

## 摘要

课堂互动理论是第二语言习得领域备受关注的话题。近二十年来,西方学者对此进行了大量的相关研究和实证研究。普遍观点是互动与语言习得之间并不存在因果关系,但前者能为后者提供有利的环境。

有两种理论可以对互动和语言习得的关系做出解释:一种是心理语言互动理论 (psycholinguistic interactionist theories), 一种是社会互动理论 (social interactionist theories)。心理语言互动理论,主要是从互动可以为学习者提供丰富的语言环境这一角度,阐述互动对语言习得的作用。社会互动理论为第二语言习得研究提供了一种新的视角。它认为互动是一种社会化的行为,从中生成的认知环境和情感环境不但有利于学习者习得第二语言知识,而且可以辅助他们进行知识的自我建构,成为独立的学习者。这两种理论虽然从不同角度论述互动的意义,但是他们都是强调人际互动作为一种外在环境对学习者的内部机制的作用,和学习者在互动中的能动性。本文还探讨了口语教学理论中的几个基本问题:口语的特点,会话的本质以及“输入”与“输出”。

本文尝试将第二语言习得中互动理论与大学英语口语教学实践相结合,并探讨了如何激发学生课堂参与,提高互动性口语教学效果,从而促进学生口语学习的方法。本文作者就此专门通过调查问卷的方式对 60 名学生做了一番了解,从调查结果中发现一些课堂教学中的问题。根据调查显示,英语口语课堂的学生互动性并不高,学生并不积极参与课堂活动,究其原因大致是学生受到社会文化因素以及学生消极语言自我的影响。就此,本文作者提出了对大学英语口语教学的可行性建议。

关键词: 课堂互动, 大学英语口语教学

## Abstract

Classroom interaction has drawn increasing attention in L2 research. During the last two decades, many researchers have contributed to the study and reached a consensus that there is no cause-and-effect relationship between interaction and L2 acquisition; rather, classroom interaction can create an optimum environment for L2 acquisition.

Two related but different types of interactionist theories arise: one is psycholinguistic interactionist theories, which mainly advance the role of interaction as a linguistic environment on learners' internal mechanism; the other is social interactionist theories which are more social in orientation. Although psycholinguistic interactionist theories and social interactionist theories address the impact of interaction on L2 acquisition from different perspectives, both of them deal with the positive effect of classroom interaction as an external environment on learners' internal mechanism. Several important issues are discussed here too: the characteristic of spoken English, the nature of conversation and the study of "input" and "output".

Based on the interactionist theories of L2 research and spoken language teaching practice in colleges, the author attempts to explore how we teachers can motivate learners' participation in the oral English classroom, and how we can maximize our spoken language teaching efficiency so as to facilitate learner's oral English learning. The author visited many spoken English classes and did a fact-finding investigation by delivering a questionnaire to and holding a random interview with 60 students in the college. According to the results of the questionnaire and the classroom observation, the author finds that the interaction in the investigated classrooms is far from favorable. Students' inactive participation in classroom interaction mainly results from socio-cultural influence and students' negative self-concept. Finally, the author gives several suggestions for the oral English teaching in colleges.

**Key words:** classroom interaction, college spoken English teaching

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The Purpose of the Thesis

Of all the 4000 to 5000 living languages, English is by far the most widely used. With China's entry into WTO, English as a universal language plays a more and more important role in the national communication of politics, economy and culture. Owing to this, there is an incredible demand for people with English language competence. To orient the request of education, colleges now put stress on improving student's oral English language teaching and emphasize the importance of imparting rudimentary knowledge of English to students.

Based on the interactionist theories of L2 research and spoken language teaching practice in colleges, the author attempts to explore how we teachers can motivate learners' participation in the oral English classroom, and how we can maximize our spoken language teaching efficiency so as to facilitate learner's oral English learning.

## 1.2 Importance of the Thesis

A number of scholars have proposed that the most effective way of developing successful L2 competence in a classroom is to ensure that learners have sufficient opportunities to participate in discourse directed at the exchange of information (see Krashen, 1983; Swain 1985, Prabhu, 1987, cited from Ellis, 1994). Thus researchers increasingly focused their attention on interactive classroom instruction. It is known that the improvement of students' oral English proficiency could not be fulfilled just from one or two aspects. However, it is unlikely for researchers to involve all the aspects at one time, therefore, the author goes on to such concrete matters as interactive activities in an oral classroom, for most teachers are aware that classroom activities are a must for oral classroom instruction.

## 1.3 Feasibility

What has happened to the students of English in oral English classroom? What are the main problems of the present oral English teaching in colleges? In order to discover a bit more about these problems, the author did a fact-finding investigation by delivering a questionnaire to and holding a random interview with 30 language teachers in colleges.

After carefully analyzing the replies to the questionnaire, the author found some problems in the oral class in these schools:

The oral English teaching materials vary greatly from school to school, with an alternation from Look Ahead, New Person to Person, Oral Workshop to many other textbooks. Some teachers (especially foreign teachers) prefer using the teaching materials compiled by themselves.

Most teachers are not very satisfied with the current teaching materials, which are somewhat shocking replies to the author.

All of the colleges are actually examination-oriented, though they all claim that they have started to take the oral English as an essential component of the “quality education”.

## **1.4 Research Background**

In the interview, the teachers were invited to list their most common problems involved in the oral English teaching / learning process. There were many complaints on this theme, for example:

The same students always do the speaking in English, the rest of the class just do listening, they even don't want to put in a word.

Some students are sitting in silence when you ask them to do some pair work or group work. They are teacher-dependent. It seems that they prefer listening to teachers to speaking to each other. They desire to express themselves in English, but when it comes to a certain topic, idea or opinion, they can speak just a few sentences, while they talk more about the topic in Chinese.

There are many Chinese-English expressions in their utterances.

Why do these problems happen? How can teachers help the students to improve their oral English learning? Although there is a rather large literature on oral English teaching in China, until recently there have been few studies of teaching oral English to non-English major students in colleges, and the theoretical exploration is not systematic enough to provide adequate guidance to oral English teaching practice. At the same time, the theoretical findings by themselves do not lead to immediate and direct answers to the practical problems. So there is an urgent need to research these problems.

What kinds of activities are effective enough to encourage learners' participation in oral English in class? How do we deal with the relationship between the teaching and the activities? How can we solve the existing problems? Which is the effective approach to meet the needs of learners so as to improve their competence in oral communication? On the basis of both theoretical and practical work, the author tries to explore the ways to improve the oral English teaching in colleges.

## **1.5 The Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of five parts. Chapter 2 is a literature review. In this chapter psycholinguistic and social interactionist theories are briefly reviewed, then the definition of interaction and its features are expounded. Chapter 3 is mainly about theoretical background of spoken language teaching. Several important issues are discussed: the characteristic of spoken English, the nature of conversation and the study of "input" and "output". In Chapter 4, teacher-student classroom interaction, interaction among students and learner-content interaction are dealt with in detail. This is the emphasis of this thesis, treats how to manage an interactive classroom. Classroom dynamics and some effective communicative activities are demonstrated. The author claims that oral English teachers should try to create an interactive oral English learning environment and design suitable interactive activities so as to offer more opportunities for learners to negotiate meaning.

Chapter 5 is the conclusion part. The author tells us the major findings and the pedagogical implication. According to the results of the questionnaire and the

classroom observation, the author finds that the interaction in the investigated classrooms is far from favorable. The linguistic, cognitive and affective environment is not effectual and encouraging to provide a forum for learners to reflect on language learning so as to be autonomous language learners. Students' inactive participation in classroom interaction mainly results from socio-cultural influence and students' negative self-concept. Finally, the author gives several suggestions for the oral English teaching to non-English students in colleges and tells the limitations of this research as well as further studies of this topic.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

Interactionist theories are different in scope to the type of structuralist theories that we have considered. In general, interactionist perspectives tend to concentrate upon relatively small-scale levels of social interaction (between individuals, small social groups and so forth) and, for this reason, they are sometimes referred-to as a micro level of sociological analysis. We now begin with this brief overview of interactionist theories of language teaching.

### **2.1 Historical studies of interactionist theories**

Over the past thirty years or so, a number of studies have probed in the impact of classroom interaction on second language acquisition (e.g., Ellis, 1980; Long, 1981; Allwright, 1984; Pica, Young & Doughty, 1987). The studies have reached a consensus that classroom interaction can create optimum environments to act on learners' internal mechanisms and facilitate L2 learning (Gass, Mackey&Pica, 1998; Ellis, 1994, 1999; Swain &Lapkin, 1998; Long, 1996). From the basic insight stemmed a number of studies that described L2 interaction and attempted to relate it to language learning. Two related but different types of interactionist theories arise: one is psycholinguistic interactionist theories which maintains that interaction creates the linguistic environment to activate learners' internal mechanisms; the other is social interactionist theories, which are more social in orientation and claims that interaction may produce cognitive and affective environments, and is not just a device that facilitates learners' movements along the interlanguage continuum, but a social event which helps learners participate in their own development (Ellis, 1999).

#### **2.1.1 Psycholinguistic interactionist theories**

The contribution of interaction to language learning and its place in second language acquisition theory has been the focus of a considerable research effort. Allwright (1984) sees interaction as “ the fundamental fact of classroom pedagogy”

because “everything that happens in the classroom happens through a process of live person-to-person interaction”. This perspective leads the researchers to observing and describing the interactional events that take place in a classroom in order to understand how learning opportunities are created. The researchers put their focus primarily on the different aspects of classroom interaction: teacher talk, error treatment, teacher’s questions, learners’ participation, task-based interaction and small group work. Consideration is also given to the relationship between classroom interaction and L2 learning and, in particular, whether classroom environments are capable of providing the kind of opportunities needed to develop full L2 competence. (Ellis, 1999: 566) Long (1983) carried on a series of studies that shed light on the relationship between interaction and learners’ linguistic needs, which led to a theory known as Interaction Hypothesis (IH). The Interaction Hypothesis is based on the notion that involves both input and output. (This is the notion of interaction. When a learner interacts with someone—it may be another learner or a teacher , —the learner receives input , and produces output ). The Interaction Hypothesis is associated for foreign language learning, with Allwright (1984) and Long (1983). The hypothesis claims that it is in the interaction process that acquisition occurs.

Learners acquire L2 knowledge through a talk with others. On the basis of the empirical studies, Long (1983) suggests that conversational /interactional modification is more important than linguistic modification, for it can play a better role in providing comprehensible input needed for successful L2 learning. Long’s earlier proposal finds consistent support through his own research (1983,1985), and in the studies by Varonis and Gass(1985) and Pica ,Young& Doughty (1987 ), Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) have usefully reviewed these studies, and argued that “on the whole, it is widely assumed that modification of interactional structure of conversation is a better candidate for a necessary condition for acquisition.” Thus, important connection between interaction, comprehension and acquisition is well under way to being established.

Interaction will be not only a facilitator of L2 input comprehension, but also that of interlanguage production and modification (Pica, 1996; Pilar, Mayo & Pica, 2000;



Swain, 1985,1995,1998; Long,1996). Theoretical interest in output as a source of language acquisition is stimulated by Swain (1985), who argues for the utility of what she has called “comprehensible output” and advances that conversational interaction pushes learners to impose syntactic structure on their utterances, without denying the importance of comprehensible input in language development.

Although classroom interaction research enjoyed popularity in SLA research field abroad as early as 1980s, it is only in the past ten years that several attempts have been made to scrutinize this aspect in China. Liu Guoqiang (2000) illustrates different views on the study of interaction in the field of SLA. Universal Grammar based view, represented by, among others, Gregg and White, maintains that second language development is independent of interaction, and the role of interaction is vital in that it merely provides a context for language to appear (Liu Guoqiang, 2000:42). Other researchers represented by Ellis and Tarone claim that interaction is not only a context for inner language to be used, but also a source for inner language development (Liu Guoqiang, 2000: 43). Liu Guoqiang has given us a very comprehensible research on the effect of interaction upon the process of second language acquisition through a longitudinal observation of a child’s second language acquisition. After the study of interaction is put into classroom, researchers try to explain why an interactive classroom is effective and propose many specific methods to cultivate classroom interaction.

Up to now, the psycholinguistic interactionist theories has been enriched greatly, expanding from linking interaction to input, to linking interaction to input, learner’s internal mechanisms, and output. It is believed that interaction, involving both interlocutors’ active participation, can offer a rich linguistic environment for learners to obtain comprehensible input and produce comprehensible output so as to develop inter- language towards native-like proficiency.

### **2.1.2 Social interactionist theories**

Psycholinguistic interactionist theories mainly advance the role of interaction as a linguistic environment on learners’ internal mechanisms. Complementary to it, social

interactionist theories address the role of interaction on acquisition from another perspective. The theories maintain that interaction creates cognitive and affective environments, which are helpful for learners to participate in their own second language development. Two of the major theories, sociocultural theory and a social constructivist model, deserve particularly mentioning.

Sociocultural theory originated in the Vygotsky's works and has been applied to the study of L2 acquisition by some researchers such as Donato and McCormick(1994), and Swain and Lapkin (1998). In general, the theory attaches prime significance to the cognitive environment derived from social interaction. However, their applicability to SLA theory and practice has only begun to be explored. The social constructivist model has just been proposed by Williams and Burden (2000) from a pedagogical perspective, who synthesize the ideas of both Vygotsky and another psychologist, Feuerstein advance that it is the students who construct language knowledge, and that the process of constructing knowledge could arise from social conversational interaction which might produce cognitive as well as affective environments.

General to the social interactionist theories is the concept of mediation. Williams & Burdon (2000) state that "mediation is a term used by psychologists of the social interactionist schools to refer to the part played by other significant people (the one usually with more knowledge, e.g., a teacher) in the learners' lives who enhance their learning by selecting and shaping the learning experiences presented to them." The significant person is known as a mediator. For Vygotsky, the means of mediation, can be a system of symbols, notable language, so in language classrooms, the mediation can take the form of negotiation, teacher's questions, or various other kinds of teacher's assistance. And Feuerstein proposes several key features of mediation, e.g., significance, purpose beyond the here and now, shared intention, a sense of competence, control of own behavior, goal-setting, challenge, awareness of change, a belief in positive outcomes, sharing, individuality, a sense of belonging. That is to say, mediation, in the form of conversational interaction, is expected to create rich environments for learners to engage in so as to develop their cognitive ability and help

them adopt positive learning attitudes, which are facilitative in second language learning. Through mediation, learners are able to transform skills that lie in the zone of proximal development (ZPD, a terminology developed by Vygotsky (1978) to refer to the area of learners' potential development). What is more, mediation could activate learners' cognitive process and encourage their active participation in the learning process so as to let them make their own sense of second language knowledge. Through the process of mediation, learners are expected to know how to learn and how to take control of their own language learning. For example, it is known to all that teacher's questions are not only a way of checking whether students have mastered some specific language knowledge, but also can make the purpose of the question beyond the here and now, that is, to make the question more personal value. For instance, when a teacher explains the suffix of the word "actor", he asks students to give more words with the suffix "or", and encourages them to find out a way of memorizing words. By doing this, the teacher is likely to invite students to try out hypothesis about the target language in productive ways, and high cognitive level of questions are able to develop their high-order thinking skill which, in turn, can serve L2 acquisition. The purpose of questioning in that way is to induce students to be involved in the learning process, so that they can learn how to learn. In a word, as a mediator, the teacher is expected to help students construct their own knowledge and become independent and effective L2 learners, instead of directly imposing language knowledge on them.

The social interactionist theories, especially the concept of mediation, is likely to enrich the study of classroom SLA. It is believed that classroom interaction can not only create the linguistic environment but also cognitive and affective environments, and develop learners' linguistic competence and cognitive competence too. Social interactionist theories have offered us a new research perspective. Therefore, on the basis of the psycholinguistic interactionist theories, this thesis dwells upon the perspective of social interactionist theories as well.

## **2.2 Definition of interaction**

In the context of this thesis, interaction usually refers to “classroom interaction” or “interaction activities”. Zoltan Dornyei and Angi Malderez (Arnold, 1992:160) put the definition this way: “Interaction refers to situations in which the behavior of each person influences the other”. This definition seems to provide the widest comprehension of interaction, which is far beyond the scope of classroom and language teaching. It views interaction as any situation where mutual influence exists. It implicitly tells us that interaction is an integrative feature of conversation or discourse, for in any discourse or conversation, turn-taking and meaning negotiation are obligatory, which can be treated as typical situation with mutual influences.

According to Brown, “interaction is the collaborative exchange of thoughts, feelings, or ideas between two or more people resulting in various effects on each other.” (Brown, 2001:159) Compared with Zoltan’s definition, Brown’s focus is more on the internal affective exchange than on the external process or continuum. Wilga M. Rivers says: “students achieve facility in using a language when their attention is focused on conveying and receiving authentic messages, that is messages that contain information of interest to speaker and listener in a situation of importance to both”. This is “interaction” (Rivers, 2000: 4).

## Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, some important issues in teaching spoken English will be discussed. We will begin with the characteristics of spoken English, and the nature of conversation; and then discuss input and output in teaching oral English.

### 3.1 Characteristics of spoken English

Of all the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), speaking seems intuitively the most important: people who know a language are referred to as 'speakers' of that language, as if speaking included all other kinds of knowing; and many foreign language learners are primarily interested in learning to speak. But what is speaking? People use the language to do things. They perform functions, using the language in order to achieve particular purposes, to have specific effects on the listeners. For example, they make statements, or requests; they promise, or warn; they apologize, or they chat. Whatever people's purpose of speaking may be, they have to go through two processes before they can communicate it to listeners. First, they have to plan what they want to say. Then they have to make sure that they actually utter it in such a way that listeners understand their purpose of saying it. Brown & Yule (1983) examine the various forms of language that are most frequently used by native speakers of the language. These are:

- incomplete sentences;
- very little subordinations (subordinate clause ,etc.);
- very few passives;
- not many explicit logical connectors (moreover, however);
- topic comment structure (as in 'the sun-oh, look, it's going down'). The syntax of the written language would probably have a subject-verb- predicate structure;
- replacing /refining expressions (e.g. 'this fellow/this chap she was supposed to meet');
- repetition of the same syntactic form;
- the use of generalized vocabulary (such as 'thing, nice stuff, place ,a lot of');

- the use of pauses and mouth fillers ( such as ‘er, well, uh-huh, if you see what I mean’, and so on).

In addition to the above characteristics, spoken language also follows certain distinct patterns or “conversational routines” and rules which must be observed if a satisfactory outcome for each participant is to be achieved. Routines are usually whole sentences or phrases such as “How are you?” and “Today it is a fine day, isn’t it?” Patterns are sentence frames with open slots, such as “That’s a...” or “My name is...” Phone conversation is a very typical example that follows the routines and distinct pattern. And in social communications, some rules must be observed too, such as Gric “cooperative principles” and Brown and Levinson’s “politeness principles”, which I will discuss later in Chapter Three.

## **3.2 The nature of conversation**

Conversation in English has certain definite characteristics. It usually consists of a series of fairly short verbal exchanges, with rapid changes of topic generally dealing with the participants’ immediate experiences or surroundings, and a lot of use of informal language and routine formulas. Conversation is a multifaceted activity. In order to appreciate the complex nature of conversation, some of the most important dimensions of conversation are examined here: the purpose of conversation, turn-taking, topics, repair, and the notion of accuracy and fluency.

### **3.2.1 Purpose of conversation**

Conversations serve a variety of purposes. According to Brown & Yule (1983), two different kind of conversational interaction can be distinguished —those in which the primary focus is on the exchange of information (the transactional function of conversation), and those in which the primary purpose is to establish and maintain social relations (the interactional uses of conversation). In transactional uses of conversation the primary focus is on the message, whereas interactional uses of conversation focus primarily on the social needs of the participants. Approaches to the teaching of both conversation and listening comprehension are fundamentally affected by whether the primary purposes involved are transactional or interactional.

Conversation also reflects the rules and procedures that govern face-to-face encounters, as well as the constraints that derive from the use of spoken language. This is seen in the nature of turns, the roles of topics, and how speakers repair trouble spots, as well as the syntax and register of conversational discourse.

### 3.2.2 Turn-taking

Conversation is a collaborative process. A speaker does not say everything he or she wants to say in a single utterance. Conversations progress as a series of “turns”; at any moment, the speaker may become the listener. Basic to managements of the collaborative process in conversation is the turn-taking system.

A basic rule of conversation is that only one person speaks at a time, and other participants work to ensure that talk is continuous. In some western countries, silence of long pauses are considered awkward and embarrassing. Successful management and control of the turn-taking system in conversation involves control of a number of strategies (Wardhaugh, 1985; cited from Richards, 1990).

#### (a) Strategies for taking a turn

These involve ways of entering into a conversation or taking over the role of speaker, and include:

- using interjections to signal a request for a turn, such as “Mn-hmm”, “Yeah”, and rising intonation;

- using facial or other gestures to indicate a wish to take a turn;

- accepting a turn offered by another speaker by responding to a question or by providing the second part of an adjacency pair; (e.g., expression thanks in response to a compliment)

- completing or adding to something said by the speaker;

#### (b) Strategies for holding a turn

These involve indicating that one has more to say—for example, through intonation or by using expressions to suggest continuity, such as “First”, “Another thing”, “Then”, etc.

#### (c) Strategies for relinquishing the turn

These are devices used to bring the other person(s) into the conversation, and include:

• using adjacency pairs, requiring the other person to provide the sequence, such as with the adjacency pair of challenge-denial;

A: You look tired.

B: I feel fine.

• using phonological signals, such as slowing down the final syllables of an utterance and increasing the pitch change to signal completion of the turn;

• pausing to provide an opportunity for someone to take up the turn;

• using a facial or bodily gesture to signal that a turn is finished.

Participants in conversation are involved in ongoing evaluation of each other's utterances to judge appropriate places to take up the turn to talk. As Slade (Richards, 1990) observes: Turn taking and turn assignment in conversation can be difficult for a second language speaker. A learner who enters conversation at a wrong time or who is unfamiliar with the correct formulae can give the impression of being "pushy" or, conversely, over-reticent.

### **3.2.3 The role of topics**

The topics are selected for discussion within conversation and the strategies speakers use to introduce, develop, or change topics within conversations constitute another important dimension of conversational management. Hatch (1978, cited from Richards, 1990) emphasizes that second language learners need a wide range of topics at their disposal. They should practice nominating topics about which they are prepared to speak. They should do lots of listening comprehension for topic nominations of native speakers. They should practice predicting questions for a large number of topics....They should be taught...elicitation devices...to get topic clarification. That is, they should practice saying "huh", echoing parts of sentences they do not understand in order to get the rest of it recycled again, "pardon me, excuse me, I didn't understand, etc." Nothing stops the opportunity to carry on a conversation



quicker than silence or the use of “yes” and head-nodding when the learner does not understand.

Learners also need to be able to follow the flow of a topic through conversation. Knowledge of the real world is one source of information the learner can make use of, predicting and anticipating questions and the direction of conversation for certain topics.

The topic chosen is then taken as a wide, elastic area. National holidays, sports, travel, leisure-time occupation and hobbies, how to improve the school program or solve national or local problems, favorite authors or films, the contemporary family, careers, and such personal topics as “what irritates me most” or “The funniest/happiest, /weirdest experience of my life” may serve as good topics. The imaginative teacher will soon have a list long enough to cover most of the sessions, and the students will certainly suggest more.

### **3.2.4 Repair**

Repair refers to efforts by both parties in conversation to solve problems that arise. Van Lier (1988:180-2) emphasizes that discourse involves continuous adjustment between speakers and hearers obliged to operate in a code that gives them problems. This adjustment-in- interaction may be crucial to language development, for it leads to noticing discrepancies between what is said and what is heard, and to a resolution of these discrepancies.

Repairs may be initiated by either the speaker (self-repair) or the hearer (other repairs). Echoing is one technique that is used when the speaker repeats a word or phrase that is not understood and the conversational partner explains it or replaces it with an easier item.

A: We're going mountaineering tomorrow.

B: Mountain. ..ee...?

A: Mountaineering. You know, to climb up the mountain.

Another response to a request for repair involves topic fronting, as in the following example:

A: Do you come from a big family?

B: Uuh?

A: Your family. Is it big? Do you have lots of brothers and sisters?

Repairing, as one of the mechanisms of feedback is likely to be an important variable in language learning. Although it is not a sufficient condition, we may assume that it is a necessary condition.

### **3.2.5 Accuracy**

The presentation and practice of new language items are a major part of the spoken language course, but we should not forget the main goal of the oral English language teaching — to enable learners to use English effectively in real communication. A presentation methodology entails a good deal of language control on the part of the teacher in the interest of accuracy. It is based on the assumption that out of accuracy comes fluency (Jane Willis & Dave Willis, 2002: 45). Accuracy refers to the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences but may not include the ability to speak or write fluently. According to Dave Willis, “to be meaningful a focus on accuracy must take account of meaning. Accuracy should describe the relationship between what is intended and what is achieved in communication. Controlled practice in the classroom is not concerned with accuracy in this sense.” Whenever learners are involved in communication they are concerned with accuracy in that they are making the best use of their language system to meet the communicative demands placed upon it. In spontaneous communication, learners have little time to reflect on the language they produce. However, if they are given time to prepare what they have to produce, there will be a concern for formal accuracy with a communicative context.

While fluency may be an initial goal in language teaching, accuracy is achieved to some extent by allowing students to focus on the elements of phonology, grammar and discourse in their spoken output. Traditionally, English teaching is dominated by the grammar-translation method, while accuracy is emphasized more than fluency. Students in such classrooms are extremely particular about linguistic details. They never feel satisfied with their language production until the correct answers are

provided. They are interested in the exact words, have a low tolerance of ambiguity, and tend to focus on discrete grammar points and specific syntactic constructions. However modern society is in need of people who not only read English well but also speak it fluently. As for learners in the low/intermediate language proficiency level, they must have a solid foundation in English, which is primarily built on accuracy. It is believed that once bad language habits are formed, they are difficult to break. Moreover, for our Chinese students, there is little chance for them to learn an acceptable form of English outside class. So, in order to achieve accuracy, students need rigorous language training in class. However, accuracy does not mean to be 100% error-free, an impossible achievement. But during the elementary level, a high degree of accuracy should be required. Not only are the students encouraged to make as few errors as possible, but they are expected to manipulate the language system as spontaneously and flexibly as possible. In the elementary level, it is recommended that the priority for class time be on accuracy-oriented practice.

### **3.2.6 Fluency**

The overall goal of a second language learner is to produce fluent speech. In ELT, oral fluency is one of the important teaching targets of the communicative approach and task-based approach. A number of researchers have studied oral fluency, and defined fluency in different ways. The European Threshold Level Project (Van Ek 1977; Van EK and Alexander 1980, cited from Richards, 1990), describes oral fluency in terms of “reasonable speech; with sufficient precision; with reasonable correctness (grammatically, lexically, phonologically).” Fillmore (1979: 93, cited from Richards, 1990: 75) describes fluency in terms of “the ability to fill time with talk... the ability to talk in coherent, reasoned and ‘semantically dense’ sentences” showing “a mastery of the semantic and syntactic resources of the language”; “the ability to have appropriate thing to say in a wide range of contexts”; and the ability to “be creative and imaginative...in language use.” Zhang Wenzhong (Zhang Wenzhong, 2002) states his operational definition of fluency: the ability to speak an acceptable variety of a second language with smooth continuity and coherence that can be felt by

the hearer. Generally, fluency describes a level of proficiency in communication, which includes:

- the ability to produce written and! or spoken language with ease;
- the ability to speak with a good but not necessarily perfect command of intonation, vocabulary, and grammar;
- the ability to communicate ideas effectively;
- the ability to produce continuous speech without causing comprehension difficulties or a breakdown of communication.

There are three factors which influence learners' oral fluency. First of all, the difficulty of the topic that students are trying to talk about may affect how rapidly and fluently they express themselves. In an experiment, Talor (1969) selected 4 single words that varied according to their frequency in the language as a whole and according to the abstractness or concreteness of the concepts they referred to. The words chosen were:

	CONCRETE	ABSTRACT
HIGHFREQUENCY	CAR(2.27secs)	JOY(2.71secs)
LOWFREQUENCY	KALEIDOSCOPE(3.49secs)	AFFLECENCE(3.76secs)

He gave these words to his subjects one by one and asked them to use the words in a sentence as quickly as they could. The numbers in brackets after each word refer to the average time they spent planning before beginning the sentence. These show that with low frequency words (less familiar topics) and more abstract words, the subjects required longer time to plan what they were going to say. If this extra time had not been available it is likely that their planning might not have been completed and hence their utterance might have been imperfect.

The second factor that may influence the fluency of a speaker's production is the difficulty of what one is trying to say about a topic.

Levin(1967) made an experiment in which he used as his subjects two groups of children. He showed these children two balloons of different sizes and colors. The larger balloon was filled with gas and the smaller with air. When he let go of the balloons, the larger one rose into the air and the smaller one fell slowly to the ground.

He then asked the children two questions that he wanted them to answer orally. First, he asked them ‘what happened when I let go of the balloons?’ The children were able to describe what they had seen fluently, with very little hesitation or pause. Then he asked them “why did it happen?” They found the explanation to be much more difficult and were unable to answer with the same fluency as they had previously. Here the complexity of what they were being asked to speak about affected the quality of speech that they produced. It is, therefore, possible that in speech it is easier to be fluent when they narrate a series of events or describe a scene, a place or a person, than when they are asked to explain cause and effect or make comparisons.

Finally, social factors may also affect a speaker’s fluency. Social factors may make students anxious in a number of ways. The topic being talked about may be one that the speakers know they are unfamiliar with or one that they are not used to talking about openly. The listeners too, may cause the speakers to feel anxious, for example, if the speakers are unsure about the listeners’ attitude to the topic under discussion, or do not know how much shared knowledge they can assume. As a result speakers may feel that they must be careful about what they say and thus, concentrate too much on planning and too little on actually uttering what they want to say.

After the students have mastered the language forms through accuracy-oriented practice, they ought to be given intensive fluency practice. Then, as control is withdrawn, students can use the language more freely. At this stage, errors should be tolerated, and the teacher should emphasize that error-making is not at all disgraceful but a natural and common practice.

On the whole, in the teaching of spoken English, accuracy and fluency are not mutually exclusive, but are interdependent. In the elementary level, accuracy-oriented practice should be stressed, while in the intermediate and advance level, fluency-oriented practice should become the emphasis in oral class teaching.

### **3.3 Input and output**

In the history of second language acquisition, input and output have been considered as two important elements in language learning. A large number of studies

have contributed to the roles of input and output in language learning and their relationship with acquisition and comprehension (Krashen 1976; Hatch & Wagner-Gough 1976; Gass & Varonis 1985;

### **3.3.1 Comprehensible output hypothesis**

As an extension to the Input Hypothesis, Swain (1985) put forward the Comprehensible Output Hypothesis, which claims that the mechanisms for acquiring a language are driven primarily by receiving comprehensible input, i.e. meaningful messages expressed at an appropriate level of complexity and under helpful conditions.

Swain argues that the Input Hypothesis could only partially explain how people learn a language, basing her argument on the performance in French of English-speaking pupils in immersion programs in Canadian secondary schools (Swain 1985). She argues that learners need the opportunity for meaningful use of their linguistic resources to achieve full grammatical competence. She finds that when learners experience communicative failure, they are pushed into making their output more precise, coherent, and appropriate. She also argues that production may encourage learners to move from semantic (top-down) to syntactic (bottom-up) processing. Whereas comprehension of a message can take place with little syntactic analysis of the input, production forces learners to pay attention to the means of expression.

A number of research studies have found evidence to support the Comprehensible Output Hypothesis. Pica (1998) found that in 95% of the cases of the NS' indication of a comprehension problem—the “negative input” that Swain referred to — led the NNS to make their next contribution comprehensible, and that in nearly half the cases the NNS was able to produce the correct form. Pica, Lincolh-porter, Paninos, and Linnel (1996) have also come to a similarly positive conclusion. More recently, Lightbown & Spada (2002) suggest that learners can indeed, in Swain's term, be “pushed” to produce more accurate language by the demands of classroom speaking tasks, especially those involving an information gap.

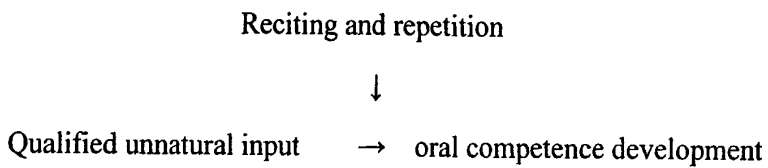
### **3.3.2 Present studies of input and output theories on oral English teaching in China**

With the popularity of the western pedagogic approaches and theories of SLA, many Chinese researchers and teachers began to focus on the study of input and output theories in oral English teaching context. Wang (2002, 2003) delivered a series of experimental studies on “unnatural input” (this was slightly different from Krashen’s natural input), which have been proved to be favorably effective in improving learner’s communicative competence. In these studies, Wang (2002) attempted to “integrate the input theory with the traditional approach”. By resorting to logical reasoning, macro-teaching- effect investigation, and micro-teaching experimentation, he tried to “prove the role of unnatural input at the phrase level in promoting the output ability”.

Though much has been discussed about the input and output theories, nothing has come out as the final verdict as to which element, input or output, exerts a greater influence on oral competence development. Wang (2003) suggested the primary role of input and the secondary role of output in oral competence development, based on the findings of a comparison between his two teaching methods: one focusing on output with the amount of input well-controlled and the other on unnatural input, a slightly modified input theory. The author came to the conclusion that the unnatural input consolidated by a small amount of output drills has yielded remarkable “output”, i.e. oral competence development for non- English majors.

Many English teachers experienced a bitter time when they had a group that always kept in silence. Regarding learners were lacking in self-confidence, teachers always tried to encourage their learners to speak. As a matter of fact, what the learners mostly lacking is input; with sufficient input, students are willing to participate in all kinds of activities, even in discussing some complex topics. On the contrary, if the students haven’t received enough amount of input, their oral competence won’t develop rapidly no matter how brisk the classroom atmosphere is, or how many interesting ways their teachers have tried to encourage the learners to speak.

By reviewing the theories of input and output, Wang delivered a theoretical model of oral competence development:



(a) Qualified unnatural input means input of sentences based on a large amount of core vocabularies and phrases, which serves as basic and practical complementary of input. “This has proved to help improve learner’ language competence in a short time.”

(b) Input is at the primary horizontal extreme and practice is at the secondary vertical extreme. Practice helps turn comprehensible unnatural input into oral competence development, which results in enhancing oral fluency (Wang Dawei, 2003 : 62).



## Chapter 4 Empirical Study

Since the present thesis mainly addresses classroom interaction, it is a classroom-based research in nature. Although the classroom-based research enjoyed popularity in SLA research field abroad as early as 1980's, it is only recently that some attempts have been made to scrutinize this aspect in China (Yang Xueyan, 2003). The oral classroom is a place where interactions of all kinds take place, affording learners opportunities of person-to-person communication. It is true that if we want to enrich our understanding of language learning and teaching, we need to spend time investigating classrooms.

### 4.1 Methods of research

- Objectives

The purpose of the study is (a) to investigate students' attitude toward oral English learning; (b) how learners perform in oral classrooms; (c) how much they value classroom interaction; (d) to find out some general implications on oral English teaching and learning.

- Subjects

The subjects were 60 students from Gannan Normal University. Forty-eight of them are girl students and twelve are boy students. They were from three classes of Grade Two. The subjects have been taught oral English by the same teacher for nine months with two class periods every week. In the oral English class, interactive activities, mainly the communicative approach, were employed by the teacher. The textbook they use is *Let's Talk*, which is edited by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press. It aims at developing students' conversational speaking and listening skills. Each unit focuses on conversational tasks or functions such as talking about likes and dislikes, inviting a friend to go somewhere, complaining politely and so on.

- Questionnaire to students

The questionnaire was carried on in the three classes on November 28th, 2009. There are altogether 60 students. Hence 60 questionnaires were distributed. They

were asked to finish the forms without prejudice and interference. The questionnaire mainly aims at investigating the subjects' cognitive, affective and linguistic features in learning oral English. It contains 30 statements/questions. (see Appendix I) In order to make sure every student understood the meaning of each question, the author explained each question in Chinese.

- Results and discussions

The results of the questionnaire are presented and discussed one by one from such aspects as students' cognitive, affective and linguistic style in learning spoken English in the oral English class.

On one hand, these findings provide us with some important data and information about students' cognitive, affective and linguistic styles of learning spoken English, and on the other hand, the results of the survey questionnaire also reflect some problems in oral English teaching. (e.g., how can teachers get most students to participate in oral class activities?)

## **4.2 Patterns of classroom interaction**

Patterns of classroom interaction observation have demonstrated that the most common type of classroom interaction is known as 'IRF' — "Initiation-Response-Feedback": the teacher initiates an exchange, usually in the form of a question, one of the students answers, the teacher gives feedback, then initiates the next question, and so on. There are, however, alternative patterns: the initiative does not always have to be in the hands of the teacher; and interaction may be between students, or between a student and the material. Generally, there are five forms of interactions concerning teacher-students participation, using the following code:

Ti' = Teacher very active, students only receptive

T = Teacher active, students mainly receptive

TS = Teacher and students fairly equally active

S = Student active, teacher mainly receptive

SS=Student very active, teacher only receptive

According to Ur (2000), ten different patterns of interaction were described in Box 3-1.

**Box 3.1: INTERACTION PATTERNS**

Group work (S)

Students work in small group on tasks that entail interaction: conveying information, for example, or group decision-making. The teacher walks around listening, Intervenes little if at all.

Closed-ended teacher question (T)

Only one "right" response gets approved. Sometimes cynically called the 'Guess what the teacher wants you to say' game.

Individual work (S)

The teacher gives a task or set of tasks, and students work on them independently; the teacher walks around monitoring and assisting where necessary.

Choral responses (T)

The teacher gives a model which is repeated by all the class in the chorus ;or gives a cue which is responded to in chorus.

Collaboration (S)

Students do the same sort of tasks as in "individual work", but work together, usually in pairs, to try to achieve the best results they can .The teacher may or may not intervene (Note that this is difficult from "Group work", where the task itself necessitates interaction.)

Student initiates, teacher answers (TS)

For example, in a guessing game: the students think of questions and the teacher responds; but the teacher decides who asks.

Full-class interaction (S)

The students debate a topic or do a language task as a class; the teacher may intervene occasionally, to stimulate participation or to monitor.

Teacher talk (TT)

This may involve some kind of silent student response, such as writing from dictation, but there is no initiative on the part of the student.

Self-access (SS)

Students choose their own learning tasks, and work autonomously.

Open-ended (ES)

There are a number of possible "right" answers, so that more students answer each cue.

### 4.3 Teacher-students interaction

In traditional language teaching, the teacher is looked upon as an authority who "passes on knowledge and dispels ignorance". The teacher is a resource of knowledge, even as a walking dictionary. He overtly controls the teaching process as a center, while students maintain a passive and subordinate role. In this teacher-centered class,

I-R-F interaction pattern is the typical teacher-student dialog. Different from the traditional teaching process, modern language teaching theories hold that the teaching process is one in which both teachers and students participate jointly. The role of the interactive teacher is not only a resource and lecturer but also a director, facilitator, organizer, and more important an creator of environment in which learners learn how to learn.

Teacher talk has attracted attention because of its potential effect on learners' comprehension, which has been hypothesized to be important for L2 acquisition (Ellis, 1999:583). For most Chinese learners, English is learned in class. The quality of class instruction is therefore much emphasized. Teacher talk is a decisive factor. Besides, it is also a major source of input for the students. So interaction between teachers and students should be strengthened. In traditional English teaching, the teacher was the center of the class. As the word "teacher" itself indicates, the teacher's role was to teach, to dictate. But now the center of the class has shifted to students. The teacher is not the authority any more. Instead, he/she is the facilitator or the mediator. What he/she should do is to help the students to develop into full-fledged persons. Therefore, interaction is necessary. The advantage of the interaction between the teacher and the students is that teacher talk can provide the students with input of good quality if not better than foreigner talk. In order to get good teacher talk, teacher training is pressing.

Teacher talk in the ELT classroom is a highly complex, complicated and elusive issue. In Chinese EFL, teachers control what goes on in the classrooms primarily through the ways in which they use language. Suggestions for supportive teacher talk in oral class settings are:

- Teachers need to be made more aware of the importance of appropriate language use in the EFL classroom. By considering more closely the link between pedagogic purpose and language use, teachers could be made aware of the need to use language appropriate to their teaching aim, in the same way they would normally use classroom techniques appropriate to that aim.

- Teachers need to be discouraged from always 'filling in the gaps' in the discourse of the EFL classroom. By so doing, they may be creating a smooth flowing exchange, but reducing opportunities for interactional adjustments and learner potential.

- The content of teacher talk can be adjusted by: (a) focusing on functional language; (b) making short statements; (c) keeping explanations brief and concrete; (d) using cognates; (e) using highly frequent vocabulary; (f) reinvesting learned words and expressions; repeating key words and expressions; (g) reformulating in order to simplify information; (h) delivering instructions step-by-step; (i) presenting factual information logically and sequentially.

- Teacher talk can be adjusted by (a) pronouncing clearly, using a natural delivery; (b) pausing to let students process information and gather their thoughts in order to respond; (c) varying intonation for specific words and expressions; (d) using gestures and body language; referring to poster, pictures, checklists, posted rules; (e) using mime and dramatic demonstrations; modeling activities with students; (f) writing essential information on the board, or on a transparency; (g) presenting activities, providing examples, correcting on the overhead projector.

Adjusting input to the young learners is a crucial task for language teachers. The English that teachers use has to be comprehensible. What students hear and understand has to be adjusted to facilitate learning. Just as parents adjust their input for young children, so can teachers adjust both the content and the means of transmission of their input to students.

- Teacher's questions

Teacher's questions are one topic which has attracted many researchers' attention these days. One of the main forms of interactions between the language teacher and learner is through questions. Teacher's questions are not only a communicative tool, but also a cognitive device to push learners to try out secure and insecure hypothesis about the target language. Most studies of teacher's questions have involved question types, question modifications, their effects on learner output, wait-time, and factors affecting teacher behaviors of questioning. Questions have been classified according

to various different criteria: what kind of thinking they try to elicit (plain recall, for example, analysis, or evaluation); whether they are ‘genuine’ or ‘display’ questions; whether they are closed-ended or open-ended (do they have a single right answer or many) and many others.

- Questioning strategies for interactive learning

Appropriate questioning in an interactive classroom can fulfill a number of different functions.

- Teacher’s questions give students the impetus and opportunity to produce comfortably language without having a risk of initiating language themselves.

- Teacher’s questions can serve to initiate a chain reaction of student interaction among themselves.

- Teacher’s questions give the instructor immediate feedback about students’ comprehension.

- Teacher’s questions provide students with opportunities to find out what they think by hearing what they say.

However, asking a lot of questions in classroom will not by any means guarantee stimulation of interaction. Some questions may actually discourage interactive learning. Be aware of the following:

- Too much class time spent on display questions—students can easily grow weary of artificial contexts that don’t involve genuine seeking of information.

- Questions that insult students’ intelligence by being so obvious to everyone in the class that students will think it’s too silly a question to bother answering.

- Vague questions that are worded in abstract or ambiguous language (e.g. “Do you pretty much understand more or less what to do?”)

- Questions stated in language that is too complex or too wordy for aural comprehension.

- Too many rhetorical questions (that you intend to answer yourself) that students think you want them to answer, then get confused when you answer the question yourself.

- Random questions that don't fall into a logical, well-planned sequence, sending students' thought patterns into chaos.

Of course, there are other teacher strategies besides questions that promote interaction. However, teacher questioning strategies is one of the most important teaching behaviors for language teachers to master.

- Teachers' feedback

What is feedback? Much has been written and spoken about the role of feedback in second language acquisition. Ellis (1999:583—584) defines it as “information provided by listeners on the reception and comprehension of messages”. Penny Ur (2000:242) defines feedback as “information that is given to the learner about his or her performance of a learning task, usually with the objective of improving this performance. Some examples in language teaching: the words ‘yes, right!’, said to a learner who has answered a question; a raised eyebrow in response to a mistake in grammar; comments written in the margin of an essay.” Generally, feedback provides communicators with essential information concerning his or her success in accomplishing the desired objectives.

- A Model for correction of speech errors

When and how should a language teacher correct the speech errors of learners in his classrooms? Vigil and Oller's (Brown, 2002) model of how affective and cognitive feedback affects the message-sending process provides us with a theoretical perspective. Taking the purpose and result into consideration, Vigil and Oiler (Ellis, 1999: 584) classify feedbacks into cognitive feedback and affective feedback. The former is information got from the teacher about learners' language use, usually conveyed by sounds, vocabulary and structure; while the latter refers to emotional reactions to learners' utterance and signals such as teachers' willingness to continue communicating, which is primarily encoded in terms of tone of voice, gestures and facial expressions. Vigil and Oiler (Ellis, 1999) suggest that providing clear cognitive information about the problems in the learners' output can prevent fossilization of errors. Just as correct linguistic structures can be learned with the reinforcement of positive feedback, positive affective feedback ensures the continued communication.

Negative affective feedback discourages learners to continue interacting in the target language. So feedback will best function to reduce errors when the learners are highly motivated after receiving the teacher's positive affective support.

- Correction techniques on the oral classroom

Box 3-2 is a set of oral correction techniques.

**Box 3.2: TEACHER'S RESPONSES TO MISTAKES**

- Does not react at all.
- Indicates there is a mistake, but does not provide any further information about what is wrong.
- Say what was wrong and provides a model of the acceptable version.
- Indicates something was wrong, elicits acceptable version from the learner who made the mistake.
- Indicates something was wrong, elicits acceptable version from another member of the class.
- Ask the learner who made the mistake to reproduce the corrected version.
- Provides or elicits an explanation of why the mistake was made and how to avoid it.

There is a discrepancy between what teachers think is best, or usually do, and what learners find most useful. Hence there is a discrepancy, whose opinion should be more respected? The learners have reliable intuitive knowledge about what kind of correction help most; but teachers, especially experienced ones, have a different kind of knowledge which may be no less valid. The author's own feeling is that learner preferences are on the whole a reliable guide; and if a teacher chooses to disregard these, he or she should be very clear in his or her mind why he or she is doing so.

#### **4.4 Interaction among Students**

Another important aspect of classroom interaction we are going to consider in this chapter is that the interaction happens among students. In the traditional oral class, the teacher was the center of class and the students were only listeners. They listened to the teacher all the time, receiving information without using their own minds. I-R-F exchange was the typical classroom interaction. We could observe in this kind of classroom, where students' silence and quietness were very striking features. With the ongoing nation-wide reform of ELT, this exchange structure has been sharply criticized on the ground that it failed to give the students opportunities to ask questions themselves, nominate topics of interest, and negotiate meaning. In recent



years, learner-centered teaching, task-based approach, and co-operative learning are advocated by many researchers and language teachers. Is the shifting wind of ELT reform bringing remarkable changes to oral classrooms? Let's zoom in on the classroom interaction among the students.

#### **4.4.1 Interlanguage talk**

NNS-NNS conversation is often referred to in the literature as interlanguage talk. An early study of interlanguage talk was carried on by Long, Adams, Melean, and Castahos (in Long & Porter, 1985 ) in intermediate level, adult ESL classes in Mexico. The researchers compared speech samples from two teacher-led class discussions to speech from two small group discussions (two learners per group) doing the same tasks. To examine the quantity and quality of speech in both contexts, the researchers first coded moves according to a special category system designed for the study. Quality of speech was defined by the variety of moves, and quantity of speech was defined by the number of moves. The amount and variety of student talk were found to be significantly greater in the small groups than in the teacher-led discussions. In other words, students not only talked more, but also used a wider range of speech acts in the small-group context.

In a larger study, Porter (in Long & Porter, 1985) examined the language produced by adult learners of English in task-centered discussion done in pairs. The learners were all NSs of Spanish. Porter concluded that although learners cannot provide each other with the accurate grammatical and sociolinguistic input that NSs of English can, learners can offer each other genuine communicative practice, including the negotiation for meaning that is believed to aid SLA.

#### **4.4.2 Task difficulty and communication stress**

A task is essentially goal-oriented: it requires the group, or pair, to achieve an objective that is usually expressed by an observable result, such as brief notes or lists, a rearrangement of jumbled items, a drawing, a spoken summary. This result should be attainable only by interaction between participants.

A task is often enhanced if there is some kind of visual focus to base the talking on a picture, for example. Penny Ur argues that “the task-centered activity scores higher with most groups on all criteria: there is more talk, more even participation, more motivation and enjoyment...” Thus, as a generalization, it is probably advisable to base most oral fluency activities on tasks.

In terms of speaking, there are three factors affecting task difficulty. In the first place, there are factors that have to do with the data that learners are working with. (How dense! complex are the texts that learners are required to process? How abstract! concrete is the content in relation to learners’ experience? How much contextual support is provided? ) The second set of factors has to do with the task itself. (How many steps are involved in the task? How relevant and meaningful is the task? How much time is available? What degree of grammatical accuracy is provided? How clearly is the task set up for the learners? How much practice of rehearsal time is available?) Finally, there are factors that are internal to the speakers themselves. These factors, which are largely outside the teacher’s control, include the level of confidence and motivation of the learners, prior knowledge of content, degree of linguistic knowledge and skill, extent of cultural knowledge, and the degree of familiarity with the task type itself.

With speaking tasks, there is also the interlocutor effect. Speakers behave differently when performing identical tasks depending on the person they are talking to (Martyn, 1997; cited from Nunan, 2001). In her study, Martyn collected data from speakers as they performed similar tasks with different interlocutors. She found that different language was produced by the speakers according to the degree of comfort they felt with the learners they were working with. Another aspect of the interlocutor effect is the degree to competence of the other person or persons. As we have already seen, communication is a collaborative achievement in which the speakers negotiate meaning in order to achieve their goals. Therefore, a speaker’s communicative success will be partly determined by the skills of the other person.

#### **4.4.3. Listening to facilitate speaking**

Brown and her colleagues were not only interested in identifying those factors causing difficulty, but also in finding ways of helping speakers improve their performance.

In some interesting work that dramatizes the symbiosis between speaking and listening, they found that prior experience as a listener helps speakers improve their performance as a speaker. There are two possible reasons for this finding. In the first place, being a listener gives learners models to deploy when acting as a speaker. In addition, being a hearer first helps the learner appreciate the difficulties inherent in the task. Giving speakers experience in the hearer's role is more helpful than simple practice in tasks in which a speaker is having real difficulties in appreciating what a particular task requires. In tasks in which speakers are largely successful in meeting a particular task demand, repeated practice may enable them to improve further their performance in this respect, and may indeed be a pleasant and motivating experience.

#### **4.4.4 Students' speaking strategies**

- Conversation strategies

One of the most salient examples of classroom interaction among students is conversation practice. To become good conversationalists, students need to learn some speaking strategies. Many students claim that it is fairly unsatisfactory trying to communicate in English, even though they have learned some vocabulary, drills, sentence structures and daily expressions. Conversation is a two-way, three-way or four-way, but never one-way interaction. To keep the flow of conversation going smoothly and fluently, students need to have (a) speaking strategy training; (b) knowledge of general conversation rules.

H.P. Grice (1971) suggested that certain conversational "maxims" enable the speaker to nominate and maintain a topic of conversation:

(a)quantity: say only as much as is necessary for understanding the communication;

(b)quality: say only what is true;

(c)relevance: say only what is relevant;

(d)manner: be clear.

Once a topic is nominated, learners in a conversation need to employ some conversation strategies to maintain the topic-development. The conversation strategies are:

- Turn taking: body language such as inhalation and head movement as turn-seeking signal, eye contact, gesticulation, etc., as well as linguistic phenomena such as a drop in pitch or use of grammatical tags.)

- Interruption: responses such as sorry/hang on /but

- Agreeing/disagreeing: responses such as yeah / definitely /of course! yeah, but/oh, I don't think so

- Back channeling: responses such as yeah / uhuh / umm etc.

- Returning to topic: responses such as anyway / to get back to the point

- Topic shift: responses such as oh, /by the way/that reminds me...

- Hesitation devices! fillers: responses such as erm

- Repair: responses such as I mean...

- Communication strategies

Besides conversation strategies, communication strategies provide learners with important tools for active, self-directed involvement in learners' interaction. Communication strategies are elements of an overall strategic competence (Brown, 2002:118).

To gain the ability of speaking a foreign language, speaking strategies are very important for learners to master. According to Cohen (1998: 65) "language learning will be facilitated if students become more aware of the range of possible strategies that they can consciously select during language learning and language use", it is suggested that strategy instruction is necessary; if students are taught to use some strategies that are useful in their oral practice, they might become better conversationalists.

## **4.5 Learner-content interaction**

To express themselves in English, students must have access to a variety of resources, such as words and expressions of banks, posters, computer programs. Good teachers have always been creative people who adapted teaching materials to meet the needs of their students. It is important to look carefully at the content of the materials. Is the language real? Does it reflect what learners actually say and hear, read and write? Are the pictures, stories, and situations relevant and interesting to students? Do stories or dialogues carry their own meaning, or are they simply vehicles for grammatical structures or vocabulary lists? At the same time, it is important to look at textbook exercises to be sure that they do not just ask obvious questions, but also require the students to reflect on what he/she has read. There should be challenging and interesting exercises that require students to think and apply what they have learned. In oral English teaching and learning, the flexibility in the use of teaching materials should be drawn attention to, so that students can take control of their own learning, and become more autonomous.

Now the world is changing and technology is developing fast. More and more new things appear in our daily life. We teachers must follow the trend of the times, meet the students' need and try to be qualified teachers. We must set a certain teaching surroundings in which the students can participate in the class activities and create new ways to help the students form good qualities by teaching. On the basis of the knowledge gained in classroom, the students should learn how to learn English in natural surroundings themselves. There are not only all kinds of English newspaper, English magazines, English written information, but also English broadcast and English programs on TV. With the development of science and technology, modern educational technology is the key of the audio-visual education program — multimedia aid teaching is widely used in English class. Computer multimedia aid teaching brings in more teaching effects than those in other teaching ways. It can change abstract knowledge into concrete one and make lots of knowledge concentrated and enrich the students' knowledge. It can get the students not only to find, to discuss and solve problems, but also to develop self-study ability. Using the teaching method of human-computer interaction pattern, the students can make good

use of these English media to enlarge their amount of intake, to input naturally, to absorb naturally, to deepen the students' impression of what they have learned, not to remember and recite forcefully. Thus, the aim of using language is finally achieved; their listening and speaking skills are further practiced. The students learn English well subconsciously. By using this method, we can save much time so that the students can be given much time to practice and can be made to feel the reality of language. We can safely claim that computer multimedia aid teaching combines the teaching processes with the learning processes and can form a new compound among teachers, students, teaching materials and teaching ways.

## Chapter 5 Conclusion

“Speaking activities are probably the most demanding for students and teachers in terms of the affective factors involved.”(Hedge, 2002: 293) Trying to produce language in front of other students can generate high level of anxiety. Students may feel that they are presenting themselves at a much lower level of cognitive ability than they really possess; they may have a natural anxiety about being incomprehensible; they may have cultural inhibitions about losing face, or they may simply be shy personalities who do not speak very much. It is therefore a major responsibility for the teacher to create a reassuring classroom environment in which students are prepared to take risks and experiment with the language.

If a teacher wants to instruct students how to interact more effectively in the oral class, he needs to investigate the classroom directly so as to improve the quality of spoken English teaching.

### 5.1 Major findings.

Through the classroom observation and the survey of the questionnaire, the author finds that the interactive activities do help learners in their oral English learning. But the results of the questionnaire indicate that the interaction in the investigated classrooms is far from favorable. The linguistic, cognitive and affective environment is not effectual and encouraging to provide a forum for learners to reflect on language learning so as to be autonomous language learners. Students’ inactive participation in classroom interaction mainly results from socio-cultural influence and students’ negative self-concept. What can we do to create an optimum environment for learners to learn spoken English? How can we maximize learners’ active participation in oral classroom? In view of the spoken English teaching and learning situation in the secondary English schools, several suggestions are put forward to help teachers activate students’ participation in classroom interaction.

- Unnatural input is the core of linguistic competence

In oral classroom, many learners complain that they are willing to express their opinions on certain topics, but they can't talk about them in English. The main reason for this is that they don't have enough linguistic knowledge.

As we all know, vocabulary is the carrier of meaning. Without vocabulary we cannot express our meaning accurately. So even in oral class, we cannot neglect the role of vocabulary teaching. In oral class, teaching vocabulary is not simply to tell the meaning of the new words in the textbook. According to different communicative activities the teacher should write down the relative new words on the blackboard or on the prepared paper to be distributed to learners. After a brief explanation, the teacher should ask learners to use them in their talk or speech. And when a learner is presenting his speech before the whole class, he can write down some new words that he thinks important on the blackboard or the teacher writes down the new words while the learner is making the speech. In this way, learners will learn more words by using them in practice. They will no longer think vocabulary learning is tiresome. Through this method, the new words are easily remembered and also can last for a long time.

- Well-prepared class guarantees successful classroom interaction

Preparation should always make provision for the inclusion of previously learned functional language before, during and after planned activities. The language to be learned should be conspicuous during the phases of both presentation /demonstration and students' participation. It is critical to anticipate how to compensate for students' gap in knowledge so that classroom activities "life" and activities remain possible. Insufficient preparation can lead to the failure of classroom activities. Careful class preparation is a determinant factor in the development of oral interaction with learners. If teachers want students to experience interaction in oral class, they must pay close attention to the preparation of teaching/learning activities.

- Make students aware of the importance of classroom interactions

Since classroom silence is a common phenomenon of students participation in classroom interaction, it is essential for teachers to arouse students' awareness of the importance of classroom interaction at the very beginning of the class. Teachers



should tell students that effective classroom interaction is of significant value to students and teachers: (a) on the students' part, classroom interaction not only helps them improve their English proficiency but also facilitates their thinking. Researches such as that by Varonis & Gass (1985), Pica, Doughty, and Young (1986), and Pica (1988) echo the importance of interaction in second language acquisition, focusing in particular on the non-native speakers' role in the negotiation of meaning.

In addition, classroom interaction facilitates thinking. Just as Vygotsky and his colleagues observe, "exterior dialogue is a necessary precursor to inner speech and an awareness of one's own thought process". Our capacity to think and to talk is developed through personal interaction in which we pass ideas and information back and forth among those with whom we speak and to whom we listen; (b) on the teachers' part, teachers are very easily affected by students' participation in classroom interaction.

- Teachers should protect students' self-confidence, self-esteem

To activate students' participation in classroom interaction and to ensure that all students participate in it, attention should be paid to the protection of students' self-confidence, self-esteem and face. Teachers should keep in mind that students are grown-ups and easily humiliated into obedience by sarcastic remarks and that their self-confidence, self-esteem and face should be protected. Any direct or overt criticism, embarrassment of students may lead to students' low self-confidence, low self-esteem and loss of face. It is preferable to ask students questions that they can answer. When he questions his students, it is necessary for the teacher to tailor his questions to the different degrees or abilities of his students. That is to say, students with different abilities answer questions of different degrees of difficulty.

- Establish trust among learners

Feeling of insecurity plays a large part in the build-up of a negative group atmosphere. Learners under such situation always lack self-confidence and can easily slide into negativity and antagonism. To counteract this, it is important for the teachers to establish a climate of trust among learners, so that they can feel confident enough to say and doing things in front of others without fear. This is particularly

important in the oral classroom as it is easy for the learners to feel stupid when struggling to take risks about the language. Obviously, the attitude of the teacher is vital here. It is important for the teachers to have assuring, encouraging, and comforting manner.

- Maintain fluidity by reseating the students

When the learners are required to do some classroom activities they show a marked preference for their own seats. Sometimes they actively refuse to work with certain students. This does not make for a very pleasant classroom atmosphere, and makes the process of organizing discussions and speaking activities fraught with hazards. Therefore, it is important to ensure that students do not always work with the same partner or partners for several reasons: always working with the same partner will place limits on the amount of language used—pairs may develop their own “restricted code”, always using the same vocabulary and phrases. They may also get to know each other too well, and have too few information gap, thus becoming bored with each other. Hence reseating the students is a tactful way to promote more active cooperation and provide better language practice.

## **5.2 Pedagogical Implication**

Jill Hadfield was convinced (1998:14) that a successful classroom dynamic is a vital element in the teaching /learning process. Firstly, and most obviously, teaching and learning can and should be a joyful experience for both teachers and learners, and most teachers will know from their bitter experience that there is no more miserable teaching experience than to be shut up inside the four walls of his/her classroom with a prickly and uncooperative group. Secondly, in present-day foreign language classrooms, where pair work and group work have become the norm, relationships within the class become more important: it is fundamental to the success of these activities to have support and co-operation from the class and a harmonious relationship between its members. Finally, research in social psychology confirms that teachers know instinctively: a cohesive group works more effectively and productively (Hadfield, 1998:14).

A positive group atmosphere can have a beneficial effect on the morale, motivation, and self-image of its members, and thus significantly affect their learning, by developing in them a positive attitude to themselves as learners. Successful classes can thus be, as T. Douglas puts it in classes —*Understanding People Together* (1983) “an instrument of behavioral or attitudinal change, an instrument of support and maintenance, a pool of resources, and an instrument to facilitate learning”.

### 5.2.1 Creating a positive classroom climate

The role a teacher plays and the styles that he develops will merge to give him some tools for creating a classroom climate that is positive, stimulating, and energizing.

- Motivation

Motivation in L2 learning refers to learners’ desire and raw power of learning. It is arguably the most important factor in success or failure in language learning. Harmer (1983) has divided motivation into two main types: extrinsic motivation, which is concerned with factors outside the classroom, and intrinsic motivation, which is concerned with what takes place in the classroom. Extrinsic motivation is unnecessary for us to discuss any more, since it naturally is the two categories of learning reasons, but in a vaguely different expression. Here one point should be emphasized that in language learning, motivation derives first and foremost from the need to communicate with others.

Motivation characterizes learning intention, desire, interest and so on, which have the function of propelling or restricting learning. A well-motivated student who is badly taught will probably do better than a poorly motivated student who is well taught. The stronger the motivation is, the more positive the learner is, the quicker the language cognition is, and so the better the internalizing knowledge is.

Teachers should find opportunities to give students formative feedback for their classroom behavior as well as for their academic products, especially when that behavior is appropriate or improving. Too often, students are publicly chastised for their inappropriate classroom behavior without ever being acknowledged for their

appropriate behavior. When teachers ignore all appropriate behavior, responding only to inappropriate behavior, students can be led to believe that they never behave appropriately. Teachers, therefore, need to show students what appropriate classroom behavior is by quietly and almost privately acknowledging them when they are cooperating and behaving well.

- Building strategic techniques

Getting students actively involved in the classroom is something every language teacher hopes to accomplish. As we seek to make the language classroom an effective milieu of learning, it has become increasingly apparent that “teaching learners how to learn” is crucial. Language teachers themselves should also be strategy-facilitated since the teacher’s role is not only in the place of instructing language knowledge but also the place of instructing the knowledge of how to study more efficiently. “The concept of ‘strategy’ is somewhat a fuzzy one, —a strategy consisted of mental or behavioral activity related to some specific stage in the overall process of language acquisition or language use (Ellis, 1999)”.

- Establish rapport

“Rapport” is a somewhat slippery but important concept in creating positive energy in the classroom. Rapport is the relationship or connect the teacher establishes with his students, a relationship that is built on trust and respect and that leads to students’ feelings capable, competent, and creative. The teacher sets up a connection by:

- showing interest in each student as a person,
- giving feedback on each person’s progress,
- valuing and respecting what students think and say,
- openly soliciting students’ ideas and feelings,
- laughing with them and not at them,
- developing a genuine sense of vicarious joy when they learn some thing or otherwise succeed.

- Praise and criticism

Part of the rapport the teacher creates is based on the delicate balance that he sets between praise and criticism. Too much of either one or the other renders it less and less effective. Genuine praise, appropriately delivered, enables students to welcome criticism and to put it to use.

### **5.2.2 Encouraging co-operative learning**

A curriculum or classroom that is cooperative and therefore not competitive—usually involves the following characteristics:

- techniques that focus on or account for learners' needs, style and goals;
- techniques that give some control to the student; (group work or strategy training, for example)
- curricula that include the consultation and input of students' and that do not presuppose objectives in advance;
- techniques that allow for students' creativity and innovation;
- techniques that enhance a student's sense of competence and self-worth.

As students work together in pairs and groups, they share information and come to each other's aid. They are a 'team' whose players must work together in order to achieve goals successfully.

An added connotation to the term "cooperative," however, is its emphasis on collaborative efforts of students and teachers working together to pursue goals and objectives. Collaboration may be strictly among students, realized through pair and group work or it may involve students-teacher collaboration in choosing and carrying out techniques and in evaluating progress.

### **5.2.3 Encouraging interactive learning**

At the heart of current theories of communicative competence is the essential interactive nature of communication. When you speak, for example, the extent to which your intended message is received is a factor of both your production and the listener's reception. Most meaning, in a semantic sense, is a product of negotiation, of the give and take, as interlocutors attempt to communicate. Thus, the communicative purpose of language compels us to create opportunities for genuine interaction in the

classroom. An interactive course or technique will provide for such negotiation. An interactive oral classroom will most likely be found:

- doing a significant amount of pair work and group work; receiving authentic language input in real-world contexts;
- producing language for genuine, meaningful communication;
- performing classroom tasks that prepare them for actual language use “out there”;
- practicing oral communication through the give and take and spontaneity of actual conversations.

### **5.3 Communicative activities designed for oral classroom interaction**

In the previous section, I discussed the classroom climate to support group interaction. However, the realization of interactive teaching process is through communicative activities.

As Canale points out “the second language learner must have the opportunities to take part in meaningful communicative interaction, that is, to respond to genuine communication needs and interests in realistic second language situations. In CLT, classroom activities are often designed to focus on completing tasks that are mediated through language or involve negotiation of information and information sharing. Students can learn language and meanwhile develop communicative competence through communicative activities because “activities that involve real communication promote learning” and “activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning” (Richards & Rodgers, 1986:72). Communicative activities are possible and feasible to oral class teaching. The important thing is to design suitable activities and the most crucial one might be the group work activities.

#### **5.3.1 Group work organization**

What is group work? It is a generic term covering a multiplicity of techniques in which two or more students are assigned a task that involves collaboration and self-initiated language. What we commonly call pair work is simply group work in

groups of two. It's important to note that group work usually implies "small" group work, that is, students in groups of perhaps six or fewer. In group work, learners perform a learning task through small-group interaction. It is a form of learner activation that is of particular value in the practice of oral fluency: learners in a class that is divided into five groups get five times as many opportunities to talk as in full-class organization. It also has other advantages: it fosters learner responsibility and independence, can improve motivation and contribute to a feeling of cooperation and warmth in the class. There is some research that indicates that the use of group work improves learning outcomes (Bejarano, Y, 1987).

In secondary foreign language schools, it is much easier for the teachers to arrange group work activities since most of the students are at a relatively balanced language proficiency. Yet the learners have different expectations of what learning spoken English involves and what they want out of the course. What's more, learners have their own individual learning styles, attitudes. So the teachers must be aware of the learners' potential conflict and make efforts to bridge the gaps.

Group work activity carries many benefits in oral classes. However these potential advantages are not always realized. Teachers fear they may lose control, that there may be too much noise, that their students may over-use Chinese, do the task badly or not at all: and their fears are often well founded. Some people—both learners and teachers—dislike a situation where the teacher cannot constantly monitor learner language. The success of group work depends, to some extent, on the surrounding social climate, and on how habituated the class is to using it; and also, of course, on the selection of an interesting and stimulating task whose performance is well within the ability of the group. But it also depends on effective and careful organization.

### **5.3.2 Popular activities**

Some popular activities of group work to be discussed in the following are: pair work, games, role-play, stimulations, storytelling, drama, brainstorming, information gap, jigsaw, debate, problem solving and decision making.

- Pair Work

Pair work is an essential activity in oral class interaction. It is generally used to make a conversation and role-play. Through pair work, learners get a lot of opportunities to practice using language. On the one hand, pair work reduces the teacher's talking time, encouraging learners to attend activities and allowing learners to have more time to interact. On the other hand, pair work is beneficial to create an active and relaxed classroom communication atmosphere.

- Games

Games usually involve elements as fun, rules, competition/cooperation and finally an objective for each game. Students experience lots of fun in classroom games. We have different types of games, such as guessing games and twenty questions. One interesting game is called "telephone". First, the teacher gets the participants stand in a line. Then, the teacher whispers a sentence to the first student. The first student whispers the sentence he hears to the second and the second to the third.. .the sentence is passed on till it reaches the end of the line. The last listener is required to repeat the sentence he hears. If this sentence is the same as the original sentence, the line wins the game.

- Role-play

Role-play is used to refer to all sorts of activities where learners imagine themselves in a situation outside the classroom, sometimes playing the role of someone other than themselves, and using language appropriate to this new context. It is an effective technique to practice doing things in foreign language. The teacher may assess students' competence through role-play. According to the need and situation, role-play can be arranged as pair work or group work. Role-play is also a good way we can give our learners the opportunity to practice improvising a range of real-life spoken language in the classroom and is a fairly effective technique if the students are confident and cooperative; but more inhibited or anxious learners find role play difficult and sometimes even embarrassing. Factors that can contribute to a role-play's success are: making sure that the language demanded is well within the learners' capacity; the teacher's own enthusiasm; careful and clear presentation and instructions.



A preliminary demonstration or rehearsal by the teacher together with a student volunteer can be very helpful.

- Stimulations

The most common view of simulations is that they provide a way of creating a rich communicative environment (a representation of reality) where students actively become a part of some real-world system and function according to predetermined roles as members of that group. Simulations fulfill students' need for realism and reduce students' anxiety level which is essential to language development. A common genre of simulation game specifies that all members of the group are on an airplane which is due to crash. Half of the parachutes are burned. Each person has been assigned an occupation (doctor, carpenter, garbage collector, etc.) Only half of them can survive on the remaining parachutes; so the group must decide who will live and who will die.

- Storytelling

Storytelling is a popular technique which requires students to be active participants in the oral class. Learners have an innate love of stories. Stories teach learners about life, values and cultures. Storytelling from teacher to students or student to students carries many benefits. It is an effective way for students to increase verbal proficiency, particularly for those of less confident. Also, it can increase their willingness to communicate thoughts and feelings and encourage using imagination and creativity. As a follow-up activity, the teacher may ask students to change the ending or to role-play a dialogue between the characters of the story. For intermediate level students, we can do storytelling in a six-student group activity. The teacher selects some words, usually more than ten from any of stories, and lists them on the blackboard. The group members are required to make a story by using the given words. In the process of communication, students can always lose themselves in the characters, plots, and situations they create, they lower their anxiety levels and at the same time, they increase their self-confidence and esteem since each of them contributes to the task.

- Drama

It is an expansion of role-play technique and some times referred to as a “skit”, where a class learns and performs a play. This can be based on some famous stories or something the students have read. Real communication involves ideas, emotions, feelings, appropriateness and adaptability. Drama activity requires the learners to create their own version of the context by varying their volumes, pitches, and voices. Furthermore, the students have to make their bodies and gestures respond to the roles and lines. At the same time, they have to maintain eye contact with the audience/individual listeners. Creative drama techniques allow more direct involvement in learning on the part of all the students. The students find these activities very productive and fun, which has made the teaching and learning more enjoyable.

- Brainstorming

Brainstorming is one of the most effective classroom techniques in which learners have a free and relatively unstructured discussion on an assigned topic as a way of generating ideas. It can also be used as a warmer(a five—minute activity at the start of the lesson) just to get the students in the mood and to start them thinking about the topic or as a filler(a five—minute activity at the end of the lesson) to see how many words they remember from the lesson . Brainstorming is often used before group discussion activity. First, the teacher asks the students to think of all the words they know connected with the topic to be discussed. Then, he put the students in pairs or small groups to compare their vocabulary and transfer words they hadn’t thought of from their partner’s list to their own. At last, the teacher pools the words on the blackboard and offers some feedback or complimentary knowledge to the students. After the students have already activated their vocabulary related to the topic, they will not be searching for words so much when they start the speaking activity.

- Information gap

Information gap involves each learner in a pair or group processing information, which the other learners do not have. The learners’ information must be shared to in order to achieve an outcome. The two focal characteristics of information gap

techniques are (a) their primary attention to information and not to language forms and (b) the necessity of communicative interaction in order to reach the objective. Unlike teacher- initiated display questions, information gap activities have genuine communicative value—calling for the decoding or encoding of information from or into language. One example is pair work in which each member of the pair has part of the total information (eg. an incomplete picture ) and attempts to convey it verbally to the other.

- Jigsaw

This is a cooperative learning activity in which everyone becomes an expert about a topic or sub-topic, and shares his or her learning within a group setting so that eventually all members learn the content. A popular jigsaw technique that can be used in large groups is known as a “strip story.” The teacher takes a moderately short written narrative or conversation and cuts each sentence of the text into a little strip, shuffles the strips, and gives each student a strip. The goal is for students to determine where each of their sentences belongs in the whole context of the story, to stand in their position once it is determined, and to read off the reconstructed story. Students enjoy this technique and almost always find it challenging.

- Problem solving and decision making

These activities provided us a new way of working with curriculum materials. In the process of solving the problems, students are encouraged to work in small groups without teacher support. It is believed that this activity can motivate students to negotiate meaning, since when they focus on the groups’ solution of a specified problem, they are busy discussing the problem in the target language, sharing ideas and prior experiences (listening and talking), changing their minds, looking for and using clues in the materials.

Decision making techniques are structured plans for actively involving students in making decisions in the classroom. Some of the problem solving techniques don’t involve a decision about what to do. Other problem solving techniques do involve such decisions. For example, students presented with several profiles of applicants for a job may be asked to decide who they would hire.

- Debate

Debate is another type of activity that can stimulate interaction in the classroom. The whole class is divided into two groups, one supports the debate topic and the other opposes it. To keep the debate going smoothly, the teacher has to select a controversial topic and teach the students some typical expressions such as “In my opinion,” “I may agree with you on this point, but ...” “On the one hand, ...on the other hand . . .”, “On the contrary..”, “Obviously, ...” “Do you mean...”. Group debate can be an effective way of integrating learners listening , speaking and thinking that challenge them more actively in the oral class and provide a bit fresh air and a release from the class.

#### **5.4 The limitation of this research**

To create an interactive classroom is such a big complex issue that it is impossible for the author to involve all the aspects. Of all the interesting topics of creating interactive teaching, the author is particularly interested in interactive activities and techniques and their influence on students’ oral English proficiency. According to the New Standard, one purpose of oral English is to establish a positive attitude to English learning in the minds of students. This is more important than teaching them the language. The teacher specifically should create an interactive atmosphere in oral English learning. The study of the author will, based on classroom observation and a survey questionnaire, check how learners perform in oral classrooms, and how much they value classroom interaction.

Interactive language teaching highlights the importance of the teacher being a classroom interaction manager and facilitator. Therefore, in oral class, it is the teacher’s main responsibility to try every effort to seek out every opportunity to increase involvement and maximize the quality and quantity of interaction. To train students’ communicative competence, the teacher, on the one hand, should create a communicative environment, provide learners with sufficient input. On the other hand, from the perspective of psycholinguistics, to create a safe, relaxed and pleasant atmosphere is also vitally important. Successful teachers teach not only at the content

level but also the relationship level. Teachers should be sensitive to the students' affective needs and be empathetic, warm and rewarding.

In oral class interaction, the teacher's main duty is to organize and plan suitable activities to keep the interaction going. In interaction, he needs to help the learners and offer them positive feedback. Students' communicative competence comes from consequent negotiation of meaning. Therefore, the teacher should try to supply students with more opportunities to communicate in class. As the saying goes, practice makes perfect. Learners' spoken English production lies in active interaction. Only when learners are provided with sufficient opportunities to use language can they improve their communicative competence.

In oral class, teacher-student interaction is necessary. Student-student interaction is more important. We should always keep in mind that in oral class, learners are the subjects of learning. Therefore, the focus of oral class should no doubt be on learner-centered method and activities. To encourage learners' autonomous learning, learner-content interaction should also be stressed.

## **5.5 Further studies**

Interactive teaching does not only involve methods and techniques, but also material development, testing, classroom organization, and possibly the retraining of the teaching staff. Though this thesis has attempted to explore the effective ways of teaching oral English in foreign language schools, it is still in the stage of its infancy due to the limitation of the author's knowledge and the objective conditions. Many issues should be further sorted out, for example (a) the relationship between a particular teaching model and the specific teaching content, before the construction of interactive teaching should be implemented effectively; (b) how we motivate those quieter learners to participate in the activities. Obviously these issues are of theoretical and pedagogical significance in ELT classrooms and await further study.

## Appendix I

### A Questionnaire on Oral English Learning of Low/Intermediate Level Students

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_

Choose from the four choices the one you think that best fits you, and fill in the blank after each statement or question.

A= always B= mostly C= sometimes D= never

1. Are you afraid of making errors in your spoken English? ( )
2. Do you form what you want to say first in Chinese and then translate it into English? ( )
3. I learn English by remembering lots of drills and sentence patterns. ( )
4. Do you like your teacher to correct every error you make orally? ( )
5. I like my teacher to correct every error I make orally. ( )
6. I learn oral English because I think it's fun, interesting, and useful. ( )
7. When I talk to people in English, I use communicative strategies (such as coining a word, using body language, paraphrasing, etc.) consciously to make myself understood. ( )
8. I feel confident when I talk to people in English. ( )
9. I feel comfortable when giving a "talk" or presentation to a group ( )
10. I get good result in oral English test. ( )
11. I am active in the oral class activities. ( )
12. Do you hope that you had more time to form your answers to questions in the oral class? ( )
13. Do you attempt to guess an answer which you are not sure to your teacher's, question in the oral class? ( )
14. Do you think "to learn a new language is to learn a new culture"? ( )
15. When I find it difficult to express myself in English, I just speak Chinese. ( )
16. There are many Chinglish expressions in my oral English. ( )
17. I am not sure whether I speak "correct" English when I talk to others. ( )

18. Do you like to do a lot of spoken English practice after class? ( )
19. I prefer learning English by talking with people who speak English well. ( )
20. Do you like to do a lot of oral practice after class? ( )
21. I want to learn oral English in a class with other students. ( )
22. Do you join in class or group discussions? ( )
23. I speak more than listening to others in classroom activities. ( )
24. I learn something new from my classmates when we do pair work or group work. ( )
25. I am not afraid of losing face when I speak English with my classmates. ( )
26. We correct each other's errors in speech in small groups or pairs. ( )
27. I try every means to improve my oral English, for example, I listen to the BBC and VOA programs, watch original English films, sing English songs, attend to English corners, surf the internet and read newspapers to get as much English information as I can. ( )
28. I learn oral English more efficiently in group than in teacher's spoon-feed teaching. ( )
29. The teachers give us a lot of chance to practice speaking English in the oral class. ( )
30. I am interested in practicing my oral English while doing some classroom activities, such as jigsaw, story-telling and debate. ( )

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