

ENGLISHES

TESTI E CONTESTI DELLE LINGUE INGLESI

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Tra le lingue occidentali, l'inglese è quello che si è maggiormente evoluto, se non trasformato, fino a divenire la lingua della globalizzazione. Oggi, quindi, non si può più parlare di "English" bensì di "Englishes", ognuno dei quali si inserisce in un ben delineato contesto geografico e storico-politico dal quale ricava e afferma nuove e originali strutture grammaticali e lessicografiche. È il caso dell'anglo-americano, dell'anglo-canadese e dell'anglo-australiano, ormai realtà consolidate e codificate, così come è il caso dell'anglo-caraibico, dell'anglo-indiano e dell'anglo-africano (nelle sue diverse accezioni) che sono tuttora realtà "in progress" e, proprio in virtù di ciò, le più interessanti e innovative.

La Collana intende, pertanto, ospitare studi filologici e linguistici, testi grammaticali e lessicografici che possano coadiuvare l'insegnamento dell'inglese moderno e aiutare la comprensione e l'insegnamento delle letterature che di questi "Englishes" sono espressione.

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**INVESTIGATING
COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES
IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS
AN ELF-ORIENTED APPROACH
TO EFL PRACTICES**





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INTRODUCTION

The present work focuses on the language strategies EFL teachers use to facilitate learners' comprehension, especially when non-understanding or comprehension gaps occur in the classroom. Second language acquisition research has highlighted the learner's central role in the classroom context. Learners' needs and behaviors inside the classroom are believed to be crucial for gaining insights into how the learning process works (Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Nunan, 1990; Ellis, 1994; Nunan & Lamb, 1996). However, to gain a broader understanding of the teaching-learning process within the classroom setting, it is worth investigating how teachers engage with students, how they convey messages, and how they affect learners through their teaching approaches.

According to second language acquisition research (Ellis, 1994; Nunan & Lamb, 1996; Cullen, 1998; Walsh, 2002), the language teachers use in class and the way it is "restructured" to facilitate mutual comprehension can be transformed through patterns of teacher-student interaction into learning opportunities likely to advance the acquisition process (Gass & Varonis, 1985; Long, 1985; Pica, 1991). One aspect of classroom talk that will be examined in this work concerns the speech modifications teachers employ to aid learners' comprehension and the extent to which teachers can succeed in creating and promoting learning opportunities through two-way negotiated interaction. This aspect will be explored by analyzing two EFL language

classrooms observed and recorded in an Italian university context. Both a native English-speaking teacher and a non-native English-speaking teacher will be observed, and their language strategies analyzed.

Firstly, the main strategies used to facilitate learners' comprehension will be reviewed, drawing on research on teacher and classroom talk, with similarities and differences highlighted. However, the ultimate objective of the study will be to relate classroom interaction and talk to the interactional strategies non-native speakers of English specifically manifest in ELF (English as a lingua franca) communicative contexts. A broader approach to speech adjustments will be presented. In particular, it will be suggested that grounding classroom talk in ELF theoretical and empirical studies may contribute to broadening and enriching traditional knowledge of classroom interaction with useful insights from multilingual communicative contexts, where non-native speakers of English experience the diversity of English and interact to achieve mutual comprehension. Raising awareness that, in ELF contexts, speakers cooperate to negotiate meaning and are successful in their communicative goals may provide a new perspective on classroom talk. This perspective suggests incorporating knowledge of real-life communicative exchanges to account for the diversity of the English-speaking world. Ultimately, this approach is likely to expand traditional language teaching horizons and reduce the gap between how teachers perceive language and communication and how real communication in the global English world takes place.

The second section will concentrate on the research methodology, elaborating on the principal characteristics of the study and the procedures for data collection and analysis. The third and fourth chapters will deal entirely with data analysis and the related discussions. The final part will be devoted to pedagogical implications.

CHAPTER I

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. Outline of the Chapter

This section will outline some theoretical views related to teachers' speech modifications, the overall process of teacher-student interaction, and its effects on learners' comprehension. Firstly, it will describe some features of pre-modified input, a simplified use of language that native speakers or highly proficient non-native speakers address to non-native learners, as reported in the literature.

Secondly, it will emphasize that modifications occurring in teacher-student interaction, where both participants negotiate and restructure their language to convey the message, are essential for creating learning opportunities (Long, 1983, 1985; Gass & Varonis, 1985; Pica, Young & Doughty, 1987; Pica, 1987, 1991, 1994; Musmeci, 1996; Cabrera & Martinez, 2001). The issue is addressed both in terms of teachers' modifications when students signal non-understanding, and learners' modifications when teachers ask for clarifications (Swain, 1985, 1995).

1.2. Teacher Talk and Language Modifications

Teacher talk is the language that a teacher uses in the teaching and learning process (Basra & Thoyyibah, 2017). It is the language most

used in the classroom to give directions, explain activities, and check students' understanding (Yanfen & Yuqin, 2010). It facilitates the understanding, building, and regulating of communication patterns (Poorebrahim & Talebinejad, 2015), as well as controlling class and students' behavior (Guo *et al.*, 2010). Teacher talk has a significant role as an interactive device, a source of knowledge input (Yanfen & Yuqin, 2010; Poorebrahim & Talebinejad, 2015), and the primary source of the target language input that learners receive (Setiawati, 2012). Teacher talk is fundamental in language acquisition as it is believed to facilitate learners' growth throughout the learning process. Consequently, teachers need to know what forms of teacher talk can best be employed to promote effective learning.

Early studies on second language acquisition research emphasize that for input to be effective, it must be comprehended by learners (Krashen, 1981, 1982, 1985; Long, 1983, 1985; Fuente, 2002). The theoretical assertion that learners need to comprehend input slightly beyond their current level of interlanguage to significantly impact the acquisition process has been a prevailing theme in second language acquisition theory. Many studies have emphasized that input is made comprehensible to learners through pre-modified input, in other words, through a series of strategies that simplify language for learners. For instance, this happens "through repetitions, paraphrasing of words, phrases, or sentences, restriction of vocabulary to common or familiar items, addition of boundary markers and sentence connectors; reduction in sentence length and complexity through removal of subordinate clauses" (in Pica, Young & Doughty, 1987; Meng & Wang, 2011). An extensive body of research has highlighted the use of simplified input that teachers employ when talking with their students in class (Long, 1983; Chaudron, 1988; Saville-Troike, 2006; Cook, 2008; Al-Ghamdi & Al-Bargi, 2017), and therefore has investigated the extent to which teachers, through their speech adjustments, are likely to increase learners' comprehension and foster effective learning contexts.

One aspect of speech modifications is the rate of speech, which in several studies has been observed to be slower when addressed to

low-level students, as well as the length of pauses. The length of utterances is usually shorter when addressed to non-native learners, as well as phonology, articulation, stress, and pronunciation. As was observed, when addressing non-native learners, teachers tend to exaggerate their pronunciation, raise final intonation, mark stress, and slow down their speech (Chaudron, 1988; Yanfen & Yuqin, 2010; Al-Ghamdi & Al-Bargi, 2017).

1.3. The Role of Negotiation of Meaning

Another perspective, which emphasizes modifications arising from interactions and meaning negotiations between teachers and students, advances beyond previous views of pre-modified input. This approach has garnered substantial theoretical support, which is further reinforced by empirical evidence. It has been suggested that conversational adjustments in which both teachers and students adjust their speech to overcome communication problems play a far more crucial role in facilitating comprehension. When learners interact with their teachers and signal that the message has not been understood, they trigger adjustments that are likely to make input more comprehensible to learners. During interaction, since teachers are triggered to repeat or reformulate their messages, learners may be facilitated in the understanding process (Musmeci, 1996; Gass & Varonis, 1985; Long, 1983, 1985; Pica, 1987, 1991, 1994; Pica, Young & Doughty, 1987; Cabrera & Martinez, 2001; Richards & Schmidt, 2002; Lengluan, 2008). Richards and Schmidt (2002) claim that “negotiation of meaning happens when interlocutors attempt to overcome problems in conveying their meaning, resulting in both additional input and useful feedback on the learner’s own production” (p. 264). According to Pica (1987), negotiation of meaning refers to “activities that occur when a listener signals to the speaker that the speaker’s message is not clear, and the speaker and listener work linguistically to resolve this impasse” (p. 200).

Therefore, listeners and speakers cooperate to achieve a common goal by using a series of language strategies and speech adjustments.

Foster and Ohta (2005) state that “Negotiation of meaning is one of a range of conversational processes that facilitate SLA as learners work to understand and express meaning in the L2” (p. 402). Through conversational adjustments and negotiation of meaning, learners can overcome comprehension problems so that incomprehensible input becomes comprehensible. Many studies have shown that negotiation of meaning can enhance students’ fluency, lead students to greater awareness, and further develop their language proficiency. Meaning negotiation can provide learners with opportunities to access L2 form and meaning, receive comprehensible input, and modify their own output (Pica *et al.*, 1987; Doughty & Pica, 1986; Gass & Varonis, 1985; Pica, 1994; Ko, Schallert & Walters, 2003; Gass & Mackey, 2006; Sommat, 2007; Kawaguchi & Ma, 2012). In other words, negotiation of meaning supports learners’ comprehension in three major aspects. It provides comprehensible input, which is especially modified for them. Secondly, negotiation of meaning spurs learners to modify their own output to make themselves understood. Thirdly, it provides learners with feedback about their L2 productions. The feedback they receive enables them to notice the difference between their own productions and the target language, which eventually facilitates L2 development. According to Fuente (2002), negotiation promotes acquisition because it allows learners to understand words and structures beyond their current level of competence and therefore incorporate those words and structures into their L2 production.

1.4. Meaning Negotiation Strategies

Following the previous views, language strategies usually identified in classroom observation are comprehension checks, clarification requests, confirmation checks, reformulations, elaborations, repetitions, and comments (Cullen, 2002), which are considered crucial features in creating a meaningful dialogue between teachers and students. Comprehension checks are expressions aimed at ensuring the speaker’s utterance has been understood by the interlocutor: “Do you understand?” “Is it clear?” Clarification requests are meant to elicit clarification of an

utterance by the interlocutor: “What do you mean?” “I don’t understand.” Confirmation checks elicit confirmation that an utterance has been correctly understood by the speaker by repetition of the interlocutor’s utterance: “Did you say ‘he’?” (Long & Sato, 1983: 275-76). According to Cullen (2002), other language strategies employed are Reformulations, Elaborations, Repetitions, and Comments.

Reformulations, for instance, are strategies teachers employ when they rephrase students’ utterances in a correct form, with the purpose of making students’ messages audible and comprehensible to the whole class and providing a source of meaningful input. Elaborations are strategies that aim to reformulate students’ utterances and especially expand concepts to provide a “linguistically richer source of input” (2002: 125). Comments, on the other hand, occur when the teacher is not trying to expand on what students say but simply picks up on students’ responses and then adds a personal comment (2002: 125).

1.5. Previous Studies on Meaning Negotiation

Many studies have noted the importance of using negotiation of meaning as an interaction strategy to facilitate second language development for different types of learners and at different levels. Lengluan (2008) suggests that negotiation of meaning can be promoted in English classrooms when teachers construct an interactive learning environment with appropriate communication tasks. Meaning negotiation is viewed as a vehicle to language proficiency. A study conducted by Abdullah (2011) investigated how Indonesian and Chinese international post-graduate students negotiate meaning in English communication. The findings revealed that providing information gap activities stimulated meaning negotiation strategies.

Samani *et al.* (2015) investigated the types and frequencies of negotiation of meaning in the interaction of ESL Malaysian students in computer-mediated communication (CMC). According to the findings of this study, the most frequently used strategies were confirmation and elaboration requests. It emerged that students’ proficiency affected the amount of meaning negotiation strategies employed.

Yufrizal (2001) investigated the negotiation of meaning among Indonesian learners of English. He specifically investigated which types of tasks stimulate the negotiation of meaning. He used information gap, jigsaw, and role play tasks. Results indicate that information gap tasks were the most effective. Yi & Sun (2013) explored whether or not negotiation of meaning is effective in L2 vocabulary acquisition for Chinese learners of English in the classroom context. Two experimental groups (pre-modified input and negotiation of meaning) and two control groups (pre-modified input) were investigated. The students were required to do a pre-vocabulary test, a match task, and a post-vocabulary test, respectively. The experimental group outperformed the control group in terms of comprehensible input in the match task.

Nakahama, Tyler & Lier (2001) examined how meaning is negotiated in interactions between native English-speaking (NS) and non-native English-speaking (NNS) interlocutors using unstructured conversational activity and information gap activity. The results suggest that conversation offers meaningful learning opportunities even though it offers fewer opportunities for repair negotiation than information gap activities do.

Ko, Schallert & Walters (2003) attempted to identify whether and how the performance of L2 learners of English on a storytelling task could be influenced by a session involving negotiation of meaning. The results showed that the negotiation of meaning sessions offered opportunities to elicit feedback and may have had a positive impact on the retelling of the story. Jeong (2011) investigated the effects of task type and group structure on meaning negotiation in synchronous computer-mediated communication. The study aimed to compare the effects of proficiency level in relation to how much negotiation of meaning was produced in the different pairs, and how three different task types influenced negotiation (jigsaw, decision-making, and free discussion). He analyzed text-chat quantitatively and qualitatively and suggested that computer-mediated communication offers opportunities for negotiation of meaning.

The aforementioned studies support the idea that second language learners should be encouraged to negotiate for meaning during L2 interactions. Teachers need to be more aware of the benefits of

negotiations of meaning in the second language learning process and carefully design instructional materials accordingly. Moreover, learners of English need to be fully informed that communicative exchanges require communication strategies to convey their meaning effectively. They need to be aware that they can never avoid communication breakdowns; however, strategies to minimize misunderstanding are available to them. Therefore, it is essential that second language learners acquire this communicative competence. Having said that, the present study suggests the need to move beyond the classroom context and examine how negotiation strategies are used not only in the EFL setting but also in “naturally occurring interactions” where non-native speakers attempt to overcome communication gaps and achieve mutual understanding. The following paragraphs will illustrate these aspects.

1.6. ELF Interactional Strategies

Starting from the aforementioned views on classroom talk and interaction, it was decided to bring the issue forward with a further perspective that draws on the interactional strategies observed in ELF (English as a lingua franca) contexts, in other words, “naturally occurring interactions” between non-native participants who share English as the main means of communication. Therefore, classroom talk and interaction will be related to ELF interaction, firstly, to point out the similarities identified in the two contexts in terms of language strategies employed, and secondly, to emphasize the significance of bringing ELF knowledge into the language classroom. A number of recent ELF studies have drawn attention to the pragmatic strategies and discourse practices speakers, belonging to different ‘linguacultural’ (Cogo & Dewey, 2012: 136) backgrounds, employ to facilitate the achievement of a common goal: mutual comprehension. Data collected from the observation of “naturally occurring conversations” (2012: 18) show that analyzing speakers’ strategies when engaged in interaction is incredibly helpful in shedding light on the linguistic resources speakers and listeners use to construct and negotiate meaning and ultimately achieve successful communication. The identification and description

of linguistic (phonological, lexical, grammatical) features (Jenkins, 2000; Breiteneder, 2005; Dewey, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2004) has represented the starting point in ELF research. Shifting the focus to the underlying pragmatic processes that give rise to unique linguistic forms provides new insights to better understand how language users interact in intercultural encounters and how they manage intelligibility problems (Seidlhofer, 2001; Jenkins, Cogo & Dewey, 2011).

1.7. ELF Perspective on Classroom Talk

Therefore, choosing an ELF theoretical and methodological perspective for the analysis and observation of teacher-student interaction means acknowledging the creative, changeable, dynamic nature of the English language, which has become fluid and flexible, co-constructed by speakers engaged in interaction. It means becoming aware of the linguistic diversity that has emerged from the contributions of both speakers and listeners and providing meaningful and relevant ground to EFL classroom talk. Data highlights that ELF communication occurs in highly variable socio-linguacultural contexts (Seidlhofer, 2009). It is not limited to geographical settings or definite speech communities; rather, it cuts across linguistic and geographical boundaries (Dewey, 2009; Seidlhofer, 2009). In these diverse cultural and linguistic settings, pragmatic strategies “cannot be taken for granted as selected from a pre-determined store” (Cogo & Dewey, 2012: 114) as they are constantly negotiated moment by moment in interaction. This means that speakers in ELF contexts develop particular strategies to achieve understanding and negotiate non-understanding.

Understanding is viewed as an active ability, a joint enterprise, collaboratively achieved by speakers in interaction (Roberts, 1996; Gumperz, 1982). Speakers and listeners are both responsible for the construction of understanding. “Understanding is thus seen as a process by which participants engage in building common ground or joint knowledge” (2012: 115). In ELF contexts, common ground between participants cannot be easily built or shared, as ELF talk is by nature diverse, fluid, and unstable. However, speakers can build on this instability, on

the awareness that speaking differently from the native speaker variety binds them together. Speakers are aware that they share a rather unsteady common ground, and it is this unclear common ground, this “shared non-nativeness” (Hülmbauer, 2009) that helps them engage in meaning negotiation (2012: 116).

Speakers actively and skillfully shape and co-construct the language; they manipulate its linguistic resources and give life to new repertoires that are worth investigating. In this effort, they are engaged in a process in which they exploit the fluidity and flexibility of the language, accept its “hybrid” and “mutable” nature (Cogo & Dewey, 2012: 13), and therefore contribute to creatively developing and expanding it (2012: 4). English as a lingua franca talk shows that non-native participants are very skillful in “exploiting the multilingual resources available to them.” Speakers can draw on “the varied resources of their linguacultural repertoires, often in flexible and creative ways, in order to achieve their communication purpose” (2012: 136).

1.8. ELF Meaning Negotiation Strategies

In this section, some examples of ELF negotiation strategies will be shown, particularly when speakers engage in efforts to deal with a trouble source, that is, when participants signal problems in understanding. Of course, there are no standard and fixed trouble source utterances. Nonetheless, specific utterances may become problematic only if participants themselves signal them as such.

Negotiation is usually initiated when speakers deal with a trouble source, which can occur either from explicit indication of trouble (post-trouble source) or without explicit signals of trouble (pre-realizations) (Cogo & Dewey, 2012: 115). The overall purpose will be to connect ELF communicative exchanges and meaning – negotiation strategies to interactional adjustments EFL teachers employ to facilitate learners’ comprehension when addressing non-native learners. The similarities between the two contexts will be highlighted, as well as the need for the classroom context to reflect the diversity of English in the evolving English-speaking world.

1.8.1. *Post-Trouble Source*

In the post-trouble source, there is a mismatch between the speaker's intended meaning and what the listener seems to understand (Bremer, 1996). As one of the speakers is aware of this mismatch, the negotiation strategy can be initiated to solve the problem of non-understanding. In the following extract, the speakers are talking about a show that S₁ had gone to see the previous week (Cogo & Dewey, 2012: 121).

Extract 1

Salzburg opera (S₁: German, S₂: Italian, S₃: Italian)

- | | | |
|---|----------------|---|
| 1 | S ₁ | it's really nice |
| 2 | S ₂ | it's really nice |
| 3 | S ₃ | yes it's very nice |
| 4 | S ₁ | I think I will go there more often [@@@@@ |
| 5 | S ₃ | [if you find the tickets |
| 6 | S ₁ | mhm? |
| 7 | S ₃ | if you find the tickets |
| 8 | S ₂ | yeah |
| 9 | S ₁ | yeah of course... you have to book in advance |

In this extract, S₁ talks about the show and expresses the wish to go there more often, at which point S₃ comments on the difficulty of finding tickets. S₁ doesn't seem to understand S₃'s comment and signals this in line 6 with 'mhm?', which indicates non-understanding and a request for clarification. S₃ solves the problem by clarifying in line 9 ('yeah of course') and also expands the clarification with an additional response, 'you have to book in advance'. In this extract, exact repetition is the strategy used to repair the non-understanding and ensure the successful continuation of the talk (see Cogo, 2009; Kaur, 2009).

Unlike the previous example, in the extract below, simple repetition is not sufficient to ensure a full repair of the non-understanding, so the repeated item is followed by further clarification. In this extract, S₁ and S₂ are talking about the possibility of a teaching contract for S₁.

S₁ says he wants to talk with the management about this issue and seems to believe that they want to give him a contract. However, S₂