UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

EFFECTS OF NEGOTIATION FOR MEANING TOWARDS THE IMPROVEMENT OF CLASSROOM INTERACTIONAL SKILLS

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FPP 2003 12

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By

PUNG TZE CHING JOANNA

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

March 2003

DEDICATION

To my family members; my parents, Pung Thau Yung and Pow Soon Ling, my brother and sister, Roger Pung Chuk Tshung and Joan Pung Tze Ping, sister-in law, Jenny Lim Yen Nie, niece, Darly Pung Xi An and grandmother, Liew Kui Jin. Pa and Ma believed in me, brother and sister-in law were patient with me, sister supported and encouraged me, grandmother stood by me and lastly my niece, who has brought me tremendous joy.

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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March 2003

Chairman   :   **Dr Fauziah Hassan**

Faculty   :   **Educational Studies**

Interaction involves not just the expression of ideas but the skills in solving communication problems that occur. There is an opportunity to transfer information efficiently and ensure mutual understanding in communication when students negotiate for meaning. This study examined how students receiving negotiation of meaning training contributed significantly on a test of two-way information task. This study involved 40 students of the English Academic Purpose course from the Universiti Putra Malaysia.

The purpose of Chapter 1 is to provide an introductory overview of the study. In particular, the background of this study, statement of the problem, the purpose and the significance of this study are discussed. Chapter 2 covers the related theories and past studies on negotiation of meaning. The discussion of the related theories are well established in the second language learning field which view the vital role of negotiation

for meaning in achieving communicative competence. Chapter 3 deals with the research design and the procedures of the methodology in this study. This was a pretest-posttests quasi-experimental design conducted on two intact groups of students. The study was carried out over a period of seven weeks. The instrument used was a set of adapted two-way information task. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the data. Percentage, mean, standard deviation, independent sample t-test and repeated measures analysis of variance were employed to analyse the data. The study concluded that negotiation of meaning training contributed significantly to the students' achievement in the two-way information task.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia untuk memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

KESAN PEROLEHAN MAKNA KE ATAS PENINGKATAN KEBOLEHAN INTERAKSI DALAM BILIK DARJAH

Oleh

PUNG TZE CHING JOANNA

Mac 2003

Pengerusi : **Dr Fauziah Hassan**

Fakulti : **Pengajian Pendidikan**

Interaksi berkesan bukan sahaja melibatkan pengeluahan idea tetapi juga melibatkan kemahiran penjelasan makna komunikasi yang berlaku. Para pelajar mempunyai peluang untuk memindahkan informasi secara berkesan dan memastikan mereka saling memahami dalam komunikasi apabila menerima latihan perolehan makna. Kajian ini adalah berkaitan bagaimana latihan perolehan makna yang diterima oleh pelajar memberi kesan yang signifikan terhadap ujian informasi dua-hala. Kajian ini melibatkan 40 pelajar dari program 'English Academic Purpose', Universiti Putra Malaysia.

Bab 1 menjelaskan pengenalan kepada kajian ini. Secara khususnya, bab ini membincangkan latar belakang kajian, pernyataan masalah, tujuan dan kesignifikaan kajian. Bab 2 menekankan teori-teori yang berkaitan dan kajian-kajian lepas tentang perolehan makna. Teori-teori yang terlibat dalam kajian ini merupakan teori yang mantap dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Ingerris sebagai bahasa kedua yang menekankan

peranan utama perolehan makna untuk mencapai komunikasi berkesan. Bab 3 adalah berkaitan rekabentuk penyelidikan dan prosedur-prosedur untuk metodologi kajian. Kajian ini menggunakan rekabentuk ujian-pra ujian-pasca eksperimen kuasi yang dikendalikan ke atas dua kumpulan pelajar yang tetap. Kajian ini telah dijalankan dalam selama dua bulan. Alat kajian yang digunakan adalah satu set ujian informasi dua hala yang telah diubahsuai. Bab 4 memaparkan dapatan data. Peratusan, min, sisihan piawai, ujian-t bersandar, analisis varians ukuran berulangan telah digunakan untuk menganalisis data. Kesimpulan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa latihan perolehan makna memberi sumbangan signifikan kepada pencapaian pelajar dalam informasi dua hala.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to my Supervisory Committee: Dr Fauziah Hassan, Cik Syarifah Zainab and Associate Professor Dr. Bahaman Abu Samah for their invaluable guidance and comments in completing this thesis. In particular, my warm and sincere gratitude to Dr Fauziah Hassan and Cik Syarifah Zainab for their personal encouragement and concern throughout this study.

My sincere gratitude also goes to Associate Professor Dr Jegak Uli of Universiti Putra Malaysia and Miss Ng Siew Hua for their advices and assistance in interpretation of the SPSS data, and Puan Iza Dura, the coordinator of the English Academic Purpose course from Universiti Putra Malaysia, for her help and cooperation in carrying out the field research. Finally, my sincere appreciation to all my coursemates and friends who, in one way or another, have offered their help and support to make this thesis possible.

I certify that an Examination Committee met on the 25th March, 2003 to conduct the final examination of Pung Tze Ching @ Joanna on her Master of Science thesis entitled "Effects of Negotiation for Meaning towards the Improvement of Classroom Interactional Skills" in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

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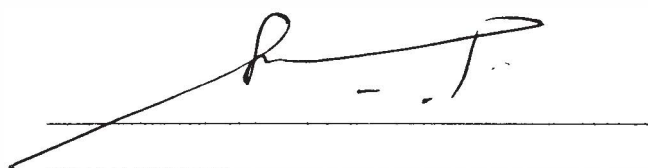
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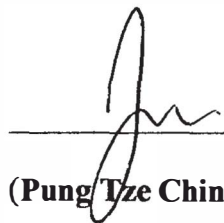Faculty of Educational Studies
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This thesis submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee are as follows:

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations, which have been duly acknowledged. I declare that this thesis has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or other institutions.

(Pung Tze Ching Joanna)

Date: 29.4.2003

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

KBSM	Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia
ESL	English as a Second Language
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
UPM	Universiti Putra Malaysia
NNS	Non-native speaker
NS	Native speaker
L2	Second Language Learning
L1	First Language
SD	Standard Deviation
RR	Reactions to response
CC	Comprehension checks
T	Trigger
I	Indication
R	Response

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Negotiation of meaning occurs in everyday interaction. It is a communication strategy that clarifies meaning to facilitate comprehensible messages. According to Bygate (1987), one of the primary reasons for communication is to seek the required information known only to another and it is only through mutual negotiation for understanding that successful communication takes place. On the contrary, any unsuccessful negotiation may lead to misunderstanding, conflict and obstruction. Hence, every utterance spoken within a negotiation act has a great impact on the outcome of interaction.

Within the context of second language (L2) learning, negotiation for meaning plays an important role in the interaction among students with their peers. It assists students to overcome comprehension difficulties when students manipulate available language as a result of clarification, confirmation requests of messages and comprehension checks on their production (Pica, 1987). It is an interactional skill that requires constant exposure, guidance and practices to develop the ability to mobilize the appropriate target language to communicate ideas clearly (Ernst, 1994). Hence, this study examines the effects of negotiation for meaning towards the improvement of classroom interactional skills.

Chapter One of this study presents several aspects: background of this study, statement of the problem, purpose of this study, significance of this study, limitations encountered in this study and operational definition of the research terms.

Background of the Study

In the Malaysian context, one of the aims of the curriculum is to produce students who could interact in order to acquire knowledge, share information and communicate different views with one another (Compendium, 1989). Despite the necessity of knowing a certain amount of grammar and vocabulary, it is also important to learn to use the language fluently. Apparently, learning to speak involves students in using appropriate language functions in different speaking encounters. As a result, the skill of communicating transactional intentions clearly is an important interactional strategy in the Malaysian context.

The importance of engaging students in genuine interaction has considerable support from different theoretical and empirical perspectives. Generally, there is considerable agreement from many studies (Ellis, Tanaka & Yamazaki, 1994; Bajarano, Levine, Olshtain & Steiner, 1997; Foster, 1998) which claimed that negotiated interaction contributes to L2 learning. According to Anton (1999) language learning takes place when students actively attempt to make conversational adjustments and language modifications to transform information efficiently in the process of interaction. Moreover, given the constant negotiation role, students are not merely practising

communication but are extending the commands of the language to bridge the gap in miscommunications (Pica, 1991).

Foster (1998) pointed out that negotiation of meaning has motivating effects in facilitating interaction. The emphasis on negotiation of meaning helps students to speak confidently and fluently in the target language. The knowledge of the appropriate procedure and the use of language to negotiate for meaning are seen necessary to develop the skill of interaction in L2 classroom (Nassaji, 2000). In this respect, Takashi (1998) and Anton (1999) advocated the importance of providing abundant opportunities for students to govern the appropriate use of the language in lifelike situations. Further, the relations among the appropriate settings, task type and exposure to negotiation skills are seen as crucial reciprocal process for the success of comprehension and production of language. Additionally, the current literature (Bajarano, Levine, Olshtain, & Steiner, 1997; Foster, 1998; Muranoi, 2000) urged classroom practitioners to perceive negotiation of meaning as a required and crucial classroom interaction skill to be taught among L2 students.

From the above discussion, negotiation for meaning is seen as a necessary interaction skill to cope with daily communication demands. Apparently, the interactional social constructivists such as Long (1983), Swain (1985), Varonis and Gass (1985) have indicated that negotiation of meaning is one crucial communication skill that leads to successful classroom interaction. Interactional constructivism places emphasis on the use rather than the usage of language. Long (1983), seen as the father of interactional social constructivism proposed the Interaction Hypothesis (1983) which is

actually an extension of Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1981). The Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1983) particularly examined the conversational adjustments in negotiation of meaning. Long (1983) took a broader look at how communication competence in L2 learning could be achieved through conversational adjustments.

Another influential interactional social constructivists is Swain (1985). Swain (1985) investigated conversational adjustments on second language acquisition (SLA) in terms of students' output production. Thus, Swain (1985) put forward the Output Hypothesis which claimed that comprehensible input itself is not sufficient for SLA. Rather, the importance of achieving comprehensible output is also necessary for successful SLA. Swain (1985) claimed that students are compelled to attempt to new structures and forms when there is recognition of linguistic limitation. Hence, students will resort to the manipulation and modification of available linguistic forms to accommodate comprehensible output.

Gass and Varonis (1985) on the other hand, proposed the non-native/non-native (NNS/NNS) conversations model. It is a model that explains the complexity of the process of negotiation for meaning among non-native speakers. Further, this model examines instances of any occurrence of partial or incomplete understanding. Such instances are referred to as the "trigger resolution sequence" (Jean Wong, 2000) and will be further elaborated in Chapter 2. Gass and Varonis (1985) claimed that the model reflects the necessary procedure for conversational adjustments and linguistic modifications to ensure successful negotiation of meaning.

As discussed above, negotiated interaction is seen as the basis for the provision of comprehensible input and later for the production of comprehensible output. Unfortunately, there is no recent study conducted in the Malaysian L2 classroom to investigate negotiation of meaning in L2 learning and thus, little is known about the effects of negotiation for meaning when the skill is taught.

Statement of the Problem

Speaking is one of the integrated language skills, which every L2 student needs to acquire. Complete agreement has not been reached on the definition of communicative interaction but what most researchers agree is that:

'genuine communication is charaterized by uneven distribution of information, the negotiation of meaning (through, for example, clarification requests and confirmation checks), topic nomination and negotiation of more than one speaker, and then the right of interlocutors to decide whether to contribute to an interaction or not. In genuine communication, decisions about who says what to whom are up for grabs' (Nunan, 1987:137).

Unfortunately, the emphasis of how language is used effectively to express one's view, negotiate and compromise for solutions among students may be still lacking in the Malaysian L2 classrooms (Sunday Star, 2001).

Based on the curriculum specifications, the second language is seen as a means of communication locally and internationally. In addition, one of the objectives of the secondary school English Language programme is to enable students to interact with one another in order to acquire knowledge, share information and communicate different

views (Compendium, 1989). Hence, what is needed is providing students with the opportunities to seek and convey required information in the target language. Further, teachers are supposed to use different interactional skills to encourage students to enact different social roles to communicate efficiently in class. Besides, the curriculum is designed to create conditions conducive to the development of students' interactive speaking skills. Despite such efforts of enhancing oral communication, poor interactional skill is still a major problem among students (Lam & Wong, 2000).

Similarly, researchers (Roskams, 1999; Muranoi, 2000; Lam & Wong, 2000) found that L2 students in other Asia countries failed to negotiate for meaning and it is due to several possible reasons. Firstly, negotiation of meaning is successfully tackled in the first language (L1) and is assumed transferable naturally to L2. Hence, there is little exposure of the use of negotiation for meaning in the L2 classroom. Students may probably attempt to negotiate for meaning but either accomplish it in the L1 or a mixture of L2 and L1 to ensure mutual understanding in a negotiated interaction. In this respect, Lam and Wong (2000) further substantiated that the L2 students' failure in developing negotiating for meaning is a result of no direct teaching of this interactional skill. This supports Savignon's (1984) claim that L2 students' communicative success often depend on the "ability to communicate within restriction" when there is inadequate exposure of practice.

Secondly, negotiation of meaning in L2 has only recently been explored (less than 20 years) and this therefore, poses a challenge to the curriculum planners and teachers to provide strategy training in negotiation of meaning. Teachers are often

perceived as the sole provider of comprehensible information that requires no negotiation from students (Cardorath & Harris, 1998).

Thirdly, there are rare opportunities for student-to-student collaborative interaction (Roskams, 1999). Too often, the limited experience in the appropriate negotiating role has discouraged students to generate adequate linguistic input and social linguistic rules for negotiation of meaning in L2. Further, students placed in groups for cooperative activities may not necessarily communicate in the target language. As a result, students may seem to attempt to make quick elicitation, predictions and confirmation checks in comprehension rather than initiating elaborated student-centered negotiation.

Overall, there is a need to examine the impact of negotiation for meaning in classroom interaction. There should be investigations on the extent to which negotiation of meaning training contribute to L2 learning. Besides, there is also a need to identify the factors that both support and limit students' effective negotiation of meaning skills before and after the training of negotiation for meaning. This study will not only provide empirical data of the effects of negotiation for meaning on the two-way information task but also examine the negotiation process before and after the training. Further discussion of the quantitative and qualitative approaches used in this study is found in Chapter 3.

Purpose of the Study

This study intends to examine the effects of the negotiation for meaning in L2 among a selected group of undergraduates in Universiti Putra Malaysia. It seeks to investigate if students receiving negotiation for meaning training perform better on a test of two-way information task compared to students who receive normal classroom instruction. The main characteristics of the two different instructions are elaborated in Chapter 3. The study not only examines how much negotiation of meaning is derived (product of negotiation of meaning) in L2 but also on how negotiation of meaning is achieved (process of negotiation of meaning). A two-way information task is used to elicit the type and frequency usage of the different negotiation for meaning skills. Another purpose of the study is to identify the process of students' negotiation for meaning in the L2. The findings will therefore show if the emphasis of the interactional social constructivists' theories is actually reflected in the selected L2 students' interaction of the study.

Based on the above rationale, this study employs both quantitative and qualitative analysis and it is hoped that the findings help to provide a more in-depth understanding of the effects of negotiation for meaning in L2. This study underlines the following primary research questions and hypotheses.

R1. Do students in the treatment group receiving negotiation of meaning skills perform better on a test of two-way information task compared to the control group, which receives normal classroom instruction?

R2. Do the performance of the students in the treatment group receiving negotiation of meaning skills differ in Posttest 1 and Posttest 2 as compared to the control group, which receives normal classroom instruction?

R3. What are the differences and similarities of the negotiated interaction before and after the training of negotiation for meaning. Specifically:

a. the similar and different discourse structures that emerged in the pre-and post transcribed data of the students.

b. instances when students use the negotiation of meaning skills successfully and unsuccessfully to achieve comprehensible input, and

c. instances when students use the negotiation of meaning skills successfully and unsuccessfully to achieve production of output.

The research hypotheses related to the above research questions are as follows:

(R1) HA1: There is a significant difference of the mean scores in the Posttest 1 between the control group and experimental group.

(R1) HA2: There is a significant difference of the mean scores in the Posttest 2 between control group and experimental group.

(R2) HA3: There is significant difference of the mean scores in the Posttest 1 and Posttest 2 of subjects in the experimental group when compared to the mean scores in Posttest 1 and Posttest 2 of subjects in the control group.