



Recepción: 22/01/2019

Aceptación: 19/02/2019

Publicación: 05/03/2019



Ciencias de la educación

Artículo de revisión

## *The Facilitative Role of the Interaction Hypothesis: Using Interactional Modification Techniques in the English Communicative Classroom*

### *El papel facilitador de la hipótesis de interacción: uso de técnicas de modificación interactiva en el aula comunicativa de inglés*

#### *O Papel Facilitador da Hipótese de Interação: Usando Técnicas de Modificação Interacional na Sala de Aula Comunicativa Inglesa*

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## Abstract

English language teachers are expected to implement lessons directed by the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) into today's classrooms. In this regard, it is pivotal to know about the theoretical framework of this key language teaching approach. The framework is partly made up of one of the most crucial Second Language Acquisition (SLA) hypotheses called the Interaction Hypothesis (IH). The IH claims that second language development is better facilitated when learners participate in negotiated interaction. From a CLT perspective, a second language is acquired more effectively through interaction and communication. When language teachers attempt to design and deliver classroom instruction grounded in CLT, it is imperative to be familiar with the essential notions behind the IH and its facilitative role in SLA. Therefore, this paper provides key information on the hypothesis at hand by analyzing its early version and updated version. In addition, Krashen's comprehensible input and Hatch's role of interaction and conversation on L2 learning are highlighted, because the IH evolved from these two scholars' seminal works. This paper also deals with three key interactional modification techniques - comprehension checks, confirmation checks, and clarification requests – promoted by the IH. With the intent of facilitating language learning, the design and deliver of communicative-oriented lessons should have a central role in the classroom. However, lessons are more likely to be effective when teachers take the theory of the IH into practice by allowing learners to engage in negotiation of meaning through the use of the aforementioned interactional modifications.

**Key words:** interaction; communication; second language acquisition; English; techniques.

## Resumen

Se espera que los profesores de inglés implementen las lecciones dirigidas por la enseñanza de la lengua comunicativa (CLT) en las aulas de hoy. En este sentido, es fundamental conocer el marco teórico de este enfoque clave de la enseñanza de idiomas. El marco se compone en parte de una de las hipótesis más importantes de Adquisición de la Segunda Lengua (SLA, por sus siglas en inglés) llamada Hipótesis de Interacción (HI). IH afirma que el desarrollo del segundo idioma se facilita más cuando los alumnos participan en la interacción negociada. Desde una perspectiva CLT, un segundo idioma se adquiere de manera más efectiva a través de la interacción y la comunicación. Cuando los profesores de idiomas intentan diseñar e impartir instrucción en el aula basada en CLT, es imperativo estar familiarizados con las nociones esenciales detrás de IH y

su función facilitadora en SLA. Por lo tanto, este documento proporciona información clave sobre la hipótesis en cuestión al analizar su versión anterior y la versión actualizada. Además, se destacan la información comprensible de Krashen y el papel de Hatch de la interacción y la conversación en el aprendizaje de L2, porque el HI evolucionó a partir de los trabajos seminales de estos dos académicos. Este documento también trata tres técnicas clave de modificación interactiva (verificaciones de comprensión, verificaciones de confirmación y solicitudes de aclaración) promovidas por el HI. Con la intención de facilitar el aprendizaje de idiomas, el diseño y la entrega de lecciones orientadas a la comunicación deben tener un papel central en el aula. Sin embargo, es más probable que las lecciones sean efectivas cuando los maestros llevan la teoría del HI a la práctica al permitir que los alumnos participen en la negociación de significado a través del uso de las modificaciones de interacción mencionadas anteriormente.

**Palabras clave:** interacción; comunicación; adquisición de una segunda lengua; inglés; técnicas

## Resumo

Espera-se que os professores de inglês implementem as lições dirigidas pelo Ensino Comunicativo de Línguas (CLT) nas salas de aula de hoje. A este respeito, é essencial conhecer o quadro teórico desta abordagem chave de ensino de línguas. A estrutura é parcialmente composta por uma das hipóteses mais importantes da Aquisição de Segunda Língua (SLA, Second Language Acquisition), denominada Hipótese de Interação (Interaction Hypothesis - IH). O IH alega que o desenvolvimento do segundo idioma é melhor facilitado quando os alunos participam da interação negociada. Do ponto de vista da CLT, uma segunda língua é adquirida de forma mais eficaz por meio da interação e da comunicação. Quando os professores de idiomas tentam projetar e fornecer instrução em sala de aula com base na CLT, é imperativo estar familiarizado com as noções essenciais por trás do IH e seu papel facilitador no SLA. Portanto, este documento fornece informações importantes sobre a hipótese em questão, analisando sua versão inicial e versão atualizada. Além disso, a contribuição compreensível de Krashen e o papel da interação e da conversa da Hatch no aprendizado de L2 são destacados, porque o IH evoluiu a partir dos trabalhos seminais desses dois acadêmicos. Este artigo também trata de três principais técnicas de modificação interacional - verificações de compreensão, verificações de confirmação e solicitações de esclarecimento - promovidas pelo IH. Com a intenção de facilitar o aprendizado de idiomas, o design e a entrega de lições orientadas para a comunicação devem ter um papel

central na sala de aula. No entanto, é mais provável que as lições sejam eficazes quando os professores levam a teoria do IH em prática, permitindo que os alunos se engajem na negociação de significado através do uso das modificações interacionais mencionadas anteriormente.

Palavras-chave: interação; comunicação; aquisição de segunda língua; Inglês; técnicas.

## **Introduction**

Communication and interaction both have facilitative roles for second language (L2) development. Communication has a central role in L2 learning. When students engage in conversations in the target language, for instance, syntactic structures are potentially developed. In addition to this, conversational interaction is beneficial for comprehensible input and for the production of linguistic output (Hatch, 1978). Interaction may also facilitate conditions (e.g., comprehension and lexical acquisition) that are claimed to be essential in language learning (Pica, 1994; Long, 1983). In this respect, interaction can be viewed as the most essential way used to make input comprehensible. To do this, linguistic modifications (e.g., comprehension checks) used during conversational interaction aid to turn unfamiliar language into comprehensible input (Long, 1983).

In the Ecuadorian educational context, dominant, traditional pedagogical methods (e.g., Audio-lingual Method and Grammar-Translation Method) for language learning and teaching are mostly employed by EFL learners in the classroom setting. Even when a traditional language teaching methodology is being frequently used, classroom instruction is not solely focused on the teaching of the structures of the English language. There are few English language teachers who lean towards a more communicative classroom practice focused on the development of L2 skills. However, among this small number of teachers, some of them do not implement appropriately the communicative approach into their classroom practice (Calle et al., 2012).

As a result, students find it difficult to achieve a good command of the English language upon completion of their high school education. In addition, Ecuadorian EFL students in their last year of high school have a limited L2 performance, as Ortega and Auxocoplula's study (2017) concluded. This is an issue of concern because most Ecuadorian EFL students start learning English at elementary school, and by the time they graduate from high school they have had twelve years of English language instruction. Despite these many years of English language learning, there is no satisfactory level of proficiency.

It should be noted that English language teachers within the Ecuadorian educational context are expected to implement CLT into their professional practice, as indicated in the National Curriculum Specifications (2012) and EFL Curriculum (2016) designed by the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education (MinEduc) (2012). Therefore, it is pivotal to have a good understanding of this language teaching approach. It is also imperative to know about the theoretical framework of CLT, which partly consists of the Interaction Hypothesis (IH) (Long, 1980). That is to say, this hypothesis forms an important foundation for the language teaching approach at hand (Cummins & Davison, 2007; Mackey & Polio, 2009). On the basis of the information provided above, it is worth noting that from a CLT perspective, a second language is better acquired through interaction and communication (Richards, 2006). Therefore, the CLT and the IH go hand in hand, and when a classroom instruction is grounded in CLT, it is critical to be familiar with the key characteristics and central claim behind the SLA hypothesis under discussion.

With the intent of facilitating students' English language learning, a classroom instruction directed by the CLT is needed in conjunction with the linguistic devices or tactics (e.g., comprehension checks, confirmation checks, and clarification requests) afforded by the IH (Long, 1981). This type of classroom instruction is needed for EFL students to use the target language for communicative purposes (e.g., information exchange and problem solving) with the help of the aforementioned linguistic devices, which may facilitate comprehension and participation, avoid communication breakdowns, and repair and sustain communication (Long, 1983). This classroom instruction should also be learner-centered, address the students' needs and interests, and promote a social and collaborative learning community where students can build knowledge and produce understanding of the English language by allowing them to take risks and make mistakes (Prasad, 2013; Ahmad & Rao, 2012; Richards, 2006). All of the above-mentioned aspects may help students improve their classroom performance and engage in effective English language learning.

#### **Methodology of the conducted literature review**

The methodology employed for the elaboration of the present paper was based upon bibliographic research on the topics of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the Interaction Hypothesis (IH), and the three top interactional modification techniques or devices (namely comprehension checks, confirmation checks, and clarification requests) associated with this hypothesis with the aim of finding key theoretical information and research-based ideas to



gain a good understanding about the aforementioned topics. The reviewed literature also provided key information about the effectiveness of CLT and the IH in the language learning classroom. Furthermore, a section that takes the theory behind the IH into language classroom practice was created. This section includes key ideas on how to go about putting into practice the above-mentioned techniques that promote negotiation of meaning, interaction, and communication in the classroom. In doing so, as stated by Gómez-Luna y col (2014) several different sources of information need to be sought and discriminated as part of a bibliographic research. In this sense, journals and databases specialized on the aforementioned topics were consulted. Lastly, the located information was also organized, analyzed and synthesized, and such process allowed to bring into discussion meaningful classroom implications depicted in the present work.

### **Results of the reviewed literature**

Mainly, this section of the paper addressed the topic of the IH by using seminal works of Michael Long, which were published in 1981, 1983 and 1996. It should be noted that the IH lays an important foundation for the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Cummins & Davison, 2007; Mackey & Polio, 2009); therefore, CLT will also be highlighted in this paper. Briefly, the CLT theory reveals that communication and interaction are the purpose of language learning (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). According to Wang and Castro (2010), previous studies on the communicative approach (e.g., Hymes, 1972; Nunan, 1991) show that interaction facilitates the learning of language functions and of target language structures. Additionally, results of research studies that indicate the suitability of CLT and its positive impact on the learning of the English language, especially in EFL contexts, will be analyzed.

The key characteristics and central claim of the hypothesis will be provided alongside a discussion of research studies that indicate its effectiveness. In addition to this, we will learn about the early and updated version of the IH, along with Krashen's (1981) comprehensible input and Hatch's (1978) role of interaction and conversation on L2 learning, as the IH evolved from the works of these two scholars.

### **The impact of CLT on student language learning**

First and foremost, it is imperative to point out that there is a positive impact of the CLT on students' English language learning (Ahmad & Rao, 2013; Efrizal, 2012; Al-

Twairish, 2009; Mohd et al., 2007). Specifically, by incorporating the CLT into classroom practice, teachers can effectively help their students develop their English communicative ability, as studies conducted by Efrizal (2012), Al-Twairish (2009), and Mohd and colleagues (2007) have concluded. In addition, despite the notion that CLT is commonly associated with the development of learners' communicative ability alongside their listening skill, which is needed for an effective communication, this language teaching approach may also have a facilitative role on EFL learners' reading and writing skills (Emeza, 2012). In this respect, an authentic language use may be conducive towards the development of these English literacy skills among English learners. Therefore, it is essential to have students use their reading and writing skills to interact and communicate with one another in the classroom. For instance, in a CLT classroom, the act of writing must be as meaningful and relevant as possible so that EFL learners can have opportunities to use the target language to meet their everyday life and communicative needs in the outside world of the classroom.

Apart from facilitating the development of language skills, CLT can help English students develop self-confidence and increase their motivation for L2 learning (Efrizal, 2012; Ahmad and Rao, 2013), which are important factors for SLA. As students take part in a classroom instruction grounded in CLT, it can facilitate them to become actively engaged and have a greater participation in the process of teaching and learning (Efrizal, 2012). In short, EFL secondary students can become motivated in taking part in the acquisition process of the English language directed by the CLT since it encourages participation, promotes confidence, and prepares students for real-life communication (Mohd et al., 2007).

Within a CLT classroom, EFL secondary learners' can build their self-confidence due to ample opportunities to experimenting with and trying out new language (Efrizal, 2012; Richards, 2006). As learners do so, errors are likely to be produced; in this respect, tolerating learners' errors is essential as this is an indication of the development of communicative competence. From a CLT perspective, error production is viewed as a normal part of language learning (Richards, 2006). In addition, students should not be expected to be accurate every time they use the target language but should be encouraged to be as creative as possible when exchanging information and negotiating meaning.

Additionally, CLT can have a facilitative role towards English students' language learning because it posits that classroom instruction needs to include content that relates well to students'

lives and interests (Prasad, 2013; Ahmand & Rao, 2012). Therefore, when attempting to create a communicative classroom, language teachers first need to begin by discovering learners' interests and needs so that classroom practice can be responsive to what learners bring to the instructional process. This in turn will have a positive impact on students' language learning because being engaged in meaningful communication and interaction facilitates L2 learning (Richards, 2006).

### **Essentials of the interaction hypothesis: looking at its two versions**

The IH (Long 1981, 1983, 1996) evolved from the works by Hatch (1978) and Krashen (1981); the former focuses on the importance of interaction in language learning and the role of conversation in the development of L2 learning, and the latter claims that comprehensible input is a necessary condition for second language acquisition (Mackey, 1999). Therefore, based on the notion that the interaction hypothesis evolved from the above-mentioned scholars' works, it is imperative to consider them in further detail. According to Mackey (2007), an important line of research aligned with the IH was established by Hatch (1978), who was one of the first L2 researchers to look at the role of conversation in L2 development. According to Hatch (as cited in Mackey, 2007) "language learning evolves out of learning how to carry on conversations, out of learning how to communicate" (p. 63). Additionally, Hatch's research considered both input and output, and her research on these two aspects suggested that "conversational interaction was an important means for learners to gain access to comprehensible input as well as opportunities to produce linguistic output" (Mackey, 2007, p. 86).

Moreover, Ellis (1991) acknowledged that the IH had its origins in Hatch's work (1978). He provided further information about Hatch's research that partly grounded the IH; in this regard it was remarked that Hatch studied the interactions between native speaker children and adult L2 learners, and her study results yielded that "the regularities which have been shown to exist in the way which learners acquire the grammar of an L2 were the direct result of the kinds of interaction in which they participated" (p. 4).

As it was previously noted, Krashen's (1981) input hypothesis also laid the foundation for the IH. The scholar argued that the subconscious process of L2 acquisition takes place when learners are focused on meaning and receive comprehensible input (Ellis, 1991). Richards and Rodgers (1986) explained that the Krashen's input hypothesis involves four essential issues. First of all, the input hypothesis is concerned with acquisition rather than



learning. Second, people acquire a second language effectively by understanding input, which is moderately beyond their present level of linguistic competence. This notion is represented by the formula  $i + 1$ ;  $i$  is referred to as learners' current level of competence, while  $1$  is the language slightly above learners' current level. In this formula it is understood that L2 learners go from stage  $i$  to a stage  $i + 1$  (language that contains structures of  $i + 1$ ) by understanding language moderately above their present level of linguistic competence. Third, learners cannot be taught to directly develop fluency, but rather the ability of speaking fluently arises naturally as learners develop linguistic competence by understanding input provided. Fourth, if learners receive adequate amount of comprehensible input,  $i + 1$  will automatically occur. Based on the information provided above, it is important to bring into discussion what comprehensible input is referred to; it is the "utterances that the learner understands based on the context in which they are used as well as the language in which they are phrased" (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 133). It is worth noting that in his work Krashen (1981) emphasized the importance of simple speech (e.g., foreigner and interlanguage talk) as well as of extralinguistic context (e.g., visual aids) for making input comprehensible (Ellis, 1991).

In conclusion, as Lee (1997) eloquently pointed out that the only similarity between Krashen's and Long's hypothesis is in the regard that comprehensible input is necessary, but as for how comprehensible input is given to L2 learners, the two hypotheses have distinct views. That is to say, Krashen's comprehensible input is mainly provided in one way, that is, from teachers or caretakers through the simplification of input, while Long's comprehensible input is mainly produced by learners' active involvement in communicative events that essentially require interaction alongside interactional modifications or adjustments.

After key aspects were discussed regarding how the IH evolved, it is now time to focus on this hypothesis only. It is important to point out that the hypothesis is widely associated with the work of Michael Long that is traced back to his PhD dissertation in 1980. Before the IH (1981, 1983, 1996) is solely discussed in this literature review, Long's remarks in relation to Krashen's input hypothesis will be presented. In an article published in 1983, Long accepted the role that comprehensible input has upon L2 acquisition. Long's rationale for acknowledging Krashen's view of comprehensible input laid in the notions that having access to it has a central role for successful first and second language acquisition, so experiencing bigger amounts of comprehensible input causes faster language acquisition, and lacking access to it results in little

or no acquisition (Long, 1983). In the same work, Long (1983) pointed out that modifications made by interlocutors during conversational interaction were the most essential employed way of making input comprehensible. He also suggested that linguistic modifications during interaction have a facilitative role for L2 development because they aid to turn unfamiliar language into comprehensible input. In this respect, interactional modification techniques or linguistic devices (e.g., clarification requests, confirmation checks, and comprehension checks) are helpful tools aimed at preventing or avoiding communication breakdowns; taking part in interactional conversation, along with linguistic devices, is more crucial for learners to acquire L2 than only receive input simplification (Long, 1983).

In the first version of the IH, Long (1981) pointed out that “participation in conversation with NS [native speaker], made possible through the modification of interaction, is the necessary and sufficient condition for SLA” (p. 275). Native speakers employ a variety of techniques (i.e., recasting of questions, expansion, clarification requests, and confirmation checks) when negotiating meaning with nonnative speakers (NNS); these techniques are intended to facilitate nonnative speakers’ comprehension and participation during the act of communication. As stated by Long (1981), “NS . . . use a variety of techniques to help sustain conversation and to lighten other aspects of the NNS’s interactional burden” (p. 265). Therefore, when a communication breakdown takes place during NS-NNS interaction and/or learner-teacher interaction interlocutors can solve a conversational trouble by using the aforementioned linguistic devices or techniques. On the basis of the information provided above, simply put, the IH indicates that taking part in interaction facilitates second language development.

Long’s (1981) hypothesis has a significant impact in the field of SLA, as it indicates that L2 development takes place when learners, encountering a communication breakdown are able repair and sustain communication through the negotiation of meaning. For instance, L2 acquisition occurs when learners engage in conversational interactions that involve asking for clarification and confirming comprehension, which are the essential features of Long’s IH (Walsh, 2011). In addition to the impact of the IH on L2 acquisition, Ellis (1991) pointed out that the IH moves forward two critical claims with regard to the role of interaction in the process of second language acquisition, as it asserts that “comprehensible input is necessary for L2 acquisition [,and] modifications to the interactional structure of conversations which take place in

the process of negotiating a communication problem help to make input comprehensible to an L2 learner” (p. 4).

As we have seen, from Long’s perspective (1981), negotiated interaction (e.g., asking for clarification and confirming comprehension) is claimed to be the most critical condition for SLA to occur; his claim is traced back to the early version of the IH. Later on, an updated version of the hypothesis at hand appeared in 1996 by the same scholar. According to Walsh (2011), Long’s (1996) reformulated version of the IH remarked the central role that the more competent interlocutor had towards making input comprehensible, improving learner attention, and fostering learner input. As indicated by Zhang (2009), the updated version of the IH, in Long’s own words, suggests that “negotiation for meaning, and especially negotiation work that triggers interactional adjustments by the NS or more competent interlocutor, facilitates acquisition because it connects input, internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention, and output in productive ways” (as cited in Long, 1996, pp.451-452).

Long’s reformulated hypothesis attempted to reconsider teacher-learner interaction, which was first addressed in the earlier version of the IH (Walsh, 2011). Al Khateed (2014) agreed that the updated version of the IH examined the role of negotiation during interactional conversation, and he asserted that “negotiation can prompt interactional amendments and interactional adjustments between non-native speakers (NNSs) or learners and native speakers (NSs) or interlocutors. This would contribute to accelerating second language acquisition” (p. 296). This final remark regarding Long’s updated hypothesis should be considered: it is more faithful to Hatch’s work (1978), as Long (1996) stressed that interaction can facilitate acquisition by aiding learners’ L2 production (Hoang-Thu, 2009).

### **Expanding long’s work: subsequent research on the interaction hypothesis**

The interaction hypothesis has been further investigated by Pica (1994) and Gass (1997). It is worth bringing into discussion again that the IH was first proposed by Long (1980), while Pica is well known for empirically investigating Long’s hypothesis. The scholar extended the IH in a central way by stressing the importance of the social relationship among participants as an essential factor of interactional modifications (Ellis, 1991). In this respect, in a seminal work, Pica (1994) provided a comprehensive review of over a decade of research on negotiated interaction, specifically her article reviewed insights into L2 learning revealed through research on the social interaction and negotiation between L2 learners and interlocutors. She suggested

that interaction may facilitate conditions and processes that are claimed to be essential in second language learning. For instance, learners have opportunities to notice specific features of the target language, which aids to comprehend the linguistic message, because information is repeated and reorganized.

As stated previously, the IH has also been further investigated by Gass (1997), who stressed that the effects of interaction on L2 development may not be instantaneous. Therefore, she pointed out the importance of considering subsequent developmental effects of interaction on the process of L2 learning. Regarding the issue whether or not exists a relationship between negotiation and language learning, Gass (1997) remarked that when learners participate in interaction, this act brings linguistic forms to their attention, and as a result learners experience a period of linguistic growth in which correct forms of the target language will be produced.

Long's (1996) IH suggests that implicit negative feedback, which is obtained through negotiated interaction, facilitates the acquisition of a second language. Similar claims for the benefits of negotiation on L2 development were put forward by Pica's (1994) and Gass' (1997) aforementioned works. Moreover, Gass and Varonis' (1994) research provided additional support for the IH through the exploration of interaction and learner production. In their study it was revealed that negotiated and modified input positively affected comprehension, and that negotiated interaction significantly affected L2 production. The scholars suggested that "interaction with the opportunity for modifications may affect later language use" (p. 299).

Besides the impact of interaction on L2 production, further evidence has been given to the benefits of interaction on lexical acquisition (or the acquisition of vocabulary words) (Ellis, Tanaka, & Yamazaki, 1994). Ellis and colleagues' (1994) study results yielded positive evidence with regard to the connection between modified input gained from interaction and lexical acquisition. The scholars suggested that interaction allows L2 learners to understand linguistic items in the target language, and as a result learners' L2 acquisition is facilitated by comprehended input. In a study carried by Loschky (1994), the relationship regarding comprehensible input and SLA was empirically tested, and his study specifically the effects of comprehensible input and interaction on comprehension, the storage of vocabulary, and the acquisition of grammatical structures in Japanese were examined. The scholar's study indicated that negotiated interaction did have a positive effect on the comprehension of vocabulary, but it

had no effect on grammatical development and the retention of the vocabulary items. As seen above, Loschky's study results differed from Ellis and colleagues' (1994) findings that concluded that interactional modified input facilitated not only vocabulary comprehension but also vocabulary acquisition, which in turn promotes SLA.

Other research studies that attempted to investigate a link between interaction and L2 development were carried out by Mackey (1999) and Zhang (2009). Mackey (1999) carried out a study aimed at investigating if conversational interaction can facilitate second language development. According to Mackey (1999), her research attempted to test empirically the central claim made by the IH; that is, when language learners take part in negotiated interaction, L2 development is facilitated and, consequently, it leads to a greater development of the target language. The results of her study showed that conversational interaction did facilitate second language development among the subjects in the four experimental groups. It was revealed that only the study subjects that actively participated in the interactions demonstrated significant improvement in their L2. In another study in SLA with its focus on the role of input, interaction and output in the development of oral fluency in the Chinese EFL context, Zhang (2009) asserted that interaction plays a crucial role in the process of L2 development, since comprehensible input alone is not sufficient for SLA. The key finding of the study suggested that it is possible for L2 learners to achieve near native-like proficiency in a foreign language setting if learners are engaged in adequate and effective interaction during classroom practice; therefore, this finding is consistent with Long's IH.

### **The benefits of interactional modifications**

Roughly speaking, interaction can facilitate comprehension (Loschky, 1994; Ellis et al., 1994; Long, 1981), acquisition of vocabulary words (Ellis et al., 1994), and L2 production (Gass, 1997; Long, 1996; Gass & Varonis, 1994; Hatch, 1978), as well as the learning of structures of the target language (Nunan, 1991; Hatch, 1978; Hymes, 72). Specifically, negotiated and modified input have positive effects on comprehension and lexical acquisition. Negotiated interaction can significantly impact L2 production of language learners (Gass & Varonis, 1994; Long, 1996). With regard to facilitating comprehension, study results yielded that interactional modification can lead to more comprehension of input than input provided with no interactional modification at all (Pica, Young, & Doughty, 1987; Loschky, 1994). In addition to facilitating comprehension and L2 production, the IH can positively affect the acquisition of vocabulary words as Ellis and



colleagues' 1994 study concluded. Put simply, by examining the IH it has been found that, for instance, interaction has a facilitative role towards the development of vocabulary comprehension, lexical acquisition, and L2 production among L2 learners. That is to say, interaction may facilitate and even accelerate conditions and processes (e.g., comprehension and vocabulary acquisition) that are claimed to be essential in second language learning (Al Khateed, 2014; Pica, 1994; Long, 1981).

English learners often encounter communication breakdowns or conversational problems for varied reasons, such as lack of vocabulary, comprehension skills, and oral production. In this respect, the IH provides amendments to language learners as it promotes the use of various oral communication techniques/tactics or linguistic devices (also referred to as interactional modifications) (Al Khateed, 2014; Pica, 1994; Long, 1981). For instance, using oral communication tactics or linguistic devices during conversational interaction can help EFL students turn unknown language into comprehensible input (Long, 1983). The interactional modification techniques that can help learners to avoid communication breakdowns and repair and sustain communication

when it collapses are as follows: clarification requests, confirmation checks, and comprehension checks.

Confirmation checks are created by simple, uncompleted rising intonation questions; for instance, the man? or the man, right? They entail repetition of all or part of the interlocutor's preceding expression, and they can be answered by a simple positive or negative confirmation, such yes or no. This means, through a confirmation check a preceding utterance can be checked if it is correctly understood or heard; in this way no new information is required from the interlocutor (Long, as cited in Hasan, 2008). Additionally, when a breakdown in communication occurs, comprehension checks can be used to explicitly check comprehension by the interlocutor. It should be noted that comprehension checks serve a metalinguistic function where the focus is on the meaning of the message itself rather than on language forms or structures. Moreover, when communication breaks down, clarification requests can be used to repair classroom discourse between learner and teachers and among peers as well. On the students' part the strategy can be used as an attempt to clarify information and repeat unfamiliar vocabulary words, and on the teachers' part it can be used as an attempt to hear more clearly what information is being

conveyed to them. Therefore, the emphasis of the clarification request strategy is on the channel of communication, because it is used as a strategy for the negotiation of meaning within a context of communicational trouble. As a result of a joint effort between the L2 learner and the teacher, the act of communication is maintained (Hasan, 2008). In addition to this, clarification requests can enable learners to engage in self-correction and to prevent them from making the same kinds of errors on similar activities a week later (Nobuyoshi & Ellis, 1993).

### **Using interactional modification techniques in the communicative classroom**

As discussed previously, the CLT has a key impact on L2 learning in which the development of learners' communicative ability is emphasized. In attempting to develop EFL learners' communicative ability, the IH may have a central role as L2 learners are prompted to take part in conversational interaction and to engage in negotiation of meaning through the use of linguistic modifications or adjustments, which facilitate comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, as well as repair and sustain communication. Based on this understanding, the following practical ideas are put forward to guide and support a classroom practice directed by the IH and interactional modification techniques. These ideas could be helpful to develop and practice students' English speaking skill at the high school level.

As EFL learners move towards a communicative classroom environment, they will have greater opportunities to use interactional modification techniques and a lot of L2 in order to complete communicative learning activities. One common, well-known communicative learning activity within CLT is information gap activities. These kinds of activities occur within a natural learning context where learners are encouraged to negotiate for meaning, which facilitates L2 acquisition (Long, 1996). In order for English learners to get the most out of information gap activities, the application of interactional modification techniques in the classroom setting should have a major role. In this respect, it will first be crucial to model a gap information activity with more competent English learners. This will help EFL learners obtain a better understanding of what they are expected to do later on in the classroom. For illustration purposes, one well-known type of information gap activities – Information Exchange – was designed and included as part of this paper. During the elaboration process of the proposed information exchange activity, information about movies previously shown at cinemas was looked in order to make the activity as real as possible. By using this kind of information, teachers can answer their students' questions about the things relating to the movies they do not know at all or want to know more about. This means

that the activity may involve having students look at incomplete information about movies given at a local cinema and ask questions to find out more about the target movies. In this way, the key principle behind information gap activities will fall into place automatically.

During the modeling of the above-mentioned activity, teachers can introduce these three previously mentioned interactional modification techniques: confirmation checks, comprehension checks, and clarification checks. That is to say, teachers should use an explicit approach to help students become familiar with the aforementioned techniques. After the modeling of the below dialogue is done, teachers could have their students reflect on the communicative learning activity and see if they were able to notice the interactional modification used. For instance, teachers may present a dialogue like the one below, which is based on an information gap activity and uses the three interactional modification techniques discussed in this paper:

Student: What time does the Hunger Games start?

Teacher: Did you say Hunger Games or Hammer Games? (**clarification request**)

Student: I said Hunger Games. I want to watch it soon!

Teacher: Ok, it starts at 7:15 p.m.

Student: 7:15 p.m., right? (**confirmation check**)

Teacher: Yes, that's right! The movie lasts for over two hours.

Is it ok with you? (**comprehension check**)

Student: Yes, it is. I like long movies.

Teacher: What time is the last show on the weekend? (**and so on**)

As mentioned previously, carrying out the above modeling with a more competent student should occur before we have our students take part in different kinds of information gap activities. As stated before, modeling can be helpful to introducing interactional modification techniques to the class. Introducing the interactional modification techniques through modeling, it could help set the stage for helping students become aware of the importance of using these kinds of techniques during both information gap activities and actual conversations in the outside world of the classroom. The linguistic techniques or devices at hand can facilitate students' comprehension and help them repair and maintain communication and avoid conversational trouble in the classroom (Long, 1981; Long, 1996). Therefore, English teachers need to make sure that the linguistic techniques proposed by the IH form part of their students' educational experience.

As we have seen, the IH posits that interactional modifications and comprehensible input are beneficial for SLA (Long, 1983). Input needs to be linguistically modified and so does the structure of a conversational interaction. Modifications to the structure of an interactional conversation between learner(s) and teacher or among peers can take place through the oral communication techniques (as pointed out by Ellis, 1991) used in the previous dialogue about the topic of movies or any other topic of interest. These interactional adjustments or modifications performed during a conversational interaction between a L2 learner and a more competent interlocutor (or during peer-to-peer and learner-teacher interactions) can play an important role in L2 development (Long, 1981), since interactional modifications require frequent two-way negotiated interaction, resulting in an actual and successful communication (as noticed in the introduced conversation about movies).

## **Conclusions**

This paper helped bridge theory and practice, above all it can be viewed as a contribution to advocate for an enhancement of student language learning and as an attempt to provide language teachers with guidance and support to improve their professional practice in EFL settings. Thus, the selected information on the main topics was included in this paper with the aim of equipping language teachers with the necessary knowledge to be aware of the essential role of interaction on second language learning. Interaction, especially negotiated interaction, can facilitate comprehension and production that are essential for L2 development as the reviewed literature stated.

Interactional modifications based on the IH can effectively occur when clarification requests, confirmation checks, and comprehension checks are implemented into communicative-oriented. These linguistic, oral communication techniques or devices can facilitate students' language learning because they play a central role in the negotiation of meaning, avoid communication breakdowns and repair and sustain communication. For instance, when language learners are equipped with these techniques, they are able to check and clarify problem utterances during communication breakdowns. In doing so, learners are more likely to receive comprehensible input and produce comprehensible output, both of which are claimed as crucial to second language acquisition.

Lessons based on a mere simplification of input on the part of the teacher with the intent of making it comprehensible to L2 learners is pointless. Unlike, the IH suggests that input needs to be modified linguistically during a two-way interaction, which involves an active learner involvement. In this regard, learning activities, which require negotiation of meaning and interactional communication, need to be implemented into classroom practice, because they produce more interactional modifications than learning activities in which only the teacher or a more competent interlocutor/classmate provides all the information to the rest of the class. Consequently, communicative learning activities based on these notions, proposed by the IH, can greatly facilitate L2 development among English learners.

All in all, interactional modifications posited by the IH can be viewed as even a more effective, meaningful practice when they are used in the communicative classroom, because interaction and communication help L2 learners to comprehend information and acquire vocabulary, as well as they aid spoken production and facilitate the learning of L2 structures. By the same token, interactive, communicative tasks (e.g., exchange information and jigsaw tasks) lead learners to engage in negotiation of meaning, which has a central role in the development of a second language as suggested by the updated version of the IH.

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