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SOCIAL INTERACTION, LANGUAGE USE AND NEW MODALITIES

Key words: social interaction, language use, human-AI interaction, writing

Introduction

Social interaction occupies the central position of human experience. Verbal, non-verbal, visual and audio social interactions shape our daily activities and existence. Researchers have spent decades studying social interactions and the impact of those interactions on the participants and societies as a whole. In social psychology our existence as social beings is in the heart of the studies meaning that researchers focus in the explaining theoretically and practically how people interact with other people. Language learning and use is an integral part of the social interaction. We know that language learners need input that is just above their current level of understanding, i.e. comprehensible input (Krashen 2004); need opportunities to express themselves, i.e. comprehensible output (Swain 1985); and receive feedback from peers and capable others. Interestingly, these principles can all come into play

when learners use language actively and creatively with other people in social interaction. In other words, through social interaction with others (including humans or technology), individuals can develop skills and cognition through co-construction of meaning. With the development of technology, new media have offered unique ways for social interactions to be shaped.

The relevance of this study is in the attempt to fill a major research gap which relates to the lack of existing facilitators related to social interaction, which are important for proper language use. There is an inevitable urge to address the construct of social interaction, as one of those facilitators. Observation of classes and years of teaching have shown me that language learning, language use and communication in general could be more effective when social interaction between peers or interlocutors is well-established, as important social skills are developed through interaction, including coop-

eration, careful listening, offering help, sharing information, empathy, and self-control (Hurst et al. 2013). Social interaction could be manifested as negotiation of meaning, collaboration, and reciprocal exchanges in classroom tasks. In addition, the role of social interaction in inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, and project-based learning is paramount, supporting 21st century skills and active learning (Geisinger 2016).

In this paper, various understanding of social interaction will be provided as well as ideas on how communication studies researchers and educators can facilitate and explore social interaction.

Social interaction

Using a native (L1) or foreign language (L2) implies a phase when individuals manage to successfully master grammar rules and acquire significant vocabulary knowledge of a language but may not be able to express themselves using this knowledge. Learning a language and the use of a language is made effective only when speakers use language actively and creatively with other people, or engage into social interaction.

According to Goffman (1959), social interaction was seen as a theater, and people in everyday life were observed as actors on a stage, each playing numerous roles. Other individuals who observe the role-playing and react to the performances are the audience. Goffman's theory is based on the idea that people, as they create social interaction together in various social settings, are constantly engaged in the process of "impression management", meaning that each individual tries to pres-

ent themselves and behave in such a manner that will prevent the embarrassment of themselves or others. This relates well to successful social tasks accomplishment because it emphasizes the importance of the *self* and users' identity creation, participation, and bodily practices involved in the social interaction. Moreover, Little (2016) defines social interaction as "the process of reciprocal influence exercised by individuals over one another during social encounters". Social interaction used to refer mainly to face-to-face communication in which people are physically present with one another in various contexts for various reasons. In modern society, the nature of social encounters has changed, meaning they are technologically mediated and are constantly changing the nature and dynamics of the interactions. Modes such as texting on phones, messaging/chatting via social networking applications such as Viber, Instagram, Twitter, Skype, Telegram, and/or video conferencing tools such as Zoom or Google Meet have significantly influenced the ways people exchange ideas and behave. In sociology, social interaction is generally approached at the micro-level. Discourse, social and mental structures and social scripts include pre-established patterns of behavior that people are expected to follow in specific social situations. Those patterns that govern the relationship between particular individuals are being examined systematically by scholars and scientists.

Social interaction is based on two-way give and take rather than one-way exchange where either only one person is talking or no one is listening and responding. The nature of creative and responsive interaction is changing as new develop-

ments in the world of artificial intelligence (AI) are making rapid and instantaneous breakthroughs in this domain, with opportunities to work interactively with the computer growing exponentially over the past decade. Today, there are applications that can listen to one's speech and respond relatively correctly. For instance, asking Google Home, "What time is it?" is most likely replied to with a grammatically correct response, or asking the text-based, AI-operated tool ChatGPT, the chatbot developed by OpenAI more complex questions such as "Who are the main scholars in Gender studies?", it would similarly produce a meaningful response even stating details about Judith Butler, Simone de Beauvoir, bell hooks (with the distinctive spelling). These apps do the process in a way that it has provoked fear and awe in the academic world due to concerns over cheating in writing and the future of creativity and education in general (see Duffy & Weil 2023, for a review). Additionally, technological innovations have notably transformed academic writing, a crucial skill in educational systems. The advent of various digital tools has profoundly impacted how scholars conduct research, write, and compose their work (Schcolnik 2018).

Whichever angle we take in defining social interaction, the key features that it consists of are: negotiation of meaning, adaptability, emotional and cognitive feedback, reciprocity, social roles and status of participants, purposes, and the norms and rules in the social context. Negotiation of meaning is crucial for successful social interaction, which means that interactants should have the opportunity to ask for clarification, for further elaboration. Non-verbal expression that the communication is

not clear or there is misunderstanding is a technique for negotiation of meaning. In social interaction individuals use some previously-acquired social strategies and work effectively with other interactants, but also with technology.

Previous research on social interaction and learning

Social interaction is the crucial component of the process of learning. For this component to occur, learners should be eager to be engaged in interaction aimed at learning or to allow interaction to happen naturally together with the learning. Social interaction is correlated to the confidence of the learners and comfort in learning. Hurst et al. (2013) explored learning outcomes through reflections after implementing social interaction in an experimental class. They have gathered students majoring in education and applied several social interactive teaching strategies to enhance literacy among students. The researchers utilized reflections and surveys to investigate the learning outcomes of the education students and realized that social interaction improved the learning by enhancing their knowledge of literacy and their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Another relevant factor that has been researched is passion in teaching and learning which is closely related to successful social interaction. As Levitt et al. (2023: 82), who based their research on passionate teachers and passionate learners, pointed out passionate learners are "more motivated and fulfilled in their studies, leading to improved social and emotional well-being along with a sense of accomplishment

and pride” because they feel a sense of relevance and purpose in their education when they can explore their interests and passions and develop positive social interaction with others.

In my view, the above mentioned issues point to what actually happens during a successful social interaction. Active engagement, goal-directed behavior and metacognition intertwine in the learning process. Active engagement refers to the idea of commitment and confidence, the feeling of doing meaningful work. Goal-directed behavior covers the responsibility and intrinsic motivation (see self-determination theory - SDT by Ryan and Deci, 2017) and extrinsic motivation (see Weiner 2000). Finally, metacognition helps improve individuals’ intuition that aids fluency reflection.

A good example of research that examines the dynamics of engagement with all the above mentioned factors is the one by Dao and Sato (2021). In order to measure students’ positive engagement the researchers used the Experience Sampling Method and also collected measures of learners’ cognitive and social interactional behaviors while completing the assigned communicative task. Findings showed that learners’ positive emotional engagement changed during the 15-minute interactions and the nature of the cognitive and social interaction behaviors varied during the accomplishment of the task, as well as that the nature of these relationships varied over the duration of the task. In other words, the social relationships had greater influence on the learners’ positive emotional engagement than other factors and these relationships changed over the course of the short interactive task. This indicates that by exploring the relation-

ship between components of engagement at different time helps to understand the dynamic nature of engagement in relation to social interaction. The role of social interaction in supporting individual’s intellectual engagement can best be viewed from various applied linguistics perspectives, as this interdisciplinary field aims to “seek out, identify, and provide solutions to real-life problems that result from language-related causes (Nordquist 2019, para. 1).

Other researchers have reported findings on social interaction in virtual reality settings. Hoyt et al. (2003) replicated classic social psychology experiments in VR and discovered that task performance declined when an avatar was observing, indicating that the presence of virtual beings can influence behavior. Garau et al. (2003) demonstrated that aligning visual and behavioral realism in avatars is crucial for enhancing the quality of communication. Additionally, another study by Garau et al. (2005) found that individuals respond more socially to visually responsive agents, suggesting that people can perceive agents as social actors even without verbal interaction.

As language is implicated in social interaction, the connection between participation and social interaction can be explored through various perspectives such as cognitive (e.g., Ahn 2016; Coyle 2007; Robinson & Ellis 2008), sociocultural (e.g., Duff 2007; Norton 2000; Peterson 2012), and sociocognitive (e.g., Atkinson 2014; Batstone 2010; Han & Hyland 2019). The cognitive perspective, which has as its focus the understanding and explanation of learners’ internalization of linguistic structures (Chomsky 1959), highlights social inter-

action as a way to activate the potential language acquisition capacity for human beings through input and output production opportunities and processing the information. For instance, activities such as negotiations of meaning or form (Robinson & Ellis 2008) or action (Zheng et al. 2009), collaboration, and reciprocal exchanges could all provide input to the learners and provide them with opportunities to contribute to the exchange.

On the other hand, the sociocultural perspective sees social interaction as crucial in the development of human beings over millennia, encompassing both their individual and communal lives and also their mental functioning (Lantolf & Thorne 2006). Central to this view, as its followers (e.g., Watson-Gegeo 2004) contend, is an “anthropological conviction” (Ochs & Schieffelin 2012: 1) that language is a fundamental part of children’s integration into their community, a social component which is missing from the cognitivist views of language. As Vygotsky (1978) emphasized, mental functioning emerges from an individual’s interaction with their social environment, through which they appropriate and internalize the knowledge shared by their community. Viewing social interaction from this perspective underscores the significance of individuals’ intrinsic need to connect and engage in exchanges that align with their entire being, encompassing their shared culture, history, social setting, and other attributes. As Wertsch (1988: 56) stated, “the goal of sociocultural research is to understand the relationship between human mental functioning, on the one hand, and cultural, historical, and institutional setting, on the other”. There-

fore, social interaction can enhance individuals’ engagement by addressing their holistic being.

Putting social interaction into practice

In this section I offer some practical tasks for social interactions used for better engagement of users and learners.

1) **Information gap tasks.** An information gap task uses as its premise the idea that one person has information that others do not have. The point of such tasks, then, is to have people interact with each other in an attempt to find all the “missing” information. For example, to practice Parts of Speech, two versions of a story could be created by removing certain information (e.g., character names, locations, adjectives, adverbs) from each story. Then, the students, in pairs and using their own story version, can engage in interactions to complete the story (see FluentU blog.fluentu.com/blog/educator-english/information-gap-esl for a list of seven information gap activities for the ESL classroom).

2) **Using VR platforms.** Many commercial VR platforms, such as Horizon, ENGAGE, VR Chat are designed to shape and encourage social interaction (McVeigh-Schultz et al. 2019). These platforms allow users, represented by digital avatars, to explore different worlds, to interact, to play games, and collaborate on building projects. While social interactions have traditionally occurred in various forms, such as face-to-face communication, text-based applications, and video conferencing platforms, VR introduces unique properties that transform these interactions. Thus, it is crucial

to understand how social interactions are conducted and influenced by the VR medium. This understanding is particularly urgent given the anticipated rise and societal prevalence of the Metaverse in near future.

3) **Learning about ostracism.** Phenomena such as ostracism—the social experience of being ignored or excluded—have been studied using virtual reality (VR). Han and Bailenson (2024) elaborates on Kassner et al. (2012) who utilized VR to investigate the negative effects of social ostracism by recreating the game Cyberball. In Cyberball, participants can either be included (receiving an equitable share of ball tosses) or ostracized (receiving no ball tosses). Within the VR environment, participants played with two virtual agents and experienced either inclusion or ostracism by these agents. The findings indicated that experiencing ostracism in VR negatively impacted participants' mood and threatened their four fundamental human needs: belonging, control, self-esteem, and meaningful existence. Moreover, the study revealed that the negative effects of ostracism in VR were more pronounced than those in face-to-face interactions. Learners and educators can explore the concern whether individuals who are chronically ostracized in the physical world may develop severe physical and psychological problems if they also encounter ostracism in virtual spaces. This issue is particularly pertinent for social VR platforms, which offer meaningful interactions and allow users to engage in everyday activities in novel social ways.

4) **Improving social interaction through writing (and other skills).** We can perceive writ-

ing as a socio-situated practice which connects language to what socially-situated individuals do in specific situations. Lillis (2001) underlined the idea that writing links us to our cultural, social, and situated contexts. Users of any language and writers can learn how texts can convey and create interpersonal relationships. Understand why culture is important when writing in a second/foreign language (Bekar 2012). Discuss individuals' attitudes toward writing and the various language tools writers use in order to build up relationships with their audience such as imagining the reader/target audience, being clear and objective, showing concern for the reader, providing truthful arguments and avoiding assertiveness. Gather writers' reflections and descriptions of perceptions and emotions of how they approached writing.

5) **Guidelines to help educators understand/reflect on social interaction in their own educational contexts**

a. Use a social interaction and communication assessment checklist. For example, the Social Communication and Interaction observation profile from the Suffolk Learning website (<https://suffolklearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/EY-JUL-21-SCI-observation-profile.pdf>) could be a useful tool to see where your students are before social communication activities, plan future work, and record progress. Think about what this checklist tells you about your learners' social interaction skills? What can you do to improve the social interaction between you and your interactants?

b. Use a Digital Story in your teaching to help students engage with concepts, move different mental muscles, and give you a sense of your stu-

dents' current level of understanding for the concepts you are covering. It can be a powerful tool in allowing the students to communicate by expressing opinions, lifestyles, and interests.

c. Interacting with native English speakers using video conferencing or any social media. These should be used for students discussing relevant world issues such as wars, environmental challenges that human beings face. Conduct a survey and see what learners consider authentic in providing a social interaction component in the tasks they engage in.

AI-enabled tools such as ChatGPT are new tools that can provide unique affordances for developing social interaction skills by proving novel ways of making output more comprehensible.

It would be valuable to explore how the different types (e.g., human vs. technology) of social interaction and/or the types of activities involved (e.g., negotiation of meaning) are shaped by local social structures and by technology or whether learners' perceived importance of social interaction and "authenticity" interact with learning outcomes in a positive or negative way.

Conclusion and discussion

In this paper, I defined social interaction in the context of language learning, language use and impact of technology on understanding social interaction. By presenting research exploring the elements of social interaction suggestions were offered on how educators could facilitate and research social interaction in their own settings. There are different modes of social interaction as well as complex

cognitive, sociocultural, and anthropological perspectives for understanding and integrating social interaction in any learning process. Practical tasks such as inquiry-based learning and project-based learning help the development of social interaction between the participants in the learning process.

People transformation in digital platforms, enjoy the creation of new identities which impacts perceptions and behaviors and ultimately shape the type of social interaction that takes place. The most commercial social VR platforms are used to understand how psychological processes and behaviors change when interacting in a virtual environment with multiple virtual creations. In addition, the popularity of platforms that incorporate artificial intelligence into their interface shape the social interaction in positive and negative ways through avatars as social agents.

The final aspect is the impact of human-technology interaction, seen as social, on academic writing. To understand the depth of the new technologies' impact, future research should explore the transformational effects of generative AI on writing and learning skills. This exploration is important for realizing how such technologies change the modes in which knowledge is acquired and applied by learners by measuring functional literacy, authenticity in writing, and creativity. This study inspires research on the human-AI interaction in learning and academic writing hoping that AI tools can strengthen the writing process although different competence learners demonstrate different level of efficiency in engagement with the GAI-powered tool and different level of refinement of interaction strategies with the GAI-powered tools. My

insights should shed a new light on the Goffman's theory about "impression management" in which people, as they create social interaction together in various social settings, are constantly engaged.

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Мира Бекар

Социјална интеракција, употреба на јазикот и нови модалитети (Резиме)

Во прикажаниот труд ја дефинирам социјалната интеракција во контекст на учењето јазик, употребата на јазикот, академското пишување и влијанието на новите технологии за разбирање на социјалната интеракција. Преку претставување на претходните истражувања што ги истражуваат елементите на социјалната интеракција, во трудов се предложени стратегии како едукаторите и индивидуите може да ја поттикнат и насочат социјалната интеракција во новите опкружувања и контексти. Постојат различни начини и модели за социјална интеракција, како и сложени когнитивни, социокултурни и антрополошки перспективи за разбирање и интегрирање на социјалната интеракција во кој било процес на учење и употреба на вештина за преговарање, значење или развивање степен на рафинираност кон алатките за вештачка интелигенција. Претставените практични задачи, како што е учење базирано на истражување, ќе помогнат во развојот на социјалната интеракција меѓу учесниците при некој процес на учење, академско пишување и дејствување. Дадени се и идеи за идни истражувања и редефинирање на концептот на социјална интеракција на Гофман.

Клучни зборови: социјална интеракција, употреба на јазикот, интеракција човек-ВИ, пишување

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