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## ROLE OF NEGOTIATIONS AT FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSES

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This paper investigates the role of negotiation in foreign language learning. According to Nunan [2009, p. 16] negotiation means that the teacher and the students together are making decisions related to a language course. In other words they are coming to an agreement of what to teach and how to teach after discussion and compromise. In the situation in which the teachers develop the curriculum of the course or choose the textbook or the materials to use in the classroom, it is easier to negotiate with their students about the course content and the resources. But what happens in the contexts in which the teacher cannot create the curriculum herself/himself or the textbooks and the materials are provided by the department or the school? Can negotiation still exist in this situation? Can the teacher decide what to teach and how to teach? Can she/he negotiate about them with the students? This paper proposes that there is a degree of negotiation almost in every classroom no matter the situation by giving examples from the language courses that I taught and the studies that were made by researchers in the foreign language context.

**Keywords:** foreign language, negotiation; negotiation of meaning; interactions between students and teachers.

## РОЛЬ ПЕРЕГОВОРОВ НА УРОКАХ ИНОСТРАННОГО ЯЗЫКА

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В данной статье исследуется роль переговоров в изучении иностранного языка. Согласно Nunan [2009, p. 16], переговоры означают, что учитель и ученики вместе принимают решения, связанные с языковым курсом. Другими словами, они приходят к соглашению о том, чему учить и как учить, после обсуждения и компромисса. В ситуации, когда учителя разрабатывают учебную программу курса или выбирают учебник или материалы для использования в классе, легче вести переговоры со своими учениками о содержании курса и ресурсах. Но что происходит в условиях, когда учитель не может сам составить учебный план или учебники и материалы предоставляются кафедрой или школой? Могут ли в этой ситуации продолжаться переговоры? Может ли учитель решать, чему учить и как учить? Может ли он обсудить их со студентами? В этой статье предполагается, что почти в каждом классе, независимо от ситуации, есть определенная степень переговоров. Приводятся примеры из языковых курсов, которые я преподавала, и опытов, проведенных исследователями в контексте иностранного языка.

*Ключевые слова:* иностранный язык, переговоры, переговоры смысла, переговоры между студентами и учителями.

Foreign language research has been studying the role of negotiation in language acquisition for over 30 years. Much attention has been given to the factors which facilitate opportunities for negotiation.

Teachers should carry in their mind the following concepts about negotiation:

1. The teacher and the students both take part in determining things that happen in the classroom.

2. The amount of negotiation can be different in every lesson.

3. The teacher and the students can negotiate about anything starting from the content of the lesson and ending with the required time for the activity.

I believe that even in the situations in which the curriculum, the textbook and the materials are developed by the department or the school, a certain degree of negotiation can still exist in relation to how to teach the given content with the given textbook.

In the classroom in which the content and the process are negotiated, the teacher's thoughts and the learners' interests are both satisfied. It is possible to negotiate with the students at every stages of the learning process [Nunan, 2009, p. 32]. Nunan argued that there is a certain amount of negotiation in every classroom. He continues that there is not non negotiable classroom. When tutors teach by curriculum which was developed by other people they teach the lesson through negotiation with the students or without negotiation. It cannot necessarily be something big like the whole content of the course but also it can be a small aspect like how many minutes students need to complete a particular activity.

When students have the opportunity to choose the topics that they want to include in the content, they learn those topics better than the ones which were selected by the teacher. This study was undertaken by Slimani [Nunan, 2009, p. 17] to find out what learners say to have learned from the classroom content which was selected by either the teacher or the learners. Does this say that if all the content is selected by the learners, then they will learn all the topics successfully? How do we know how much of the content should be selected by the learners and how much by the teacher?

Teachers need to pay attention on engaging and developing learners' participation in negotiation. This can be done by completing the following stages:

1. A teacher needs to not only inform the learners about the instructional goals but also involve them in introducing the goals. In this way learners can select their own goals and the content.

2. Students need to create their own goals and the content to negotiate interests, needs and characteristics of themselves.

3. A teacher needs to motivate students in using the target language outside the classroom.

4. A teacher needs to give the students the choice of how to learn the content. Here in this stage a teacher with a mandated curriculum can come through negotiation with her/his students.

5. A teacher needs to help her/his students to find their learning styles and strategies. In order to do this, students should be given the options to choose from. In a study which was held by Widdows and Voller [Nunan, 2009, p. 21] students replied that they do not like learning passively and they do not prefer the teacher to control everything. They want their needs to be addressed in learning and teaching process.

6. A teacher needs to help the students to make choices regarding the activities they do in the classroom or the order of the activities. When they are more confident enough in making their own choices they can be asked to make more important choices.

7. A teacher can help students to come up with their own activities. Here again they can develop their skill of making up the activity for themselves and improving them.

8. A teacher can help the learners to teach to other students. This activity has many benefits. One of them is that it increases the student's motivation [Nunan, 2009, p. 23]. Students felt that they are making progress thus they could increase their confidence.

9. A teacher can help the students to make research by themselves and find out what they want to know about. In this process they will have a chance to understand that they can find negotiation through communicating with each other.

Adult language learners may have very clear thoughts about the activities that are appropriate for the classroom. If the students are in the foreign language situation and who are used to traditional language learning, some of these activities might be not communicative and that is why there might occur disagreement between the teacher and the learners. What she/he can do in this case when her viewpoints are different to her/his students' and they cannot negotiate? On the one hand, she/he can continue teaching the lesson as she/he has already planned but in this case the learners will not think that they are learning something and their interests will be ignored. On the other hand, she/he can ignore her/his principles and let the students do the activities such as learning the grammar rules or translating the texts which are not really developing their communicative skills. Yet, there is not clear evidence that could support that learning the grammar rules or translating the texts can or cannot improve the communicative skills of the learners.

Moreover, a teacher can start engaging students with the traditional learning activities and maybe eventually attracting their interests in more communicative activities. It might be difficult for the learners to convey their thoughts from the traditional to the communicative. This is why teachers make their expectations clear right from the beginning. No matter what way teachers choose, it is their responsibility to provide students with complete information and assist them with the greatest amount of negotiation and compromise [Nunan, 2001, p. 87].

But it is also problematic because as Brindley [Nunan, 2001, p. 96] noted not all learners can be easily consulted or negotiated because some of the students cannot express their needs clearly. This is why they need to know what is meant by being a learner in order to take part in the negotiation of content.

Learners from traditional language teaching do not dislike all the activities. This was proved by the Willing study [Nunan, 2009, p. 96] saying that students rated highly conversations, talking to each other, learning by observing and interacting with native speakers while activities which used cassettes, pictures, films, videos and games received very low rating.

Real-life interactive activities satisfy learners' needs and attract teacher's pedagogical acceptance, but most of all they find support from the learners.

This was a class for the intermediate English as foreign language (EFL) students who were majored in engineering studies. They had English for three days a week for 1.5 hours a day. The curriculum was predetermined by the head of the department and other curriculum developers and the textbook was provided by the school which had to be covered by the end of semester. The textbook had 22 units and the lessons were all the same which were all concentrated on grammar rules rather than students' communicative skills.

In my opinion even in one activity no matter if it is listening, reading, speaking or writing it is possible to ask students to negotiate how they would like to do that activity before completing it. This was a class on reading a text.

1. After brainstorming and discussing some of the words from the text I let students to listen to the text once. When they finished listening I asked if they want to listen again. They wanted to listen again. Students' needs were considered even though we had to go further due to the limited time.

2. They were offered to read the text out loud or individually by themselves. They said they wanted to read out loud. They thought in this way I can hear their mistakes and correct them.

3. After reading the text they were asked to do some activities related to the reading or they could come up with their own activities related to the reading, which can be used for other students to check their understanding. They could choose in which order they would like to do the activities. Some could start from the easiest ones while others might start from the ones they liked most.

4. Also students were offered if they would like to do the activities individually or with their partners. They preferred to do them with their partners. Freeman [2000, p. 45] noted that when students construct knowledge together with their peers, it helps them to find their voice and by finding their voice, they can take part in the world. Furthermore, they learn to see themselves as social and political beings.

5. In the end of the class students were offered the assessments through which they could show that they have understood the reading text and what they have learned from this class. They preferred to do a discussion from other ones which were answering the questions and giving a summary of the text. Through the discussion they could evaluate and direct their own learning.

In the classroom where negotiation takes place, the activities and the way they in full are completed cannot be established in advance. Rather, they are dependent on students' needs and interests. Freeman [2000, p. 51] implied that education is productive when it is experience-centered, when it relates to students' needs and interests. Students will be more motivated if their interests and needs are taken into account, and they are involved in learning process.

Negotiation can also occur during the interaction through requests for clarification [Yule, 2009, p. 78]. The attention is on what is said and the speakers negotiate meaning together. In this case the teacher should not use the mother tongue to negotiate the meaning with the students. Instead she/he should encourage them to use the target language to interact. In doing so, students can experience the advantages of hearing the target language and also speaking the target language. Producing meaningful interactions is one of the important factors for students to develop their language ability. Examples of native speaker (NS) — non-native speaker (NNS) negotiation are given below. Open-ended questions can be used to reach comprehensibility.

1. NNS: But uh but uh. We take we take a break.

NS: Oh.

NNS: You know thirty minutes.

NS: Oh.

NNS: Break time.

NS: Oh good.

NNS: Thirty minutes.

NS: At ten thirty you take a break?

NNS: Thirty minutes.

NS: Right. When do you take the break? At ten thirty?

NNS: Uhm. Ten fifteen.

NNS: Ten fifteen. From ten fifteen to ten fifty-five.

NS: Ten-five.

NNS: Ah, ten f-forty-five.

NS: Right. Have you seen Los Angeles?

[Freeman, 2000, p. 148]

2. NNS: There has been a lot of talk lately about additives and preservatives in food. In what ways has this changed your eating habits?

NS: Uh, I don't eat that many foods with preservatives, anyway even before all the talk.

NNS: Pardon me?

NS: I don't eat uh, canned foods or foods that have preservatives.

[Pica, 1994, p. 501]

3. NS: So you came here by yourself or did you come with friends?

NNS: No, no. I--what? What you say?

NS: Did you come to the states with friends or did you come alone?

NNS: No, alone-from Toronto [Pica, 1994, p. 517].

In example 1, the NNS contribution of but uh, we take break, break time, thirty minutes have served as a signal for the NS to comprehend at ten thirty you take a break? In example 2, the NNS signal Pardon me, influenced NS to paraphrase the original word. In example 3, the NNS signal what, what you say brought forth a NS adapted response. In all examples speakers could communicate effectively.

When a teacher can create a syllabus and content for the course she/he can negotiate the syllabus with the students. According to Faerch, Haastруп, and Phillipson [2004, p. 31] negotiating a syllabus means that the teacher and students determine the teaching sub-goals, the route to get there and also select the types of activities.

In order to get involved in these negotiation students need to know about communicative knowledge, language learning and socio-cultural knowledge.

Because they cannot acquire this knowledge in other lessons, language teachers need to convey this knowledge to students.

Also, students need to understand why they are learning English, what they are learning, how learning takes place, their role in the learning and teaching situation and how they can help each other to learn a language.

To learn a language, students need to have a responsibility for their learning.

Faerch et al suggested [2004, p. 32] the following reasons why learners should take responsibility for their learning:

1. Describing the needs cannot predict all the needs of specific individuals.
2. Negotiating a syllabus puts emphasis on learner's active involvement in analyzing and creating meaning in the target language.
3. Students must be prepared to continue learning the language on their own. Therefore they should learn to plan language learning.

One of the most important goals of the students is to communicate in the target language. Therefore they need to do communicative tasks that provide opportunities for students to use the target language through conversational adaptations and modify it through checking and negotiating for meaning. By doing so they are receiving comprehensible input and producing comprehensible output [Foster, 1998, p. 46]. Both have been considered to be important in foreign language learning.

The type of activities are significant, especially the ones that require exchange of information to motivate negotiations for meaning. Foster observed the language produced by intermediate EFL students who were participating in required and optional information sharing activities. The results showed that there was a distinguishable trend for peers who were doing a two-way task to produce more negotiated interaction. More studies are shown here about the role of negotiation in foreign language learning.

Ernst [1994, p. 13] claimed that language classrooms often provide little opportunity for student-generated conversations and use of meaningful language. However, research showed that a classroom task which requires interaction can provide opportunities for students to extend their receptive and productive skills in the target language. Moreover students are engaged in a meaningful communication to practice their linguistic knowledge.

Mendonca and Johnson [1994, p. 46] examined a study to describe the negotiations which occurred during EFL students' peer reviews and the way negotiations form student's revision activities. Reviewers gathered most types of negotiation but certain types of negotiation happened more frequently among the pairs who were from different fields. Although students used their peers' reviews to revise the essays, they used them selectively deciding what to revise for themselves. The findings of this study support the need to include negotiations in foreign language instructions.

In another study which was undergone by Goldstein and Conrad [1990, p. 54] looked at students who were in an advanced EFL composition course, to decide how they dealt with revisions and the role of negotiation played in success of those revisions. There were huge differences in the degree to which students participated in the conference and negotiated meaning. Furthermore, students who negotiated meaning made revisions that improved their text. In contrast, the students who did not negotiate meaning, even though they have participated in the conference, they were not likely to make revisions or any changes in their texts, which were not better than their previous drafts.

In assessing learners' language ability negotiation can be used effectively. The study of Gan, Davison, and Lyons [2009, p. 28] checked the production of topic in collaborative negotiation in an interactive assessment. They found that in group oral discussion students were able to follow, develop and shift topics and also produce individual contributions. Such negotiation of topical talk reveals that peer group discussion as an assessment provides opportunities for students to present real-life interactions.

Language teachers need to understand students' differences, use their ideas and needs in the classroom as the course content. It is vital to promote a class atmosphere which supports students and encourages their self-expression and negotiation. A teacher who wants to negotiate a syllabus and the content with the students needs to adapt what occurs in the classroom and be able to notice them, whether they are positive or negative.

Negotiation is the restructuring of interaction which occurs when learners and their conversers predict, perceive or experience difficulties in meaning comprehensibility [Pica, 1994, p. 487]. When learners negotiate, they work linguistically to reach the required comprehensibility by repeating, adjusting, changing words or adapting its form and meaning in different ways.

Negotiation, with the emphasis on reaching comprehensibility of meaning provided interest in foreign language learning. The studies made on how foreign language learners negotiate meaning and the roles of negotiation in the learning process have contributed a lot in foreign language learning and showed that there is a degree of negotiation almost in every classroom.

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