

**The role of negotiation and TA in Iranians' second language acquisition**

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***Abstract***

In this study, it is attempted to survey some intervening factors leading L2 Iranian learners' not to be successful as well, and then seeks some of the features that might be applicable to open new windows into L2 learners in Iran. Also it concerns some aspects of language learning, which have received poor attention from both pedagogical and non-pedagogical areas. This article examined some sociolinguistics and communicative aspects of ELS. Two groups were studied in Moallem institution (Tehran) in this survey; both groups included over 20 students between ages 13 to 25. E-group had been studying English for 6 months, C-group had been studying their L2 for over than 3 years; there was an effort to consider and apply some factors according to communication, which have got poor attention till now. E-group was exposed to negotiation of meaning and also TA (transactional analysis) was applied in the way the teacher behaved the students. At last an equal exam was taken from both groups. The result showed that students of E-group could talk more voluntary and

**Key words: Negotiation, Negotiation for meaning, negotiated syllabus, information gap, TA (transactional analysis, Culture.**

***Introduction***

To date acquiring a new language has always been one of the most significant current problems among Iranians especially those who want to use it as an instrument in their job, education, migration, and so forth, and those who are interested in language learning as an interest or leisure. Although, nowadays, new methods are being presented continuingly, but so far, however, there has been little achievements in this regard; so, there is a question that why

many language learners cannot communicate in second language as well and use their language knowledge after passing the best course with the best teachers? Why many of them cannot speak well despite knowing acceptable form and structure knowledge?

In this study there was an effort to highlight the role of negotiation which is the base of human being's daily activity. Despite of using the newest versions of text books a shortage of aimed negotiation and considering its factors seems strongly to be exist. In current situation many classes start with over than 30 students, and most students give up the course after 3 terms or more in most institutions (even those institutions and colleges that have a well-known attribute among Iranians). When talking to some of students, after years of language studying, they seriously believe that they cannot learn English innately, since they had tried it for several times and had gained no especial progress. This article tries to answer the presented questions and then it will address into some points that can be applicable to facilitate students' and second language acquisition.

### ***Method***

The method used in the research was based on communicative language teaching and task based activities. Two groups (classes) were studied in Moallem institution (Tehran) in this survey; both groups included over 20 students between ages 13 to 25. E-group had been studying English for 6 months, the second group had been studying their L2 for over than 3 years. It was attempted to use the most general and challenging issues in four skills, the most tangible issues of real life were used to challenge and provoke students to participate in serious activities. The study lasted in 3 months.

### ***What Is Communicative Language Teaching?***

Communicative Language teaching, or CLT, means teaching conversation, an absence of grammar in a course, or an emphasis on open-ended discussion activities as the main features of a course. What do you understand by communicative language teaching? Communicative language teaching can be understood as a set of principles about the goals of language teaching. (Jack C. Richards, Cambridge University)

## **Negotiation**

Negotiation is a dialogue between two or more people or parties, intended to reach an understanding, resolve point of difference, or gain advantage in outcome of dialogue, to produce an agreement upon courses of action. (Wikipedia)

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research has shown that interaction and especially negotiation for meaning are essential elements of language acquisition (Gass and Varonis 1994, Gass 1997, Long 1985, Pica 1994, Swain 1998).

Pica (1994: 494) defines negotiation as “the modification and restructuring of interaction that occurs when learners and their interlocutors anticipate, perceive, or experience difficulties in message comprehensibility.” As the learners negotiate for meaning they modify their speech linguistically to produce comprehensible TL. They accomplish this task by repeating a message, adjusting its syntax, changing the vocabulary, or modifying its form and meaning (Peggy Patterson, Rice University, USA, Susana Trabeldo, National Technological University, Argentina). Long and Robinson (1998) classified the process of negotiation for meaning under the Interaction Hypothesis. This hypothesis states that the conditions for second language acquisition are improved when learners negotiate meaning with other speakers. These negotiations tend to increase input comprehensibility through language modifications such as simplifications, confirmation or clarification requests, elaborations, and recasts. Thus, activities that promote negotiation for meaning create a quality environment for SLA to occur.

### ***Facilitate Negotiated Interaction***

Although many teachers believe that conversation between nonnatives cannot help learners improve their skills, but in the case of negotiation the sameness of partners' culture and even knowledge level is more important. There were some students in E-group that had had little conversation with the teacher or other students till the research but during the survey when the negotiated interaction was applied they started to speak with enthusiasm. According to B. Kumaravadivelu (, *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 1. (Spring, 1994), pp. 27-48) Negotiated interaction can be facilitated through several micro strategies:

1. Designing group activities:

Small-group arrangements by nature produce more negotiated interaction than do teacher fronted activities and research shows that nonnative/nonnative partners produce more frequent negotiations of meaning than do native/nonnative partners (Varonis & Gass, 1985). Even poor conversation, which has been applied in E-group through problem solving tasks, had drew students' attention significantly to L2 and they tried to apply all skills that they had in order to continue discussions. Despite the fact that many teachers don't suggest conversation between non-skilled students because of poor structures and grammar used, even the poor skilled students gained progress in both form and meaning.

2. Asking referential questions:

Using rigid form of interaction in forms which had been applied to C-group for three years showed that students can rarely make a good sense of the preselected forms especially in countries like Iran that has noticeable difference in cultural background with the text books used in institutions. So Asking referential questions which permit open-ended responses, rather than display questions which have predetermined answers, are another micro strategy that can generate meaningful exchanges among the participants (Brock, 1986). In this regard it was attempted to create information gap in discussions; although the question was pretty known for students but their answers was unclear and unpredictable for the listeners. Each answers could provide another question and turn taking was used to let students think and change the ideas.

3. Yielding greater topic control to the learner:

It provides an effective basis for building conversations. Learners benefit more from self-initiated and peer-initiated topics than from topics nominated by their teachers (Slimani, 1989). Yielding control over the topic is a way of tapping learners' intrinsic motivation, of ensuring an appropriate level of linguistic input, and of stimulating extensive and complex production on the part of the learner (Ellis, 1992). **Error! Reference source not found.** In E-group it was considered to let students choose topic in a democratic topic choosing way. It was usually attempted to allocate 20 minutes of the time for free discussion at the of class hours and it is always obvious that students always wait for reaching the free discussion time with an enthusiasm and most of them attempted to have a role and participate in the discussion. However, in C-group in which the topic was based on syllabus the enthusiasm for participating showed itself less. During each free discussion there was an overall oral examination

incidentally. Although C-group used more forms and structures, which was cause of their longer experience and education period but little acquisition was tangible, however E-group interestingly tried to use any forms that they knew and after the discussion when they were asked about the quality of their conversation most of them had a good sense of using language for communication.

### ***Transactional Analysis (TA)***

Eric berne (1910-1970) presented the idea of people relating as Parent, Adult and Child (PAC). And made popular by Tom Harris' Book "I'm OK -- You're OK".

In any human beings there are three egos that at a point of time one of them takes the control at person and manages his behaviors. Eric berne introduced these three egos as Child, parent and adult ego that any of them needs its own reaction.

#### **1. Child State Ego**

When people are in child state, they have all senses and needs of their instinct state, actually when they are angry, hungry, thirsty, passionate, sentiment and all instinct areas of people. Eric berne (1910-1970) their behavior is impulsive and stimulus bound. Coincidentally, a child ego has creativity, a source of spontaneity and humor and it is said to be the best part of a human's personality, because it is the only part that can really enjoy life.

#### **2. The Parent Ego:**

The Parent state is that when people use the words such as "you should (not)", "you must (not)", "ought to" and you should be sorry. These utterances are usually applied by some gesture like pointing a finger. The parent is controlling, limiting and rule maker. There are two kinds of parents:

##### **2.1 Nurturing Parent:**

The Nurturing parent is part of us that, "Takes care of" others. Is **sympathetic** part of us and Wants to make others feel better. He or she protects others. For example:

"Don't worry, anyone can make a mistake"

## **2.2 Critical Parent:**

The critical parent is the part of us that: Finds fault and blames others, criticizes others, Passes **judgments**, Puts others down. For example:

“You’re late” “Can’t we ever depend on you.”

## **3. Adult Ego:**

The Adult Ego State is the part of us that deals **objectively** with reality. It is sometimes referred to as the “computer part of us”, Gathers information, Organizes, Tests reality, estimates probabilities, Computes dispassionately and Makes decisions.

In this study there was an attempt to apply TA to language learning class. The main focus of using TA was on The Child and The Parent egos. There was an idea that most students come to the class with a state of the child ego according to their major characteristics which were accessible by a little attention. When the student referred to their teacher with their child ego and the teacher behaved them with nurturing parent state the learners got it easier to communicate with the class and felt the class safer and finally most student could achieve the aimed state which was expected.

For example:

Student (**child ego**):

“Teacher, no matter how much I study, I cannot learn well.”

Teacher (**Critical Parent**):

” you shouldn’t be so easy going during last sessions.”

Teacher (**Nurturing Parent**):

“Hey boy you are clever. You should try more.”

However there were some students who seemed to come to the class with the parent (especially Critical Parent) which is recognized through their behavior, although they were the minor number of the class but the challenge between teacher and them was usually serious. In this case the teacher usually tried to apply the adult ego to control the Critical Parent ego of mentioned learner.

For example:

Student (**Critical Parent**):

“Teacher! You usually cannot teach grammar well, I rarely can understand the points. The other students think the same too.

Teacher (**Adult Ego**):

I have been teaching the grammar for years and there has not been any especial problem with the learners, and a student cannot judge instead of other classmates. If you cannot learn well I can work on you by extra activities (a complete message, which stops student continuing the clam).

### *Negative experience*

Most Iranians have negative experience in learning English language from pedagogical system, most text books are based on old methods like grammar translation; however, weak teachers intensify the matter. The most important problem is not to apply language in a natural way, most of students study ESL just for passing the exam, and even if they pass the exam, they receive very poor marks. However, the students who pass and somehow receive acceptable scores do not look to be able to use their knowledge naturally. They can neither converse fluently and practically nor comprehend English well. Since they are not spoken, they cannot understand the meaning of what they read, and they cannot express the reading texts. Even, in many cases, they cannot write articles correctly and express their own feelings and opinions. Consequently, at the end of their curriculum, they pass their final test but actually they are unable to use what they learn. This might stem from the focus of Iran’s pedagogical system (school, university and even many institutions) on usage and special rough approach to tasks, rather use, yet a task is a work plan that requires learners to process language pragmatically and to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, and as a whole, a task is intended to result in language use (Ellis, 2003). In e-group the main approach taken in the class was based on natural questions and answers, which provided a high quantity of modified and simplified samples which, can be comprehended and used in daily routines. Although this method was based on

### *Culture and Characteristic in negotiation*

Glancing at an English text book, you would immediately find that many standard work books used in institutions are not associated with Iranians’ traditional and religious cultures; nowadays, however, many believe that English text books written by western linguists and teachers,

intentional or unintentional, are transferring a dominate culture to other learners, a Persian learner, as an illustration, is completely or partially unfamiliar with many topics in text books, and have no prerequisite. In other word, a culture which does not make special sense is induced implicitly.

However the best negotiations occur in diverse culture and characteristics. In an open-ended negotiation of meaning having different point of view can keep conversation going on.

### ***Students' background knowledge and negotiation***

In most institutions newcomers are classified in terms of their average score in all four skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking). This happens under a circumstance that the differences in knowledge of four skills will suffer both teachers and students after some sessions.

In e-group students were chosen based on the equity of four skills, the focus was on but different knowledge backgrounds in order to make a good negotiation potential.

There was evidence that showed there was a meaningful relation between the quality of conversations and students background knowledge. The more knowledge of things, the more participation in discussions. However information gap always happens in situations that people's knowledge is different and negotiation and conversation help people fill the gap of information.

### ***Negotiation***

The term Negotiation refers to all aspects of communication, it is said that human beings start negotiating from waking up till going to bed. One type of negotiation is to talk to other people to comply a need. The other is self-negotiation, as we talk to ourselves, or even when thinking we have negotiation with ourselves, and most of our short conversations with others are the result of a longer self-negotiation (mohammad reza Shabanali, 2012, shabanali.com). According to the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1985; 1996) interactive negotiation of meaning facilitates comprehension and the developments of L2. Negotiation in both mentioned type has a key role in language acquisition. Studies show that many Iranians have negotiation difficulties in classes. A study made in Rafsnajan University of Medical Sciences and provided following information:

**Table 1 - UCS Items with Numbers and Percentages of Students Selecting Each Alternative (N = 190)**

Items	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
1. I'm afraid to speak up in conversations	33	45	24	69	19	2.98	1.305
2. I talk less because I'm shy.	40	54	37	52	7	2.64	1.194
3. I talk a lot because I am not shy.	37	77	49	22	5	2.39	1.102
4. I like to get involved in group discussions	17	29	42	70	32	3.39	1.254
5. I feel nervous when I have to speak to others.	14	49	28	80	19	3.24	1.222
6. I have no fears about expressing myself in a group.	9	61	36	62	22	3.14	1.134
7. I am afraid to express myself in a group.	31	90	37	29	3	2.38	0.984
8. I avoid group discussions.	37	83	41	25	4	2.35	1.005
9. During a conversation, I prefer to talk rather than listen.	25	68	56	35	6	2.63	1.030
10. I find it easy to make conversation with strangers.	16	48	36	63	27	3.19	1.208
11. I don't think my friends are honest in their communication with me.	17	82	55	29	7	2.62	0.973
12. My friends and family don't listen to my ideas and suggestions.	60	98	19	7	6	1.95	0.922
13. I think my friends are truthful with me.	11	27	51	90	11	3.33	0.987
14. I don't ask for advice from family or friends when I have to make decisions.	23	119	24	18	6	2.29	0.912
15. I believe my friends and family understand my feelings.	9	24	36	97	24	3.54	1.021
16. My family doesn't enjoy discussing my interests and activities with me	56	88	22	18	6	2.11	1.034
17. My friends and family listen to my ideas and suggestions.	5	10	23	122	30	3.87	0.917
18. My friends seek my opinions and advice.	4	10	52	107	17	3.65	0.801
19. Other people are friendly only because they want something out of me.	12	77	45	41	15	2.84	1.082
20. Talking to other people is just a waste of time.	62	84	28	10	6	2.04	1.088

Note. 1: Strongly disagree; 2: Disagree; 3: Neither disagree nor agree; 4: Agree; 5: Strongly agree.

Although this table shows a rather clear state of a case of Iranian students, however, it can be worse when referring to students in language classes. Self-Expressing in L2 classes is one of the predicaments among learners, and neither teacher ask students to express themselves, nor students themselves are interested in sharing their personal ideas, feelings and opinion. In both classes, while teaching, it was almost always tried to share identical fortune for all learners to participate in discussions, furthermore it was attempted to quiet more fluent speakers who interfered and interrupted others during the discussions.

Consequently, In E-group students found it accessible to express their idea, although they urged not to participate at early stages, but when they found the class friendlier they gradually started to participate in discussions and some of them were even more motivated to use L2 by all means they could and this state seemed to be the best fortune to teach them.

In second group, however, since they had had an experience of a routine that previous teachers had spoken mostly, and they had been a hearer over 80% of course-time, they did not love the

matter and as I focused on their participation, they felt inconvenience. As a result, many of them had good score in writing skill, but could not speak as fluent as an ordinary student in E-group.

### ***Teachers' implicit roles***

Error neurosis or 'lathophobia' Fear of making mistakes was first presented by Rod Bolitho (British Council) which is the mother of all neuroses and almost certainly the most common source of anxiety in language learners in the public forum of a language classroom.

The notion of mistake as sin is very deeply rooted in educational cultures around the world, the more so since mistakes in any subject can be shown as a means of giving grades and of distinguishing between strong and weak students. (Rod Bolitho, British Council)

Learners are also often concerned about looking foolish and losing face in front of their peers if they make mistakes. Research into interlanguage and second language acquisition. We as teachers would do well to allow time and space for this kind of experimentation and to offer learners support rather than a scolding when they do make mistakes. (Rod Bolitho, British Council)

In E-group the atmosphere of the class had given such a fortune to students to speak easily and it was tried not to stop student when mistaking. The emphasis was on students' utterance meaning and not forms and structure. So they strongly tried to express their ideas in and open-end discussion. After students were completely engaged with the topic the teacher started to inject the rules and new vocabulary implicitly and then the discussion went on again and again. The interesting point was that many students were interested to participate in discussion in comparison to the past.

### ***Facilitating anxiety (instead debilitating of anxiety)***

According to Spielberger (1983) [31], anxiety can be described as the subjective feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system. Anxiety is also defined as a state of uneasiness or fear caused by the anticipation of something threatening. Language anxiety has been said by many researchers to influence language learning. According to Krashen (1980, as cited in Horwitz & Young, 1991) [15], anxiety contributes to an affective filter, which prevents students from receiving input, and then

language acquisition fails to progress. Whereas facilitating anxiety produces positive effects on learners' performance, too much anxiety may cause a poor performance (Scovel, 1991) [29].

Psychologists make a distinction between three categories of anxiety: trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety. Trait anxiety is relatively stable personality characteristic, 'a more permanent predisposition to be anxious' (Scovel, 1978) [28], while state anxiety is a transient anxiety; a response to a particular anxiety-provoking stimulus such as an important test (Spielberger, 1983 as cited in Horwitz, 2001, p. 113) [13]. The third category, situation-specific anxiety, refers to the persistent and multi-faceted nature of some anxieties (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a) [18]

Many studies have concluded that anxiety and achievement are negatively correlated (e.g. Horwitz et al., 1986 [14]; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994 [20])

it seems that anxiety has an optimal point along its continuum in which both too much and too little anxiety may hinder the process of successful second language learning. (Sara Atef-Vahid, Alireza Fard Kashani, Iran University of Science & Technology)<sup>1</sup>

The respondents with lower English language learning anxiety were likely to achieve higher scores on the final English exam, and students with higher English language learning anxiety tend to obtain lower scores on the final English exam. (Sara Atef-Vahid, Alireza Fard Kashani, Iran University of Science & Technology)<sup>1</sup>

“A negotiated syllabus involves the teacher and the learners working together to make decisions at many of the parts of the curriculum design process” (Nation & Macalister, 2010: 149). It provides learners' active involvement in the shared tasks of developing a syllabus via the process of negotiating with the teacher. Breen & Littlejohn (2000: 1). The need of negotiated syllabus is heightened especially when the students' role is not considered and the teacher is almost the major speaker and doer in the classes.

In e-group the class was divided to three groups and after a warm up, the teacher presented a problem and asked each groups to brain storm to find a solution. Then any students should give a solution about the problem and the discussion continued by next answers and question. The discussions was usually long and the students tried to use all skills which they acquired before.

## **Conclusion**

The result showed that negotiation can improve students' learning potential through a real free discussion, and considering the ego of students by using TA can reduce students' communicative and psychological problems and remove anxiety and conflicts in order to gain a better state of acquisition. Consequently by applying negotiation of meaning and TA factors e-group improved their ESL more effectively in comparison with C-group and finally it proved that students would show more Voluntary activities that resulted in better acquisition.

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