

CLASSROOM INTERACTION AND ITS EFFECT ON VOCABULARY ACQUISITION

Juan Carlos Acosta López

Submitted to the School of Human Sciences

In Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of B.A. in English and French

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Nota de Responsabilidad

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Summary

Por muchos años la interacción en el salón de clase ha jugado un papel esencial en la adquisición de idiomas. Adicionalmente, sus efectos también han sido discutidos en numerosos libros y escritos. Un área interesante en la cual el estudio de los efectos de la interacción en el salón de clase podría ser beneficioso, es en el área de la adquisición de vocabulario. Los estudiantes, y el público en general que aprende idiomas extranjeros en un salón de clase, parecen tener pocas oportunidades para interactuar y practicar el idioma dentro del salón, esto debido a que una gran porción del tiempo de la clase es ocupado por el profesor y muy poco por los estudiantes (Wilhem & Pei, 2008). Pica et al. (como se cita en Luan & Sappathy, 2011), sin embargo, resaltan la importancia de la interacción debido a que ésta parece ayudar a los estudiantes en la comprensión y producción del idioma. Considerando todo lo anterior, se puede sugerir que es necesario y beneficioso dar a los estudiantes más control en el salón de clase con el fin de proveer más oportunidades para la interacción y andamiaje. Lo anterior debido a que no solo son los profesores sino también los compañeros de clase quienes pueden proveer al estudiante con herramientas que él o ella necesita para la adquisición del idioma extranjero. Finalmente, Gass y Torres (2005) sugieren incorporar en las lecciones más materiales que generen interacción en el salón de clase los cuales pueden resultar en ganancias significativas en relación a la adquisición de vocabulario.

Abstract

For several years now, classroom interaction has played an essential role in language acquisition in formal instruction. In addition, its effect has also been debated in numerous books and papers. One useful and interesting area where the study of the effect of classroom interaction could prove to be beneficial is the acquisition of vocabulary. Language learners seem to have little opportunity to interact and practice their target language in the classroom because classroom time is mostly occupied by teacher talk and little by group work (Wilhelm & Pei, 2008). Pica et al. (as cited in Luan & Sappathy, 2011), however, stress the importance of interaction because it seems to help learners with comprehension and production of the language. All things considered, it can be suggested that it is necessary and beneficial to give learners more control of the lesson in order to provide more opportunities for interaction and scaffolding. This is because it is not only the teacher but also other peers who supply a learner with the tools he or she needs to acquire language (Jacobs, 2001) including vocabulary. Gass and Torres (2005) also advise to present more interaction materials in the classroom, which result in important gains for vocabulary acquisition.

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Glossary

- Classroom interaction
- Interaction
- Lexicon acquisition
- Lexicon
- Vocabulary acquisition
- Vocabulary
- Interaction patterns

Classroom Interaction and its Effect on Vocabulary Acquisition

Introduction

For several years now, classroom interaction has played an essential role in language acquisition in formal instruction. In addition, its effect has also been debated in numerous books and papers. One useful and interesting area where the study of the effect of classroom interaction could prove to be beneficial is the acquisition of vocabulary.

In this research project, the component of classroom interaction is discussed as well as its effects on vocabulary acquisition. Furthermore, interaction patterns that may facilitate the acquisition of vocabulary in the classroom are presented. With this in mind, important aspects such as the problem description, its delimitation, and the problem statement will be addressed. In addition, general and specific objectives, the significance of the study as well as its limitations will also be stated in the hope of shaping and structuring a solid and clear research problem. Moreover, the literature review, the target population, the geographical delimitations and limitations are going to be addressed.

Chapter I

Statement of the Problem

It is well known that vocabulary, being a set of words that constitute the basic building blocks used to create and comprehend sentences (Miller, as cited in Zimmerman, 2007), is a very important component when learning a language. In fact, Wilkins (as cited in Thornbury, 2002) states that “without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed”. However, language students seem to show a recurrent difficulty when acquiring or learning new vocabulary in English. Despite all the efforts that teachers make in the different activities such as vocabulary lists memorization, word translation, readings, and the use of

different materials (flashcards, textbooks, etc.) that they incorporate in their lessons, students still seem to show a lack of interest and efficiency when learning new vocabulary.

This problem might be the consequence of the persisting neglect of vocabulary in language learning (Meara, 1982, as cited in Lawson, 1996) resulting in limited strategies and techniques regarding vocabulary building in the classrooms. This lack of vocabulary has proven to be a major factor in the apparent poor performance in English that most of the students in Colombia display in classroom participation, in their assessment, including “Pruebas Saber 11”, and in their language learning process in general (EF English Proficiency Index-Colombia, 2016). Under these circumstances, teachers have started to recognize the importance of developing a lexical competence in order to acquire a second/foreign language. This has led teachers to seek and apply different and more contemporary strategies, techniques and approaches. Nevertheless, teachers themselves seem to have been struggling with the identification of specific and suitable strategies that match the principles of such approaches.

A possible solution to this problem is the exploration of different methods based on interactional and lexical approaches that state the importance of interaction as a means to facilitate the learning of vocabulary in the foreign language. Therefore, the need to establish the usefulness of classroom interaction as a means to acquire vocabulary. In order to do so, this research project attempts to answer the question: What EFL classroom interaction patterns prove to be more effective in terms of vocabulary acquisition in the students from ninth grade, group 9-1 at Escuela Normal Superior de Pasto?

Objectives

General objective. To determine what EFL classroom interaction patterns can facilitate the acquisition of vocabulary in the students of ninth grade from Escuela Normal Superior de Pasto, and to what extent.

Specific objectives

- To describe the types of interaction that take place in the classroom and the conditions under which they occur.
- To identify the types of interaction that may facilitate vocabulary acquisition in the students.
- To suggest the most effective interaction patterns that can be used in an EFL context to facilitate vocabulary acquisition.

Significance of the Study. All theories of language and methodologies on language learning agree on the importance of lexicon as a key component. Vocabulary plays an important role in language learning in several aspects such as fluency (O'keefe et al, 2007) and comprehension (Nattinger, 1980). Yet, our students often have a difficult time when learning vocabulary, and therefore, communicating in English. Research has shown that some types of interaction help learners with comprehension and production of the language (Pica et al, 1987), and when learners take part in two-way information gap tasks, they strive for a common communicative goal (Doughty & Pica, 1986). On the other hand, interaction is not only the ultimate goal of learning a language, but it is also considered as a means for acquisition to take place (Sweet, 1899). It is essential that teachers have clear ideas on activities and strategies that can be used for learning vocabulary taking into account the importance of classroom interaction. The findings proposed here will not only benefit students with the increase of vocabulary, but

also with the decrease of the affective filter due to the new bonds that may emerge between teachers and students while interacting. As a result, an important social impact can be made regarding the common idea of English being a difficult language to learn that has been persistent in the students' minds for so long. These findings may also be beneficial for teachers who could later apply them to their lessons targeting students who may present the same problem. Given that English vocabulary acquisition through classroom interaction has not apparently been researched in our region, this study may open new opportunities for this topic to be discussed and suggest that further research on this might be needed. In addition, it is important to note that EFL classroom interaction as a way to increase vocabulary seems not to have always been a focus on mainstream foreign language acquisition research in Colombia. Thus, what is proposed here strengthens the vocabulary-interaction relationship in our context.

Limitations. Even though this study has been carefully prepared, some difficulties may be encountered throughout the process. Some of them may have to do with a) the English proficiency level that may vary among the students; and, b) the signing of a consent form that is required by all parents/legal guardians due to the fact that the sample for this research is composed only by underage students.

So far in this project different aspects related to the problem of the study have been covered. First, the problem was described taking into account possible causes, consequences and solutions. Second, some problem delimitations were mentioned, and finally, the problem was stated. In addition, general and specific objectives were pointed out as well as the significance of the study and its limitations. Now, the core of the problem which is divided into two variables, classroom interaction and vocabulary acquisition will be analyzed from an academic point of view.

Chapter II

Literature Review

This chapter aims to analyze the theories and hypotheses that serve as foundations for this research. General theories about lexicon and interaction will be mentioned and discussed. Similarly, a theoretical framework regarding specific aspects about the general topics of the study that contribute to a better understanding of the reasoning behind the research will be included. Therefore, this chapter looks at vocabulary and its importance in language learning and at an interactionist perspective to vocabulary acquisition. In addition, it is important to mention that this study will be carried out in the Colombian public school “Escuela Normal Superior de Pasto” (ENSUP). ENSUP is a public school located in La Aurora neighborhood in Pasto that follows national curriculum guidelines and national education policies produced by the Government of Colombia through the Ministry of Education that regards the English language as a core subject in the Colombian education. This school educates and trains professionals in education to serve at preschool and elementary school levels guided by the institutional education project (PEI after the initials in Spanish). These national guidelines for teaching English are based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and provide learners with around three hours per week of instruction in the language. English in this context is learnt as a foreign language given that the language is not required for everyday social activities in Colombia resulting in the learners only being exposed to it during controlled and short periods of time. Therefore, this study seeks to determine how classroom interaction can facilitate the acquisition of English vocabulary when it is learned as a foreign language in a specific school setting.

Vocabulary is, without a doubt, an essential element in communication and thus in general language acquisition (Llach, 2011). Foreign and second language teachers as well as linguists look at vocabulary as a key component in any target language and a lot has been said on what the best way to acquire lexicon is (Meara, as cited in Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997). Ellis et al. (as cited in Mackey, 1999) suggest that one way to do so is through the right type of interaction which, according to his study, leads to vocabulary being acquired. Hence, the necessity to analyze in depth aspects related to vocabulary and interaction, and how the latter facilitate the acquisition of the former.

What is Vocabulary?

The first thinking after listening to the word “vocabulary” is to think of a word or a set of words that convey meaning. Taken from a dictionary, vocabulary is defined as “the body of words used in a particular language” (Oxford Dictionary, 2017). Nevertheless, the previous definition could be seen as vague or too simple in foreign or second language learning due to the complexity that learning vocabulary implies. Laufer (as cited in Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997) suggests that when learning another language, it seems that learning vocabulary is sometimes a challenging task to complete in order to be proficient in the L2 given the number of features a word has. It is also important to notice that the term “vocabulary” is different from that of “lexicon”, and that it does not necessarily refer to a set of words that are isolated from each other, but also to a group of words that convey meaning all together (Thornbury, 2002). Graves (as cited in Taylor, 1990) differentiates vocabulary from lexicon by stating that vocabulary is the complete repertoire of words related to a specific branch of knowledge or the ones known by an individual, while the lexicon of a language is its vocabulary.

Whatever its definition is, vocabulary seems to be of great importance in language learning. Therefore, when learning a new language, people learn substantial amounts of words. However, not all of those words are in the same degree of knowledge that the learner may have. In other words, learners seem to have different degrees of knowledge of their second or foreign language lexicon (Gass & Selinker, 2001). Thus, knowing the definition of a word or a chunk from a dictionary does not necessarily mean to actually know them and consequently be able to use them. In order to be able to determine how vocabulary can be acquired through interaction, it is important then to understand what knowing a word means.

Word Knowledge

Thornbury (2002) suggests that knowing a word, at least at a basic level, involves knowing its form and knowing its meaning. He exemplifies this notion with the form of the word “tangi” from the Maori language. Just by looking at the word, one cannot pretend to know it. In addition to knowing the form of the word “tangi”, it is also necessary to know that it means “sound”. However, according to Thornbury (2002), knowing the meaning of the word as if from a dictionary is not sufficient. It is also crucial to know “its function, the words commonly associated with it, i.e. its collocations, as well as its connotations, including its register and its cultural accretions”. Another way to understand what knowing a word means is by looking at the list of knowledge types provided by Nation (1990). According to Nation, the criteria for completely knowing a word include knowing its spoken form, its written form, its grammatical and collocational behavior, its frequency, its stylistic register constraints, its conceptual meaning, and its word associations.

Thornbury’s and Nation’s suggestions embody what really means to know a word. However, as stated before, people appear to have degrees of lexical knowledge which implies

that a learner does not have the same level of knowledge about all the words he or she knows.

This creates the need to establish some distinctions between real and potential vocabulary, active and passive vocabulary, and productive and receptive vocabulary.

Types of Vocabulary

Potential vs. real vocabulary. Ellis (1990) presents an interesting example to explain what potential vocabulary is. Ellis states that a Japanese learner of English may not know the word “ice-cream” but is able to recognize it because it is close to the Japanese “aisukurimu”. Potential vocabulary is then all the words a language learner has not acquired or come across with in the target language but he or she could understand or recognize when they are encountered. Real vocabulary on the other hand, is referred to all the words the student has already learned at any degree of knowledge.

Active vs. passive vocabulary. Active vocabulary is all the vocabulary a learner uses at will and makes practically no effort when retrieving the words. Passive vocabulary, on the other hand, is all the vocabulary the learner can recognize, understand and probably use with a conscious effort (Laufer, 1998).

Productive vs. receptive vocabulary. Vocabulary learning and vocabulary knowledge have been divided into different dichotomies for a long time now, one of which is the belief that a person holds two different vocabularies, one receptive and one productive (R and P) (Morgan & Oberdeck; Clark, as cited in Melka, 1982). In simple terms, P vocabulary is the one a language learner can use or produce without effort while writing or speaking. R vocabulary, on the other hand, is the vocabulary a language learner can understand while reading and listening (Alkhfi, 2015). Some authors assert that the familiarity associated to a word will determine the degree of knowledge a person has about it and, therefore, whether this word belongs to the R or P

vocabulary (Hartmann; Trampe as cited in Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997; Melka, 1982). It is also suggested that “in one’s lexicon, receptive vocabulary is much larger than productive vocabulary and that reception precedes production” (Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997). It is possible to say then that vocabulary knowledge can be regarded as a continuum where words start at the receptive extreme and, as the learner becomes more “familiarized” with them, they move to the productive one (Alkhfi, 2015; Melka, as cited in Schmitt and McCarthy, 1997). Thornbury (2002) highlights the importance of this transition for the language learner by presenting the following metaphor:

“Learning a second language is like moving to a new town – it takes time to establish connections and turn acquaintance into friends (referring to vocabulary). And what is the difference between an acquaintance and a friend? Well, we may forget an acquaintance, but we can never forget a friend” (p.20).

Thornbury’s metaphor points out the importance of “befriending” new words, but how important is leaning new vocabulary when learning a second or foreign language?

The Importance of Learning Vocabulary

Taking a look at all the research that has been done in second language acquisition (SLA) about lexicon, it can be noticed that less attention has been paid to this aspect of language in comparison to others (Coady & Huckin, 1997; Meara, 1995; Wesche & Paribakht, 1990). Nevertheless, vocabulary is a key component of language regardless of the theoretical point of view from which it is seen. In fact, knowing and understanding vocabulary is essential to any theory of SLA (Hunt & Beglar, 2005).

Vocabulary is not an isolated whole but an important part of the entire system of any language, thus vital in communication. The lack of lexicon or errors in vocabulary can have a significant effect in establishing meaning resulting in communication failure which is a great

concern for learners, if not the greatest. This is one of the reasons for believing that vocabulary is an essential part in language learning, and that it may be the most important language element for learners (Gass & Selinker, 2001; Thornbury, 2002). This may be due to the fact that of all the mistakes and errors a learner can make, those related to lexicon are the most common (Meara, as cited in Blaas, 1982), and according to Politzer (as cited in Levenston, 1979) the most serious from the learner's point of view. In addition, in native speaker (NS)-nonnative speaker (NNS) interaction, lexical mistakes are found to be more disruptive and unpleasant by the NNS than the ones related to grammar (Johansson, 1978).

Although vocabulary has not always been given as much priority as grammar structures, the advent of the Communicative Approach, the development of the Lexical Syllabus and the recognition of the role of lexical chunks in the Lexical Approach have given way to a re-thinking of the role of vocabulary and how it is acquired (Thornbury, 2002).

Vocabulary Acquisition

Psychologists and linguists have been studying L2 vocabulary acquisition in parallel ways for a long time hardly ever needing one another (Meara, as cited in Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997). This has led to two growing different research traditions. Psychologists, on the one hand, tackle sociolinguistic problems from formal models, whereas in applied linguistics, this tradition is not well regarded. This has resulted in a rather limited understanding of the psychological aspects of L2 vocabulary acquisition and learning, and vocabulary use (Channell, 1998). Thus, the absence of a systematic model of how meanings of words are acquired/learned in the SLA field (Hudson, as cited in Llach, 2011). From the perspective of SLA, nevertheless, vocabulary acquisition can be analyzed from a number of stances, two of which, different but complementary approaches, stand out. Each of these approaches regard different aspects of the

vocabulary learning process (Agustin, 2011). The first is vocabulary acquisition/learning as a process in stages (Ellis, 1997; Jiang, 2000; Schmitt, 1998, as cited in Agustin, 2011). The second regards vocabulary acquisition as the development of associative networks (Meara, as cited in Llach, 2011). Both approaches provide relevant insights on how vocabulary is acquired, and on how it can be best taught.

Thornbury (2002) suggests that acquiring L1 vocabulary requires labeling: being able to assign a word to a concept; for example, the word *dog* to the concept of dog; categorizing: the ability to recognize that not all four-legged animals are dogs; and network building skills: being able to replace common words like apple and dog with superordinate terms like fruit and animal. Network building links all labels and packages and serves as the foundation for the never-ending process of learning vocabulary. Thus, Thornbury (2002) states that the most obvious difference between first and second vocabulary acquisition is that second language learners already have a first language, a strong conceptual system and a complex network of associations. Therefore, learning a second language entails learning a new conceptual system and constructing a new vocabulary network; that is, a second mental lexicon. This mental lexicon can be acquired in different ways. Such are the cases of incidental and intentional vocabulary learning, one of which, as it will be seen, seems to have a strong connection with interaction (Newton, 1995).

Intentional vs. incidental vocabulary acquisition. There are two important aspects teachers need to pay attention to when teaching vocabulary, that is, the way students learn their lexicon. Nation (2001) distinguishes two different but complementary ways to learn vocabulary: an intentional and an incidental one.

Intentional vocabulary learning implies a more conscious process from the learner. Therefore, the learner has the intention to learn new words by looking for synonyms, for

example. Also, students are totally aware of the task of learning new lexical items what could result sometimes in strategies like memorization. This is because, according to Hulstijn (as cited in Nation, 2001), learners are also aware that they will be tested on particular items.

On the other hand, people acquire vocabulary incidentally when their intention is not learning at the end. It means, the kind of vocabulary L2 learners acquire without the intention of doing so, or when their minds are focused elsewhere such as on comprehending a text or on using language for communicative purposes (Celce-Murcia, as cited in Mohseni-far, 2008). It occurs when learners guess the meaning of a word in the context where the word appears. In this type of vocabulary acquisition, extensive exposure is fundamental for students to pick up new words. Nation (2001) argues that when acquiring vocabulary from context (incidental learning), the main focus of the learner's attention is on the general message or idea of a text or conversation. Thus, according to him, acquiring from context includes "learning from extensive reading, learning from listening to stories, films, television or the radio, and learning from taking part in conversation".

These two perspectives on vocabulary acquisition and teaching have often been described as opposite ends (Kelly, 1990). In addition, Hulstijn (2001) asserts that most vocabulary items are acquired incidentally and a few by an act of intentional learning. Although research does suggest that most of the learner's vocabulary is acquired incidentally (Nagy et al, 1987), Nation (2001) states that intentional and incidental vocabulary learning are complementary activities. He argues that a well-balanced language learning program has to provide an appropriate balance of opportunities to learn from both. According to Nation (2001), the direct study of vocabulary items in this program should not occupy more than 25% of the total vocabulary learning. Hence, the importance of activities that promote incidental vocabulary acquisition in the classroom.

Several approaches highlight this importance, but there is one that has vocabulary as its core that is called the Lexical Approach.

The lexical approach (LA). This research project does not intend to regard lexicon in the complete philosophy of language as the one taken in the Lexical Approach. Nevertheless, it is necessary to point out some of the relevant findings established by this approach for two reasons: a) vocabulary plays an important role in language learning, and, b) the ultimate goal of this research project, which is to facilitate vocabulary acquisition in the classroom through interaction.

As mentioned above, the Lexical Approach is an approach to language teaching that, in the first half of the twentieth century, viewed vocabulary as the building blocks for language (Lewis, 1993; Boers & Lindstromber, 2009). Since then, many language teachers have agreed upon the idea that vocabulary plays an important role in language learning. The Lexical Approach reflects a belief in the centrality of lexicon to language structure.

An important characteristic of this approach is that it does not see lexicon solely as separate words but mainly as multi-words or chunks. Briefly presented, it could be said that the Lexical Approach is a way of analyzing and teaching a language based on the idea that such language is composed of lexical units or chunks that include collocations and fixed phrases (Schmitt, 1990). This observation has led many dictionary and course books creators to add collocations and “chunks” to their content. Thornbury (2002) exemplifies this with the claims on the back covers of three course books, one of which reads “Strong emphasis on vocabulary, with a particular focus on high frequency, useful words and phrases” (Cutting Edge Intermediate).

From the perspective of a cognitive theory, Boers and Lindstromberg (2009) affirm that the goal of learning chunks is to adequately put these chunks in the long-term memory which could be facilitated through continuous interaction (Bonvillian, as cited in Taylor, 1990).

Regardless of the degree of the importance given to vocabulary in the different approaches to language teaching and learning, it is evident that “developing an extensive vocabulary has tremendous communicative advantages” (Thronbury, 2002). Is it possible, however, that communicative tasks have tremendous advantages in developing vocabulary too? It is only reasonable then to suggest the possibility of acquiring vocabulary from classroom interaction (Plonsky & Loewen, 2013; Dobinson, 2001). It is essential then, to examine how vocabulary can be acquired through interaction in a language-learning setting. However, to better understand the link between these aspects of language learning, it is important to first analyze the definition and types of classroom interaction.

What is interaction? : Interaction and approaches

Interaction takes place where there are at least two participants involved in the exchange of information. It can be teacher-student or student-student. The fact of being a reciprocal practice makes interaction itself a collaborative and communicative experience. In this sense, one could assume that any method using communication among the individuals in the classroom brings with it the opportunity for students to interact. Examples of this type can be found in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The premise of this approach states that interaction is the means to acquire a new language including its vocabulary and the goal at the very end (Bax, 2003).

Just as a communicative experience, interaction also refers to a collaborative task between the students where they learn from each other. Another approach that also promotes

communicative interaction in the classroom is Cooperative Language Teaching. This approach makes extensive use of group work and pair work to involve students in interaction to solve problems together. For Nunan (1992), learning a language is a collaboration between the students where they help each other to continue developing their L2.

Aside from the last approaches, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is also a current approach that makes use of tasks and interaction among the learners. TBLT focuses on authentic language where students are asked to interact in the target language to complete meaningful tasks (Nunan, 1989).

In addition, interaction seems to be so important in language learning that it has its own hypothesis in SLA called the Interaction Hypothesis. This hypothesis claims that language acquisition including its vocabulary is strongly facilitated through interaction (Long, 1981). This hypothesis is in harmony with the Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985). For this hypothesis, comprehensible input is important for language development and its benefits are strengthened when students negotiate meaning in interactional activities (Long, 1996).

Furthermore, interaction also plays an important role in Vygotsky's Socio-cultural Theory. In his theory, Vygotsky (1978) states that when learning a language, "multiple internal developmental processes are activated that can operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers". However, what are the benefits a learner can have from interacting with other learners and with his/her teacher in relation to vocabulary acquisition? This question can be answered by analyzing two concepts related to interaction and language learning.

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Scaffolding

The ZPD is probably one of the most widely and well-known contributions of Vygotsky's theory when talking about learning and social development (Aimin, 2013). The ZPD consists of two levels of development. The first is the current level of development, which is the level of skill already reached by the learner. The second, on the other hand, is the future developmental level, that is, the level of potential skill that the learner is able to reach (Vygotsky, 1978). From the vocabulary acquisition point of view, the former level refers to a learner's real vocabulary and the latter to his/her potential one. A way in which a learner can transform potential vocabulary into real vocabulary or, in other words, achieve a new level of development that was before beyond their reach, is with the aid of a more knowledgeable person (Jacobs, 2001). This concept is called scaffolding (Stone, 1998; Wells, 1999; Hammond, 2002; Daniels, 2001). As stated before, interaction in the classroom can occur among the learners, and between the teacher and the learners. These interactions may arise under different patterns and tasks that take place in the classroom.

Interaction Patterns

Interaction in the classroom is a rather complex process in which several aspects need to be taken into account because of their relevance in language learning (Tsui, 1995). These aspects, according to Tsui are teacher questions, teacher feedback and error treatment, explanation, modified input and student talk, among others. In addition, during a lesson, different patterns may arise that promote interaction. Ur (2005) suggests group work, pair work, individual work, closed-ended teacher questioning (IRF), open-ended teacher questions, choral responses, collaboration, student-initiates teacher answers, and full-class interaction as activities that promote interaction. Another important factor in classroom interaction and thus language

learning is the negotiation of meaning. Negotiation of meaning is central to communication as interlocutors exchange information while developing communicative tasks (Block, 2003). Long (1996) identified several negotiation devices that learners use when negotiating for meaning. These devices are recasts, repetitions, seeking agreement, reformulations, paraphrasing, comprehension and confirmation checks, clarification requests, and lexical substitutions. All of these push interaction forward in the classroom facilitating language acquisition including vocabulary.

Vocabulary Acquisition through Interaction

Language learners seem to have little opportunity to interact and practice their target language in the classroom because classroom time is mostly occupied by teacher talk and little by group work (Wilhelm & Pei, 2008). Pica et al. (as cited in Luan & Sappathy, 2011), however, stress the importance of interaction because it seems to help learners with comprehension and production of the language. In addition, interaction is helpful when learning new lexical items as well as grammatical structures (Doughty & Williams, 1998). In fact, Mackey (2007) makes a compilation of more than forty published empirical studies that have investigated interaction and the target language learning, some of which provide important findings that suggest that interaction benefits vocabulary acquisition. According to Long (1983, 1985, 1996), second language learning is facilitated through interaction, and in fact, it plays a necessary role in this process. Furthermore, Gass and Torres (as cited in Luan & Sappathy, 2011) suggest that interaction seems to work better with lexical items than with more abstract and complex grammatical areas.

As stated earlier, when discussing lexicon in the field of second language acquisition and specifically lexical knowledge, the distinction between productive (P) and receptive (R)

vocabularies is usually made. Melka (as cited in Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997) suggests that in order for a word to cross the boundary between R and P vocabulary, it has to go through a process of recognition and repetition with the aid of the right context. In fact, she states, “only after several occurrences in the right context can a word be considered to be a part of the child’s lexicon” (p. 86). In the case of an L2 learner, however, Belyayev (1963) believes that although this process is similar in first and second language acquisition, adults learning an L2 get less opportunity for repetition than children learning their L1. Presentation (recognition), repetition and the right context can all be provided by interaction in the classroom by using the above-mentioned interaction patterns. Carey (1978) carried out an interesting experiment that, according to Melka (1997), can be considered as a “threshold experiment distinguishing R and P”. In this experiment, she introduced new vocabulary using a full-class interaction pattern in the following way: “Bring me that *chromium* tray and the chromium cup! No! Not the blue one – this one? ...”. Carey seemed to use different negotiation devices (Gass & Selinker, 2008) such as comprehension and confirmation checks and clarification requests. Since any type of interaction requires the learner involvement (Mackey, 2007), opportunities for repetition can also be provided by classroom interaction. An example of this could be group work (Mukoroli, 2011). Group work provides learners with opportunities to talk freely improving their language (Richard & Nunan, 1987) and with a chance for practice (Nair et al., 2012). Finally, context can also be established through interaction patterns such as teacher talk and negotiation of meaning which improve information transactions (Block, 2003). Receptive and productive vocabularies are closely related to the size of vocabulary a learner has and their degree of knowledge. Regardless of the size and degree of knowledge, however, all vocabulary is acquired by the learner through

either explicit or implicit ways resulting in the dichotomy of incidental and intentional language acquisition.

Taking part in conversations is a way to learn vocabulary incidentally from context. Naturally, this activity involves interaction that, according to Luan and Sappathy (2001) promotes comprehension of the input mentioned by Krashen. Bitchener (2003) exemplifies this idea in his study on long-term retention of vocabulary items. He found that interaction-based tasks such as two-way information gaps and the ones leading to decision making had an important role on the incidental acquisition of concrete nouns and to a lesser extent, abstract nouns and adjectives.

Based on the results of his study, Bitchener (2003) goes further and suggests that teachers should adopt task-based activities that promote interaction and thus incidental learning opportunities in their vocabulary development programs.

Even though interactional activities seem to promote more incidental vocabulary acquisition than intentional learning, Thornbury (2002) suggests that there are ways to bring learners' "attention to form" of words that naturally arise during the lesson. This can be done by means of interactional activities such as negotiation of meaning using comprehension and confirmation checks and clarification requests that help in making input comprehensible to the learner (Pica, 1994), consequently, providing opportunities for exposure and a meaningful context. Thornbury presents the following example of how two new words are presented and explained in context to a class:

S1: What about going to mountains, we can do "barrancking" [Ss laugh]

T: What's "barrancking"?

S2: Is a sport.

T: Yes, but what do you do exactly?

S3: You have a river, a small river and [gestures]

T: Goes down?

S3: Yes, as a cataract.

T: OK, a waterfall [writes it on the board] What's a waterfall, Manuel? Can you give me an example? A famous waterfall [draws]

S1: Like Niagara?

T: OK, So what do you do with the waterfall?

S4: You go down.

T: What? In a boat?

S4: No, no, with a ... ¿Cómo se dice cuerda? [How do you say *cuerda*?]

S3: Cord.

T: No, rope, a cord is smaller, like at the window, look. [points]

S4: Rope, rope, you go down rope in waterfall.

The teacher can later put the words in a word box or write them on an area of the board that has been specifically sectioned off for this. By doing this, learners know they will be tested on those words which makes of this an intentional vocabulary learning process (Hulstijn, as cited in Nation, 2001). As one can see, interaction does not only play an important role in language acquisition in general but also in specific aspects such as incidental, and to a lesser extent, intentional vocabulary learning. Huckin and Coady (as cited in Mukoroli, 2011) assert in fact, that incidental vocabulary acquisition is a by-product of communicative activities, and that it occurs through numerous exposures to the word in different contexts. In addition, he suggests

that these multiple exposures can be done through communicative interactional activities among learners, and between teacher and learners.

Thornbury (2002) highlights the importance of more knowledgeable peers in the classroom. He suggests that the teacher and other learners are “a highly productive – although often undervalued – source of vocabulary input” (p.48). The teacher is a fertile source of useful language, much of which will be incidentally acquired by the learners through mere exposure and interaction. Other learners, according to Thornbury, are also a rich source of vocabulary input. In fact, he states that learners do not only pay more attention to what other learners say, but also seem to remember many more words that are raised by peers in the lesson than words coming from any other source. Finally, he asserts, “it is easy to underestimate the combined strength of a class’s shared lexicon” (p.49) and that “it is the nature of vocabulary knowledge that no two learners’ mental lexicons will correspond exactly” (p.49). This seems to set the right conditions for scaffolding to take place when carrying out a communicative task involving interaction.

All things considered, it can be suggested that it is necessary and beneficial to give learners more control of the lesson in order to provide more opportunities for interaction and scaffolding. This is because it is not only the teacher but also other peers who supply a learner with the tools he or she needs to acquire language (Jacobs, 2001) including vocabulary. Gass and Torres (2005) also advise to present more interaction materials in the classroom, which result in important gains for vocabulary acquisition. In addition, Luan and Sappathy (2011) state that “carefully planned activities involving negotiated interactions are too valuable to be overlooked, and thus they should be implemented in the ESL classroom” (p. 18) because they enable learners to work as a group for meaning facilitating lexical acquisition.

As seen above, many suggestions have been made regarding interaction and its effect on vocabulary acquisition all of them based on important research done in the field. In this chapter, such literature has been extensively reviewed and assembled in favor of constructing a solid foundation on which this research project can rest. Relevant aspects about vocabulary and vocabulary acquisition were shown including their importance in the field of SLA as well as its complexity and some of the research that has been carried out regarding the topic. In the same way, close attention has been paid to interaction in language learning. Aspects such as the nature and function of interaction, relevant approaches and theories that have interaction at their core and classroom interaction were dealt with as well. Interaction, as noted throughout this chapter, has proven to be of great importance in the process of learning a language, and apparently, to have a significant effect on the acquisition of lexicon. This chapter not only provides relevant information about fundamental aspects of this research, but it also gives directions on how to draw the research method which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter III

The Research Method

In the last chapter, various SLA components regarding language teaching and more specifically classroom interaction and vocabulary acquisition, which are the aspects featured in the problem of this research project, were discussed and analyzed. In this chapter, a research method is presented under which this study will be conducted. Here, the research paradigm will be analyzed and the reasons why it is focused on the post-positivistic side stated. In the same way, an overview of the sample and a more complete description of the setting will be provided in order to better understand the context where the study will take place. In addition, the research

procedure will be also addressed as well as the information gathering tools and the data analysis procedure.

Research Paradigm and design

Since this study is not concerned with generalizability, but rather with a deeper understanding of the research problem in its specific context (Ulin, Robinson & Tolley, 2004), and that human learning is best researched by using qualitative data (Domegan, & Fleming, 2007; Henning, Van Rensburg, & Smit, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Richardson, 1995), this research adopts a post-positivistic paradigm. McGregor and Murnane (2010) describe this paradigm as one that assumes many more ways of knowing different than the scientific method, and one in which the researcher “tries to understand why it or people operate in the manner they do” (p. 422). Within the post-positivistic paradigm, research should take place in the daily lives of the people being studied, and in their community or natural setting. In addition, in a post-positivist study, humans are seen as active participants who are central in the process (McGregor & Murnane, 2010).

In accordance to the paradigm and the objective of the study, a qualitative design has been implemented into the research given that this is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (Cresswell, 1994).

In addition, this research adopts an exploratory orientation, one that tries to study the effects of classroom interactions on the acquisition of vocabulary of a specific group of learners in their everyday life and in their natural school setting. Thus, it will be necessary to observe and

describe different aspects related to interaction in the classroom to determine its effectiveness on vocabulary acquisition.

In this research, “different knowledge claims, enquiry strategies, and data collection methods and analysis are employed (Creswell, 2003). This study analyzes in detail the human processes of vocabulary acquisition by observing and collecting information about the characteristics, the experiences and the performance on vocabulary learning of a group of students when engaging in interactional activities.

Research Type

This research aims to understand “human beings” acquisition of vocabulary through interactional activities in a social context by interpreting their performance as a single group. Therefore, this research study takes the form of a case study. This type of research, according to Mertens (1998), appeals to researchers in the field of education and psychology because of its effectiveness when assessing specific instructional strategies. According to Yin (2003), a case study is the investigation of a current phenomenon within its real-life context through an empirical inquiry. Thus, the appropriateness for this to be a case study because fieldwork will be needed within the context to collect the data required. In addition, this study also seeks the production of actionable knowledge and outcomes that benefit the student’s English learning process and the teacher’s practice.

Research Setting

This study will be carried out in La Escuela Normal Superior de Pasto, Colombia (ENSUP) located on Carrera 26, # 9-05, La Aurora. There are several neighborhoods surrounding the school none of which presents social problems that may affect students attending the school. The inhabitants of the area are in its majority merchants and have independent

businesses. The school has four English teachers at secondary level and two more at primary level. In addition, the school is in the process of being certified in quality processes by the Ministry of Education. The school facilities include extensive green areas, two cafeterias, a well-equipped library, an auditorium, an indoor and outdoor-soccer field, three computer/language labs, an administrative building and several large classrooms. In order to develop the research, it is expected that the school grants full access to the above mentioned facilities as well as to electronic devices that are currently in the facility such as MP3 players, a video projector and an electronic board if needed.

Population and Sample

Population. This study's target population are students from ninth grade from La Escuela Normal Superior de Pasto, Colombia. There are currently 194 ninth graders enrolled in the school. This population is composed of 103 male students and 91 female students. These students are between twelve and fifteen years of age and have a similar social stratum.

Sample. This research uses a purposeful sampling method. With this sampling method, "information-rich" cases can be selected for study in depth (Patton, 2002). By using this sampling method, it will be possible to select a case rich in information that is suitable to be studied in regard to the issues of importance to the purpose of the research. With this in mind, one entire class has been selected out of the seven ninth-grade classes available in the school. This class comprises 27 males and 18 females all sharing the same L1 (Spanish). Regarding the students' background, and according to data provided by the school, 18% of their parents did not finish school; 47% are high school graduates; and 35% hold university or college degrees. 86% of the students belong to an average socio-economic status (SES), and 14% to a low one. In addition, all students participating in the study live permanently in the city of Pasto.

Research Techniques

In order to understand the specific problem presented in this study and being this a characteristic of a case study, a systematic way to collect data, analyze information and report the results will be carried out. In this study, more than one research technique appropriate to the method will be applied to the individuals. Considering the problem and objective of the study, it is necessary to use observations and focus groups. Focus groups are a type of in-depth interview accomplished in a group (Freitas, Oliveira, Jenkins, & Popjoy, 1998). According to Morgan (1998), focus groups are useful in providing important data that may lead to a rich understanding of participants' experiences and beliefs. Observation is another important technique in this study. This technique "provides the opportunity to document activities, behavior and physical aspects" (Taylor & Steele, 1996) essential to this investigation.

Data Gathering Techniques and Analysis

This study will search for meanings and conclude results by direct interpretation of what will be observed and experienced as well as by what will be reported by the subjects. To carry out this study, the first step will be to request parents' consent for the students' participation in the research (see appendix A for a sample of a consent letter). Once it is given, the first focus group encounters (see appendix B for a sample of focus group interview 1) featuring a set of pre-planned questions will be carried out to determine the students' perceptions of interaction in the classroom and their strategies for learning English vocabulary. In these first encounters, the participants will be able to provide extra information as they see fit. All this information will be recorded and later transcribed. The answers of each group will be then compared with the others' to be later categorized and coded. The next step will be to gather valuable information that lead to important patterns about the types of interaction that occur in the classroom if any, and how

students respond to them regarding vocabulary acquisition. This will be done through observations (see appendix C for a sample protocol of observation) that will take place during three different lessons. A lesson, which features a unit or an item from the course content, may be covered during several sessions. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) assert that in a qualitative data analysis, the researcher “works with the data, organizes them, breaks them into manageable units, codes them, synthesizes them, and searches for patterns”. Yin (2003) emphasizes the importance of searching for patterns in a case study like this. Following this train of thought, this study will start analyzing the data obtained from the observations by organizing and categorizing it in order to find meaningful patterns and meanings relevant to the acquisition of vocabulary through interaction. Then the researcher will start coding this information and assigning it into smaller groups related to the phenomena observed and studied such as types of interaction during the lesson, types of interaction that seem to promote vocabulary gains and student’s behavior, and performance, among others. It is important to mention that in order to get more synthesized information, the data will be analyzed as soon as it becomes available so the results can help guide the subsequent collection of data. Finally, a last set of focus group encounters (see appendix D for a sample of focus group interview 2) will be applied to the group in order to inquire about their opinion on how interaction in the classroom helped them to acquire the new vocabulary and to what degree. Once all these data have been analyzed, coded, synthesized, triangulated, and once important patterns have emerged, conclusions can finally be drawn, and a set of classroom interaction patterns that facilitate vocabulary acquisition presented.

Chapter IV

Administrative Aspects

Timeframe

This research will be carried out within the following timeframe:

Research project time table	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Feb. (2018)
Identify research area								
Formulate research questions and problem.								
Formulate research strategy, research design and select methods.								
Write research proposal								
Literature review								
Theoretical framework								
Write first draft								
write second draft								
write final draft								
Dissertation								
Application								

Budget

QUANTITY	RESOURCE	AMOUNT	TOTAL
45	Photocopies questionnaire	100	\$ 4.500
5	Folders	1000	\$ 5.000
45	Sheets of paper	50	\$ 2.250
	Transportation		\$ 100.000
150	Printing	300	\$ 45.000
	Subtotal		\$ 156.750
	Extra-expenses		\$ 100.000
	Total		\$ 256.750

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Appendices**Appendix A****Informed Consent Protocol (For research with underage participants)**

Pasto, xx de xxx de 2017

Señores
Padres de Familia
Ciudad

Estimados señores:

Dentro de la formación de pregrado de Licenciatura en inglés-francés de la Universidad de Nariño, se considera muy importante la realización de un estudio de investigación como requisito de grado.

En este marco, yo JUAN CARLOS ACOSTA LOPEZ, estudiante de Xº semestre del programa de Licenciatura en Inglés-Francés de la Universidad de Nariño, autor del proyecto de investigación titulado **“Classroom Interaction and its Effect on Vocabulary Learning/Acquisition”**, le(s) solicito comedidamente otorgue(n) su consentimiento para la participación del menor _____ en la investigación ya mencionada.

Es de mi interés que esta investigación se pueda desarrollar con los menores que asisten al grado _____ de la Escuela Normal Superior de Pasto. El objetivo de esta investigación es determinar los tipos de estrategias que promueven la interacción con el fin de facilitar el aprendizaje/adquisición de vocabulario en inglés. Una vez terminado el proceso de análisis de los datos, se entregarán los resultados a los cuales usted(es) tendrá tener acceso.

Es importante señalar que esta actividad no conlleva ningún gasto para su hijo(a) y que se tomarán los resguardos necesarios para no interferir con el normal funcionamiento de las actividades propias del colegio.

Sin otro particular agradezco de antemano su colaboración.

Atentamente,

Juan Carlos Acosta López
Estudiante de Licenciatura en Inglés-Francés
Universidad de Nariño

Padre / madre / tutor/a legal del / la menor de edad

Nombre:

C.C:

Appendix B

Semi-structured interview protocol guide for focus groups

This semi-structured interview is designed to be applied to focus groups, and it is based on topic guides and open-ended questions that seek to generate more in-depth information related to classroom interaction and its effect on vocabulary acquisition.

Objective

This semi-structured interview seeks to collect qualitative data on the learners' perception, attitudes and beliefs about classroom interaction and vocabulary learning.

Interview guide

1. NAMES: _____
2. GENDERS: _____
3. AGES: _____

1. Describa lo que significa para usted la interacción en el salón de clase y la importancia que tiene el interactuar con sus compañeros o profesor durante la lección.
2. ¿Qué tan importante es la adquisición/aprendizaje de nuevo vocabulario para aprender inglés?
3. Describa las actividades/estrategias que fomentan interacción en el salón de clases.
4. ¿Cree usted que la interacción en el salón de clase puede facilitar el aprendizaje de nuevo vocabulario en inglés? ¿Por qué?
5. Según usted, ¿qué actividades o estrategias que promueven la interacción en el salón de clase pueden facilitar la adquisición de nuevo vocabulario en inglés? ¿Como?

Appendix C

Observation protocol guide

Observer:			
Teacher:	Class:	Date:	
Number of students:	Male:	Female:	

Class period or time of class:

Topic or topics:

Purpose (objectives):

Materials Used (teacher-made, manufactured, Ministry of Education-developed):

Vocabulary taught:

How students' new vocabulary is assessed (Results):

Classroom layout:

Teacher talk/Student talk:

Teacher talk -----Student talk

INTERACTION AND THE ACQUISITION OF VOCABULARY

Activity	Type of work (I) Individual (P) Pairs (SG) Small groups (WC) Whole class	Type of interaction (T-S, S-S, S-T)	Interaction Pattern - Close-ended teacher questioning - Open-ended teacher questioning - Choral responses - Collaboration - Student initiates teacher answers - Full-class interaction - others	Negotiation devices - recasts - repetition - seeking agreement - reformulation - paraphrasing - comprehension and confirmation checks - clarification requests - lexical substitution	Vocabulary Presentation, Repetition, and Context in which it is presented Incidental/intentional	Notes

Appendix D**Semi-structured interview protocol guide for focus groups 2**

This semi-structured interview is designed to be applied to focus groups, and it is based on topic guides and open-ended questions that seek to generate more in-depth information related to classroom interaction and its effect on vocabulary acquisition.

Objective

This semi-structured interview seeks to collect qualitative data on the learners' perception about their own English vocabulary acquisition through the interaction patterns that took place during the last lessons.

- | |
|-------------------|
| 4. NAMES: _____ |
| 5. GENDERS: _____ |
| 6. AGES: _____ |

Interview guide

1. ¿Usted cree que el nivel de interacción que se dio durante las últimas tres sesiones de la clase de inglés fue suficiente?
2. ¿Considera usted que aprender el nuevo vocabulario fue difícil? ¿Por qué?
3. ¿Tuvo usted estrategias propias que le ayudaron a aprender nuevo vocabulario en la clase de inglés? ¿Cuáles?
4. ¿Utilizó su profesor interacción como una forma de presentar nuevo vocabulario? ¿cómo?
5. ¿Se repitieron frecuentemente nuevas palabras y expresiones durante la lección de inglés?
6. ¿Presentó el profesor el nuevo vocabulario usando un ***contexto** claro?

7. ¿Considera usted que el interactuar con sus compañeros y con su profesor, le ayudó a aprender el nuevo vocabulario?
8. ¿Ayudó usted a un compañero o más a entender una nueva palabra o expresión en inglés?
9. ¿Algún compañero le ayudo a usted a entender una nueva palabra o expresión en inglés?
10. ¿Aprendió usted una nueva palabra o expresión al mirar y/u oír a otras personas interactuar entre ellas?
11. ¿Diría usted que de todas las palabras y expresiones que aprendió durante las últimas clases de inglés, la mayoría fueron aprendidas de forma ***incidental**?

* **Contexto:** El uso de ejemplos o situaciones que le ayudaron a entender mejor una palabra o expresión.

* **Incidental:** Aprender nuevas palabras o expresiones sin la intención de hacerlo y como resultado de otra actividad.