p> | <p><i>square except</i><br/>uhuh<br/>yes<br/>OK (Pica, 1993, p. 437, 1994, p. 513)</p>  |
| <p>(4) English NS<br/>the windows are clozed<br/><i>the windows have what?</i><br/><i>crossed? I'm not sure what</i><br/><i>you're saying there</i><br/>oh the windows are closed oh<br/>OK sorry</p>       | <p>English L2 Learner<br/><br/>crozed<br/><br/>windows are closed<br/><br/>(Pica, 1994, p. 514)</p>   |
| <p>(5) English L2 Learner<br/>Where do you put the three<br/>floor house three floor<br/><i>right and middle</i><br/><i>in across the circle circle</i><br/><br/><i>three floors</i></p>                    | <p>English L2 Learner<br/>three floor em I put it at the um right<br/>and middle<br/>yes close the cir cir the circuit<br/>yes<br/>OK um three floors<br/>yes (Pica, 1992b, p. 225)</p> |

As these selections reveal, negotiation engages learners in communication at a deeper level than the even flow of exchanges that was seen in (1) and (2). During negotiation, the overall message meaning remains, as both givers and receivers modify and manipulate the form in which the message is encoded, until its meaning can be conveyed.

### Theoretical Support for Negotiation in Language Learning

As theories about L2 learning have proliferated, the early theoretical claims of Hatch and Long about the role of communication in language learning, and about the importance of negotiation in particular, have continued to hold importance. Although the field of language learning has been grounded in descriptive studies a theoretical picture is emerging of the complex process of learning a language. Some of its main components and claims have dealt with what learners need in order to be successful in learning. These needs, described below, are 1) to access L2 input that is meaningful and comprehensible in its message, and modified to draw attention to its form; 2) to be given feedback on the comprehensibility and accuracy of their messages, and 3) to modify their production of output toward greater comprehensibility, complexity, and accuracy.

### *Learners' Input Needs*

The first component of the language learning process, often overlooked or taken for granted, has to do with giving learners sufficient access to a language to serve as input for their structural, lexical, and phonological development. The learners' need for such input data is fundamental to almost any theory of language learning, although theories differ dramatically with respect to how much is needed and whether and how it needs to be organized to facilitate learning. As such, theories that are nativist in orientation view input as a triggering device for setting and resetting innate mental structures with which the learner is genetically endowed (cf. Cook, 1988; White, 1988, 1991). Other theories view input within the context of the active learner who uses input to test hypotheses about the form-meaning relationships in the L2 under study (Faerch & Kasper, 1987) or to sort cues and weigh evidence (MacWhinney, 1987).

The second and perhaps most widely acknowledged theoretical need in language learning is for *comprehensible* input. Comprehensible input is believed to assist learning in two ways. One way is by freeing learners' attention to focus on language form. In the view of Krashen (1980, 1983, 1985) if learners can understand the meaning encoded in L2 input, they can induce those forms in the input that are slightly beyond their current level of language development. Another way in which comprehensible input is believed to assist learning is by drawing the learner's attention to the forms which have to be manipulated in order to make the input comprehensible, a reverse sequence to the one proposed by Krashen. Learners first segment and sort out the forms that encode the input, then work on comprehending its meaning. There is now a fair amount of evidence to support the view that negotiation assists comprehension, both indirectly (Chaudron, 1983, 1985; Kelch, 1985; Long, 1985) on speech modification and comprehension, and directly (Pica, 1991; Pica, Doughty & Young, 1986; Pica, Young & Doughty, 1987). There is also evidence for the role of the process of comprehension itself in English L2 language learning (Doughty, 1988, 1992) and Japanese as a foreign language (FL) (Loschky, 1989, 1994).

Research has shown that learners are best aided in their access to, and comprehension of language by what Sharwood Smith (1991) has called enhanced input. This construct consists of samples of the L2 or FL modified to make the linguistic forms and features more salient and easier for learners to process and to engage them in the focus on form. Such experiences are now believed to be critical to important learning processes (cf. Rutherford & Sharwood Smith, 1985; Schmidt & Frota 1986; Schmidt, 1990; Long, 1990).

Enhanced input helps learners with forms that are difficult to recognize because they are unstressed in the stream of speech, or because of similarity to forms in the first language, are easily misgeneralized. White (1991), for example, investigating the learning of adverb placement rules in English and French, found that despite the overlaps among these rules, there were a few differences which, unless pointed out, were difficult for learners to notice.

Given what theory and research has indicated, how might negotiation provide learners with the kinds of input they need? Excerpt (3) above is illustrative. Here, the learner asked about *rectangular* and *rectangle* as well as *square except*. In response to all three of these signals, the NS described the features of a rectangle, attending to its meaning. In addition, when responding to the signal *square except*, the NS took what the learner apparently perceived as a single word and segmented this into two forms. In effect, the NS took back his initial input and then pulled it apart, analyzing it for the learner. This was not done in the way a linguist or classroom teacher might, but in a way which appeared to invite attention to its form and meaning, and to help the learner understand it.

The scope of quality and enhanced input that negotiation can provide is seen in (6) and (7):

|     | English NS  | English L2 learner                                   |                      |
|-----|---|--|----------------------|
| (6) | is the rest of the tree pointed?<br>is it pointed on top? the tree? | <i>tree?</i>   | (Pica, 1992a)        |
| (7) | the door has hinges<br>like hinges hold it together                 | <i>hinges? I don't know what that means.</i><br>uhuh | (Pica, 1993, p. 440) |

In (6), the learner asked about *tree*. *Tree* then was used in a new form—right dislocation—in the NS response. The NS also gave information about the meaning of *pointed*. It had to do with the top of the tree. In (7), the analysis seems to be mainly on meaning: The NS added *hold it together* in response to the learner's query about *hinges*. But in doing this, the NS also segmented *hinges* and moved it from its original position as object of *has* to the subject position in the phrase *hinges hold it together*. Negotiation gave the learner information about the meaning of *hinges* as well as its structural possibilities.

| (8) | English NS  | English L2 learner |
|-----|---|--------------------|
|     | do you all have a chance to give<br>your complaints to school? do |                    |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| you know what feedback is?   | <i>feedback is?</i>   |
| do you know feedback?  |   |
| you know the word?   | <i>no</i>   |
| you can talk about the program<br>not being very good you can<br>talk about that | yeah we have to do an evaluation? do<br>an evaluation and write a report to<br>school<br>(Chen, 1992) |

In (8), the learner asked about *feedback is* as though it was a specific lexical item, unknown to her. Through negotiation, however, she discovered that *feedback is* contained in a noun phrase whose meanings she already knew.

Learners themselves also supply each other with input that is enhanced for meaning and form. Although this input is not always target-like, what we are finding in current research on learner-to-learner interaction is that negotiation results in learners' analysis of this L2 input and its breakdown into short phrases rather than lengthy, complex sentences (Pica, Lincoln-Porter, Paninos & Linnell, 1995, 1996). This procedure makes learner input a good deal more accurate than might be expected, and can be seen above in (5) where the learner was able to modify *three floor* to *three floors*, as well as in (9) below:

|   |                                     |               |
|---|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| (9) English L2 Learner  | English L2 learner                  |               |
| some guy . . . one guy . . . some<br>guy ent- opened the door and<br>uh he make a greet | <i>greet?</i><br><i>ah greeting</i> |               |
| <b>greet</b> . . . hi<br>that is all  | OK                                  | (Pica, 1992a) |

In (9), negotiation helped the learner understand the meaning of *make a greet*, as it brought him to segment *greet* from this initial verb phrase and incorporate it into the more target-like *greeting*. On balance, the responses of negotiation have been found to give learners a good deal of enhanced input for meaning of words about which they inquire and structures of utterances they can not process, both separately and in conjunction with each other.

### *Learners' Need for Feedback*

Another type of input and an important theoretical contributor to language learning comes in the form of feedback, which is sometimes referred to as

negative input. Negative input is considered important for language learning because it provides metalinguistic information on the clarity, accuracy, and/or comprehensibility of the learners' own production and helps them notice forms in their interlanguage that are not consistent with standard varieties of the L2, but are difficult to detect during the even flow of social communication (cf. Schachter, 1983, 1984, 1986, 1991).

Empirically, the valuable contributions of negative input have been revealed (cf. Lightbown & Spada, 1990; White, Spada, Lightbown & Ranta, 1992). Examples of negotiation providing negative input were shown in earlier excerpts, particularly by the NSs in (4) and (6), and by the learners themselves in (5) and (9) as they signaled about the clarity and comprehensibility of learners' messages and repronounced, restated, and rephrased them. In (10) as the NS signal offered the learner an L2 version of his original utterance.

- |      |  |  |
|------|--|--|
| (10) | English L2 Learner<br>and tree with stick<br>yes | English NS<br><i>you mean the trees have branches?</i><br>(Pica, 1994, p. 515) |
|------|--|--|

The NS version of the learner's utterance focused on differences in both form and meaning by segmenting *tree* from the learner's utterance, making it the subject of his sentence, modifying it with the plural -s morpheme, and substituting *branches* for *sticks*. Further examples are seen in (11) and (12) as the NS repronounced *bik* and supplied another form of *draw* for the learner:

- |      |  |  |
|------|--|--|
| (11) | English NS<br><i>big?</i>  | English L2 Learner<br>this country like <i>bik</i><br>yeah (Pica, 1993, p. 440; 1994, p. 514)        |
| (12) | <i>to draw?</i><br>(Pica, Holliday, Lewis & Morgenthaler, 1989, p. 89; Pica, 1994, p. 514) | I be easy to do on a piece of paper but<br>I didn't know how drew so we are very<br>confused<br>yeah |

On the other hand, negotiation led to the NS instruction on pronunciation of *flower* in the more lengthy exchange shown in (13).

- |      |                               |   |
|------|-------------------------------|---|
| (13) | English NS<br><i>is what?</i> | English L2 Learner<br>and left tree is a [flo:wer]<br>[flo:wer] |
|------|-------------------------------|---|

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <i>a what?</i>           | a [flo:wer] [o]                           |
| <i>yeah get the book</i> | [flow er]                                 |
| oh a flaUer              | flaUer oh pronunciation is very difficult |
|                          | flaUer                                    |
| flaU:                    | <i>eh? flower</i>                         |
| um <i>what's {}?</i>     |   |
| [f...o...]               | [aU]                                      |
|                          | (Pica, 1993, pp. 449-450; 1996, p. 13)    |

When input is modified to draw attention to structure and meaning, to assist comprehensibility and provide feedback, it appears to provide good data for language learning. As the above excerpts indicate, negotiation makes a considerable contribution toward meeting these many input needs.

#### *Learners' Need to Modify Output*

One additional theoretical condition relates to learners' output needs. According to Swain's (1985) comprehensible output hypothesis, learners need opportunities to produce the language, but not in the usual form of the practice associated with production in the language classroom. Learners' modification of output is viewed as a vehicle for them to manipulate their interlanguage grammar in creative and complex ways that are often more consistent with standard varieties of the L2, through modeling their interlocutor, or better yet, by trying to rephrase initially unclear messages. Examples of each during negotiation were shown in (5), where one learner was able to produce an appropriate plural construction while engaged in negotiation with another learner, and in (4), where the NS requested clarification of *crozed* by repeating most of the initial message, but inserting *what* where he couldn't understand it. The learner was also given *crossed* to compare with *closed*. The learner responded by modifying his output, segmenting *windows* from the initial utterance as he incorporated the repronounced version of *closed*. This modified message was one the NS understood.

Similar episodes can be seen in (14), in which one learner signaled a problem about the use of *discuss* by modifying it as *discussion*, then incorporated *discussion* into the other learner's response, and (15), in which the learner modified his pronunciation in response to a NS signal.

|                              |                                  |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| (14) English L2 Learner      | English L2 Learner               |
| No discuss                   | <i>what? discuss? discusson?</i> |
| hmmn we don't have xxx       | <i>we don't have to what?</i>    |
| the last discussion activity | (Pica, 1992a)                    |

- |                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| (15) English NS       | English L2 Learner   |
| <i>you have what?</i> | around the house we have glass<br>uh grass, plants and grass<br>(Pica et al., 1996, p. 62) |

Finally, in (16), taken from another conversation between two learners, one modified her initially unclear output by supplying a descriptor:

- |                               |                    |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| (16) English L2 Learner       | English L2 Learner |
| do you go to dinner tomorrow? | I'm not sure       |
| you go, you should go with me | you go?            |
| I want I think it's free      | <i>free?</i>       |
| because there is nothing they | uhuh               |
| don't tell the cost           |                    |
| so maybe it's free I think    | (Chang, 1992)      |

### Summary: Meeting Learners' Needs through Negotiation

What are the contributions of negotiation to learner needs? The input that comes via negotiation can be enhanced to help learners focus on phonological, lexical, and syntactic forms and features, to comprehend the messages that these forms encode, and to gain feedback on the form and comprehensibility of their own attempts at production. Negotiation also provides opportunities for learners to produce output. Such output is not the usual rote repetition of traditional language lessons or even the fluent, unmonitored communication of the communicative classroom. Instead, negotiation stimulates learners to produce output in which they can respond to feedback on their comprehensibility and to analyze and break apart the language of their message into meaningful segments, and thereby to attempt to produce forms and structures that may be a little beyond the complexity or accuracy of those used initially.

### Negotiation and the Communicative Classroom: Concerns, Reservations, and Possibilities

What must be acknowledged is that despite the many potential contributions of negotiation to the communicative classroom, what occurs during negotiation has been documented and described predominantly, but not exclusively, in work on L2, rather than FL learning, and in quasi-experimental studies designed to address classroom variables, but implemented outside the spontaneity of classroom life.

Of course, there has been some excellent work on both L2 and FL classrooms as exemplified in the thorough review of Chaudron (1988) and highlighted among chapters of Day (1986) and van Patten and Lee (1990). However, I believe that the reason so much of what we know about negotiation and language learning has come from research on L2 learners in studies implemented outside the classroom is because negotiation has been found to be a rare commodity in classrooms, even those with an emphasis on communicative language teaching (cf. Long & Sato, 1983; Pica & Long, 1986).

It is not easy to make negotiation an integral component of classroom life. It should also be noted that despite these many contributions of negotiation to the communicative classroom it only plays one role. It is not a panacea, nor should it be perceived as another bandwagon. Language learning remains a complex, somewhat baffling process; as such, it can never be assisted or explained by any one learning experience, even one as helpful as negotiation.

Aside from this general caveat, there are three additional areas to take into consideration to bring negotiation to the communicative classroom: applicability, feasibility, and desirability.

### Applicability of Negotiation to the Communicative Classroom

Negotiation works differently, being more effective in some aspects of language learning and communication than others. The kind of negotiation that best meets learner needs appears to depend on the learner's L2 developmental level. Results of research to date suggest that negotiation might be most helpful in the intermediate stages of learning. Although beginning learners do enter into negotiation, they appear more likely to do so as input consumers than output providers. As illustrated in (17), this is probably due to lack of linguistic resources for output modification.

What typically happens when the beginning learner produces an unclear utterance is that the NS signals by repeating or reformulating the utterance. The beginner needed to respond only with a form of *yes*.

- |                                    |                                       |                     |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
| (17) English NS                    | English L2 Learner                    |                     |
|                                    | I think on the front is a small stone |                     |
| <i>on the front?</i>               | yeah oh doors                         |                     |
| <i>in the front of the door?</i>   | yeah                                  |                     |
| <i>there is a small step. yes?</i> | oh yes                                | (Pica, 1996, p. 11) |

Advanced learners, on the other hand, often make self-repairs of what they perceive to be a lack of clarity. When negotiation does occur,

it is less about clarity and comprehensibility and more about opinion and interpretation.

Further, negotiation seems to work most readily on lexical items and larger syntactic units, such as sentence constituents. Although learners' negotiation over choice of grammatical structure or inflection has been observed, there is seldom an impressive amount over such elements on the various communication tasks studied. Even when asked to tell stories or sequence events and explain procedures, learners and interlocutors do not negotiate much over time and aspect marking, giving more attention to the people in their pictures and stories—what they looked like, their shapes, sizes, and so forth—than to what these individuals were doing. This leads them to segment and move larger units of syntax, sentence constituents, for example, but little else by way of these linguistic elements. This does not mean that learners and interlocutors *cannot* negotiate over time and aspect, but that in or out of classrooms, communities, or research contexts, many of the communication activities in which learners participate require little conscious attention to these areas of grammar.

A third issue of applicability has to do with the focus of negotiation on the comprehensibility of message form rather than on the accuracy of form in the message during communication. Learners and their interlocutors often find strategies for communicating messages through negotiation, but not necessarily in ways that are consistent with a standard version of the L2. This has been shown quite clearly in research by Sato (1986), which provides numerous examples of two young learners relying on their NS interlocutor to best articulate their message—through confirmation questions and reformulations. She also found that when the learners took the lead in the negotiation, they used little morphosyntax to express time and location, and communicated these notions instead through lexical paraphrase, adverbs, and formulas. Thus a statement such as, *Last year I played basketball at my school* might be uttered as *Last year I play basketball my school*. Although such a strategy allowed these learners to interact successfully, it brought them little advancement in their grammatical development during the 10 months of the study.

Further, features of language used in communication are often imperceptible, impossible for learners to negotiate over or attend to at all. This is why, as noted earlier, researchers have had success in helping learners acquire another language by actually giving them enhanced input directly, highlighting relatively imperceptible linguistic units, complex rules, or features that are difficult to differentiate from those in their first language (White, Spada, Lightbown & Ranta 1990).

Finally, we have found in our research that negotiation seldom assists all language learning conditions at the same time. For example, negotiation signals that are simple, open questions such as *What?* or *bub?* or statements such as *I don't understand* provide an excellent opportunity for learners to modify their output. However, these signals carry no explicit information on the L2 that can serve as data for learning. On the other hand, signals which re-code a learner's utterance into more target-like forms provide useful data and even feedback, but limit opportunities for learners themselves to modify their output (cf. Pica, 1992a, 1992b; Pica et al., 1989; Pica, Lewis & Holliday, 1990; Pica, Holliday, Lewis, Berducci, & Newman, 1991). For example, in (11) above, the NS provided a more target-like pronunciation of the learner's *bik*, while in (18), the NS modified the learner's *dog is um right hand of girl* by inserting definite articles.

- |  |                              |               |
|--|------------------------------|---------------|
| (18) English NS                                      | English L2 Learner           |               |
|  | dog is um right hand of girl |               |
| <i>the dog is at the right hand<br/>of the girl?</i> | yes                          | (Pica, 1992a) |

Both of these signal types offered potential data for L2 learning. But rather than repeat or modify their original utterances, the learners simply acknowledged the signal as encoding the meaning intended. Thus, signals given to learners during negotiation are useful to different degrees, and there is considerable variation in the learning opportunities that negotiation can offer.

To add one encouraging note, however, we are finding that these limits on the signal-response pattern may be more common when learners communicate with NS speakers than with other learners. In recent research (Pica et al., 1995, 1996), we identified a different pattern when learners communicate with other learners, as seen in (19), in which one learner's response of *dark* and *entrance is two steps* were characterized respectively by lexical and syntactic modifications of his own initial output rather than affirmations of the other learner's model. Thus learners are engaged in mutual modification of lexis and syntax, and not simply in saying *yes* to the other's modification.

- |                         |                                  |                      |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| (19) English L2 Learner | English L2 Learner               |                      |
| roof is very black      | <i>black?</i>                    |                      |
| dark                    | dark yeah hmnn                   |                      |
| two stone steps         | <i>yeah steps is a entrance?</i> |                      |
| entrance is two steps   | yeah yeah two steps              | (Pica, 1993, p. 452) |

### Feasibility of Negotiation to the Communicative Classroom

A second caveat for negotiation in the communicative classroom has to do with its feasibility in the classroom or almost any public context. Negotiation is often an optional aspect of communication. No matter how carefully we structure a class with negotiation-rich activities, we cannot count on negotiation to happen even under the most communicative of circumstances. It *doesn't* occur when topics and referents are so mutually familiar that learners and interlocutors are confronted with few impasses in their communication over which they can negotiate, or topics and referents are so *unfamiliar* that there is little communication at all (Long, 1980, 1981, 1983; Pica, 1987a).

When familiarity with a topic is unevenly distributed, the interlocutor who is unfamiliar may feel reluctant to initiate negotiation for fear of creating further social distance. This is not uncommon in a classroom context, as shown in (20), where, despite the teacher's many comprehension checks, the students are relatively uncooperative.

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| (20) Teacher  | Students |
| do you understand all that?   | silence  |
| you wrote sneezes right?  | yes      |
| ok the rest of the words are pretty<br>easy if if a person happened to<br>sneeze—you know—do you<br>know what happened means? | silence  |
| something happened it occurs<br>it takes place so if a person if it<br>happened that a person sneezed?                        |          |
| do you understand this?   | silence  |
| nobody's saying anything  | yes      |
| hmn you understood it and you<br>got it right. Ok read the next one.  |          |

(Pica, 1993, p. 450)

Further limiting the amount of negotiation that can occur during communication is the possibility that when learners interact with NSs familiar with the features of the learner's interlanguage, the NSs have little need to ask for clarification. This deprives the learners of negotiation that can provide feedback on their interlanguage or opportunities for them to modify their production toward comprehensibility. The element of familiarity can make classrooms particularly unfavorable contexts for negotiation, and those of us who have taught in comparable educational settings in the same country for years are especially vulnerable.

### Desirability of Negotiation in the Communicative Classroom

Finally, there are caveats about negotiation with respect to its desirability for communication in that negotiation can be so prevalent that it gets in the way of communication. As Aston (1986) and others have shown, a steady stream of clarification questions, when asked by either interlocutor, can be a source of frustration in attempts to move a conversation forward. Such moves can also lead learners to feigned or misguided comprehension (Hawkins, 1985). Further, Porter (1986) has shown that L2 learners often use negotiation moves that are too explicit, direct, and generally sociolinguistically inappropriate in form for the contexts in which they are seeking clarity of input.

These studies suggest that negotiation is not harmful to language learning, but that both the quantity and quality of negotiation require fine-tuning. It is in the communicative classroom that I believe we are in a position to fine-tune negotiation so that it can work effectively to assist our students. All things considered, negotiation is too relevant to the L2 learning process to be deemed undesirable. What may be unacceptable in everyday social interaction seems perfectly suitable if we think of the classroom as a place for learning language through negotiation rather than a place for practicing communication in an L2.

### Toward Negotiation in the Communicative Classroom

How can we provide conditions for negotiation in the classroom? This question can best be answered in light of what research has revealed about the conditions under which negotiation can best occur. First, research has shown that negotiation becomes part of the discourse when interlocutors have mutual recognition and concern for each other's objectives. Both participants must be aware of the objectives of the interaction, and must be willing to work toward mutual attainment (Doughty & Pica, 1986; Gass & Varonis, 1984, 1985, 1989; Varonis & Gass, 1982, 1985a, 1985b; Pica, Kanagy & Falodun, 1993). Even simple assignments such as explaining a picture for a partner to replicate, pooling clues to solve a mystery, or sharing details in order to assemble a picture have been shown to be effective because they require that learners and interlocutors take each other's needs into account at the outset of the communication and to respond to these as they arise.

In contrast, more reflective tasks involving debates, decisions, and problem-solving can, and often do, inspire little negotiation. What typically happens is that one learner dominates the debate, makes the

decision, or solves the problem while the other, less assertive learners listen. This can be seen in the modest plant-the-garden task of (21) and (22) and the more serious adoption and heart transplant tasks of (1) and (2). As (21) reveals, even when the teacher participates in a negotiation-oriented task, others in the class have opportunities to participate in learning processes.

- |      |  |                              |           |   |
|------|--|------------------------------|-----------|---|
| (21) | English L2 Learner   | Other Classroom Participants |           |   |
|      | the flower is a bowl is uh left side on the bottom and has blue color eh dark blue color and the middle of this dark blue color you can see light blue color |                              |           |   |
|      | light blue color triangle and what else do you want to know?   |                              |           | triangles?<br>triangles?<br>triangles?<br>triangle<br>which position? vertical<br><br>is on the left? normal position?                |
|      | is the normal position up on the left on bottom . . . of the board   |                              |           |   |
|      | no at the bottom   |                              |           | <i>left is in- in the middle... in the top? in the middle down left at the bottom? bottom or top? up or down? where is it please?</i> |
|      | top  |                              |           | top top (Pica, 1993, p. 456)  |
| (22) | Learner 1  | Learner 2                    | Learner 3 | Learner 4   |
|      | the stem is yellow and it has two <i>two leaves?</i> one dark green the other blue and it is on the top  |                              |           |   |
|      |  | uhuh                         |           |   |
|      | right side mmm position? vertical corner? <i>corner?</i> ahha normal position the other  |                              |           | <i>normal vertical?</i>   |

one is I don't  
 know like uh this  
 how you call this  
*square? square? just off the corner?*      *squirt?*      yeah quadratic  
 yes square just  
 on the corner  
 yes ok

(Pica, 1993, pp. 455-457)

This last point here seem especially important to bear in mind as we structure our classes toward communication. Even the most provocative content cannot promote negotiation if learners do not share a stake in the objectives of the task assigned. Further, even beginning learners can be involved in negotiation if they can be given simple content to work with and still be drawn toward negotiation to complete a task.

Another way in which negotiation is promoted or impeded is through the kinds of questions asked. What studies have shown is that negotiation is promoted by questions which signal a lack of understanding on the part of the question poser. The classroom staple of evaluation questions whereby teachers ask learners to display what teachers know already needs to be replaced by signaling questions which seek clarification of what has been said.

In addition, there need to be opportunities for both teachers and students to ask such questions. When asked by teachers, these signaling questions provide feedback to learners on their production and provide them with opportunities to modify output. When asked by learners, these questions provide them with access toward input they need to understand.

Finally, research has shown that the affective environment conducive to negotiation is one in which face-threatening moves are kept to a minimum (cf. Bailey & Oshner, 1983). These studies imply that negotiation occurs in an environment in which displays of incomprehension do not reveal the weaknesses of learners, but rather reveal their strength as workers completing a task in which they play a pivotal role. Learners must be able to feel they need to seek help because it is the task which is difficult not because it is *they* who are weak.

An important aspect of the communicative classroom, therefore, is that whatever activities take place therein must help learners feel like learners. One way to accomplish this is through providing learners with the opportunity to negotiate—to ask questions, to seek assistance, and to seek help when others cannot be understood. This requires an environment which is guided by projects and tasks whose completion depends on all partici-

pants. Developing such a social context poses many challenges. Yet, the more we strive toward communication with collaboration, the more possibilities will arise for teachers and learners to work together, and to nurture and sustain the language learning process.

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