INTERACTION ROLE IN TERMS OF LANGUAGE AWARENESS ENHANCEMENT WITHIN THE ENGLISH FOR PHD STUDENTS COURSE AT THE TODOR KABLESHKOV UNIVERSITY OF TRANSPORT

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Abstract: *The paper treats various types of interaction (communication) between students, on the one hand, and lecturer and students, on the other, within the English for PhD students course at the Todor Kableshkov University of Transport, in terms of interaction beneficial role for learners' language awareness (LA) enhancement. Interaction techniques applied in the English for general (EGP) and specific purposes (ESP) course modules belong to social language learning strategies (SLLS), which, along with remaining language learning strategies (LLS), are crucial for language material comprehension. SLLS are commented on with regard to their essence and types. Considered interaction procedures are presented within the framework of the importance of SLLS implementation in educational process, based on specialized research literature, as well as with respect to data stemming from the analysis of an author-created survey, carried out among PhD students, in the objective of exploring their assessment of several interaction techniques use aimed at the more complete grasping of taught categories at all levels of language description. Survey evaluation results are presented, commented on and, later, in conclusion, justified in the perspective of some factors, the crucial one being interaction approaches prompting cognitive LLS use, and, hence, mainly indirectly contributing to LA. Communication techniques not only positively impact LA, but also essential EGP and ESP educational process parameters, and, thus, students' communicative competence.*

1.   INTRODUCTION

The topic of learner interaction essence, features and implementation benefits in terms of various educational contexts within foreign language (FL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching has been treated on various occasions and in different perspectives. The current paper aims at presenting the applied interaction (communication) procedures during the recently carried out English for PhD students course at the Todor Kableshkov University of Transport with respect to interaction techniques characteristics, types and efficiency as to students' language awareness (LA) enhancement. The approaches, pertaining

to social language learning strategies (SLLS), are depicted on their background, and, correspondingly, through SLLS characteristics, based on previous research, and are further delineated by means of an author-created survey findings as to interaction impact on course participants' LA.

The study develops in compliance with the following layout. First, reference is made to language learning strategies (LLS) and SLLS classification, essence and traits, interaction procedures belonging to SLLS, second, SLLS educational process advantages are commented on, next, discussion proceeds with carried out survey presentation in terms of questionnaire items, learners' evaluation display in table format and most prominent results statement, and, finally, conclusion is made as to interaction role in PhD students' LA enhancement as well as concerning the factors leading to improved comprehension of taught categories and their connectedness.

2.   INTERACTION, LLS AND SLLS. CLASSIFICATIONS, TYPES AND IMPLEMENTATION BENEFITS

Taking into account the fact that the explored EGP and ESP interaction procedures belong to the SLLS, these communication approaches representing mainly various ways of asking and cooperating, there is the need to briefly delineate LLS and SLLS, in terms of definitions, essence, types and implementation benefits, based on so far performed studies, to more convincingly situate interaction within the English for PhD students course.

According to [1: 2] perspective, LLS represent "specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques" frequently deliberately applied by learners in the objective of enhancing FL competencies; LLS contribute to language information accumulation, manipulation and implementation and act as communication capacity development instruments; they function as an apparatus for intentional and autonomous FL studying (rf. [1: 2]). Although LLS may be classified into cognitive, metacognitive, memory-related, compensatory, affective and social approaches [1][1], there is frequently leakage between various types of techniques, and, they mutually intersect and cooperate. While cognitive techniques focus on material comprehension, metacognitive ones relate to learner awareness of studying process features, memory-related ones refer to memorization tools application, compensatory procedures concern rephrasing and affective ones are associated with battling apprehension, SLLS involve student collaboration in terms of taught topics [1], [2]. Although teaching of all LLS contributes to LA amelioration, which represents "conscious awareness, explicit knowledge about language in general and in particular, nature of language, reflection on language and languages" [2], more emphasis is laid on cognitive and metacognitive approaches with respect to "linguistic thinking development" [3].

To refer to another classification, SLLS, along with metacognitive and affective ones, belong to *Indirect Strategies* group, remaining approaches pertaining to *Direct Strategies* set. On the other hand, SLLS are subdivided into *Asking questions* (incl. *Asking for clarification or verification* and *Asking for correction*); *Cooperating with others* (incl. *Cooperating with peers* and *Cooperating with proficient users of the new language*) and *Empathizing with others* (incl. *Developing cultural understanding* and *Becoming aware of others' thoughts and feelings*) [4: 32][2].

The examined approaches may be additionally characterized through the views of some researchers laying emphasis [5], [6], while defining SLLS, on interaction "with others" [5: 251] and "with another learner" [6: 22]. Furthermore, these approaches are referred to as

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[1] Notwithstanding remaining LLS classifications, the paper author adheres to this view as a rather exhaustive one. Rf. to [1] and [2] for detailed LLS description and conception of approaches interconnection and relevance.
[2] Italicized terms belong to [4] and are cited from this source. Considered interaction procedures later on essentially represent the *Asking questions* and *Cooperating with others* ramifications.

"interpersonal strategies" [7] in [8: 1721][3], a fact additionally accentuating on SLLS communication essence. Likewise, studied techniques are treated as "social actions" aimed at grasping, mastering and storing language information [9] in [10: 275]. This is interaction namely, representing SLLS crucial feature, which preconditions the considered approaches implementation benefits, so far referred to in literature. Thus, for instance, SLLS application leads to increased learner self-assurance in educational process, cognitive LLS intensified implementation and higher student motivation [10], some SLLS types improve the ability to produce connected, coherent and stylistically appropriate language (rf. [4]), written assignments created in cooperation testify to enhanced grammar understanding [11] in [12], flipped classroom[4] student cooperation promotes intensified and independent studying, contributes to creativity, better learner engagement and motivation (rf. to authors in [13]).

3. INTERACTION PROCEDURES SURVEY PRESENTATION AND STUDENT ASSESSMENT OF IMPLEMENTED APPROACHES

As already mentioned, carried out survey is intended to evaluate the impact of the implemented essential interaction approaches, pertaining to the above presented SLLS, during the 2023/2024 English for PhD students course, on students' LA improvement. It needs to be highlighted that the course curriculum, directed not only at EGP, but also at ESP teaching, was specifically designed to stimulate LA [14], this fact logically preconditioning communication procedures use higher efficiency towards this objective attainment. Course participants were asked to assess the extent to which the communication techniques applied had influenced comprehension of taught material in its entirety, on the one hand, individual categories features at various levels of language description, on the other, along with the examined categories interconnections in terms of form, values and use.

Below is displayed a list of surveyed course interaction procedures, encompassing not only student/student, but also student/lecturer communication types:

❖ PhD students' communication in group work: asking questions, while translating and summarizing, as to values and translation equivalents, with respect to general lexis, terminology, grammar, etc.;

❖ PhD students' communication in group work: asking questions aimed at error correction, while translating and summarizing;

❖ PhD students' communication in group work: cooperation in key words discerning, ideas sharing, work load distributing, concise message transmission, while translating and summarizing;

❖ PhD students' communication in group work: cooperation in essential information specifying and its adequate transmission, while summarizing;

❖ Lecturer/PhD students' communication: lecturer-asked questions as to vocabulary, grammar, cognate words, Active ↔ Passive transformations, contextual markers, leading to specific categories use, etc., in terms of specialized texts analysis aimed at more adequate translation production;

❖ Lecturer/PhD students' communication: lecturer-asked questions as to vocabulary, grammar, cognate words, Active ↔ Passive transformations, contextual markers, leading to specific categories use, etc., in terms of EGP materials analysis;

❖ Lecturer/PhD students' communication: cooperating through regular lecturer-sent mails as to taught matters, tasks to complete, study materials attachments, links, etc.;

❖ Lecturer/PhD students' (and/or students' only) communication: conducting introductory topics discussions through asking questions and cooperating;

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[3] They relate to communicating and collaborating with mother-tongues speakers, among other sub-strategies.
[4] The flipped classroom represents a teaching approach involving abundant learner interaction and cooperation as a result of student preparation for taught matters presentation (rf. to authors cited in [13] as to details).

❖   Lecturer/PhD students' (and/or students' only) communication: asking questions and elucidation related to shared by students faced hardships while revising;

❖   Lecturer/PhD students' (or students' only) other types of communication.

Survey findings are displayed in Table 1, presenting respondents' assessment as to interaction impact on their LA, and then, in Table 2, generalizing positive evaluation.

Table 1

Interaction approaches applied[5]	Poor impact degree in %	Satisfactory impact degree in %	Good impact degree in %	Very good or excellent impact degree in %
1.Group work communication – asking questions, while translating and summarizing, as to values and equivalents	-	10%	10%	80%
2.Group work communication – asking questions, while translating and summarizing, as to error correction	-	10%	20%	70%
3.Group work communication - cooperation as to key words, ideas, etc., while translating and summarizing	-	10%	20%	70%
4. Group work communication - cooperation as to relevant information and its transmission, while summarizing	-	-	20%	80%
5.Lecturer/students' communication – lecturer's questions as to language categories and contextual markers within specialized materials analysis aimed at better translation	-	-	-	100%
6.Lecturer/students' communication – lecturer's questions as to language categories and contextual markers within EGP materials analysis	-	-	10%	90%
7.Lecturer/students' communication – cooperation through lecturer-sent mails as to taught matters, tasks, attachments, links, etc.	-	-	-	100%
8.Lecturer/students' communication (and/or students' only) – asking questions and cooperating in conducting introductory topics discussions	-	-	--	100%
9.Lecturer/students' communication (and/or students' only) – asking questions and elucidation as to hardships faced by students, while revising	-	-	10%	90%
10.Lecturer/students' (or students' only) other types of communication	-	-		100%
MEAN	-	3%	9%	88%

Table 2

All interaction approaches applied	Poor impact degree in %	Satisfactory impact degree in %	Good, very good or excellent impact degree in %
MEAN	-	3%	97%

Conducted survey results testify to the implemented interaction approaches efficiency in terms of PhD course participants' LA enhancement, overall number of procedures having contributed to students' improvement of taught material comprehension, as a whole, to upgrading their awareness of individual categories essence, and to consciousness of examined language items interdependence. Thus, to refer to a few instances, student communication with respect to asking questions related to values and translation equivalents of categories at all levels of language description, while translating and summarizing (Table 1, item 1), turns

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[5] Table 1 surveyed items are concisely presented based on the above interaction approaches depiction.

out to be assessed by 80% of respondents as beneficial to taught items awareness improvement; likewise, cooperation in terms of specifying essential information and adequately transmitting it in summary-production process (Table 1, item 4) is considered by 80% of surveyees as fruitful to comprehension. Lecturer/students communication, containing various types of queries and collaboration, is also treated as helpful concerning examined language matters better grasping, having been estimated as 100% successful in terms of values, cognates, contextual markers and transformations, among others, in specialized texts analysis (Table1, item 5), and, as 90% efficient in EGP materials examination (Table 1, item 6). To generalize research results, the applied interaction approaches fruitfulness in LA improvement is measured as satisfactory by 3%, good by 9% and very good or excellent by 88% of respondents (Table 1, mean), none of participants having appraised implemented procedures as poorly impacting taught matters comprehension. To further summarize (Table 2, mean), overall spectrum of interaction techniques is estimated as having influenced LA to a good, very good or excellent degree by 97% of interviewed students.

4. CONCLUSION

The paper displays a set of interaction approaches, pertaining to SLLS, and implemented during a PhD students' course in EGP and ESP. The study reveals, based on the findings of a survey designed, conducted and analyzed by the author, the relevance of communication techniques use with respect to trainees' LA enhancement. These strategies efficiency, in terms of all language levels taught categories comprehension, their interdependence awareness and conscious implementation by students, derives, in author's view, from:

❖ interaction procedures affiliation to SLLS, belonging to the whole spectrum of LLS, all of them intersecting, cooperating and specifically contributing to LA;

❖ already mentioned SLLS implementation benefits, among which, improved learner achievement, motivation, autonomy, cognitive LLS use, all these advancing LA;

❖ course teaching process laying specific emphasis on cognitive approaches use and, thus, preconditioning, due to better understanding, the explored interaction techniques efficient functioning;

❖ adequately designed and carried out interaction, through query and cooperation, not only between students themselves, but also in lecturer/student communication, for the purpose of triggering, stimulating and corroborating language information searching, manipulating, retrieving, storing and hence, its perfecting. This way, communication approaches, when deliberately applied, prove to prompt and intensify cognitive LLS use, cognitive approaches focusing to the greatest extent on language information gathering and processing, and, thus, being essentially responsible for LA building and upgrading. Implemented interaction strategies, consequently, influence positively LA, though predominantly indirectly, by means of encouraging cognitive approaches application.

It can be asserted that interaction approaches implementation within the English for PhD students course is beneficial not only concerning LA, but also other EGP and ESP teaching process parameters, due to their previously revealed in literature relatedness to LA; this way, interaction contributes to communicative competence as well.

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РОЛЯТА НА ИНТЕРАКЦИЯТА ЗА ПОВИШАВАНЕ НА ЕЗИКОВАТА ОСЪЗНАТОСТ В РАМКИТЕ НА КУРСА ПО АНГЛИЙСКИ ЕЗИК ЗА ДОКТОРАНТИ ВЪВ ВТУ „ТОДОР КАБЛЕШКОВ"

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Ключови думи: *интеракция при преподаването на АОЦ и АСЦ, езикова осъзнатост, социални стратегии за чуждоезиково изучаване, стратегии за чуждоезиково изучаване, курс по английски език за докторанти*

Резюме: *Докладът разглежда разнообразните видове интеракция (взаимодействие, комуникация) между докторантите, както и между преподавателя и обучаемите, в рамките на курса по английски език за докторанти във ВТУ „Тодор Каблешков", с цел разкриване на положителната роля на взаимодействията при повишаването на езиковата осъзнатост (ЕО) на обучаемите. Прилаганите интерактивни подходи в процеса на работа по модулите на курса, включващ английски за общи цели (АОЦ) и английски за специални цели (АСЦ), са част от социалните стратегии за чуждоезиково изучаване (ССЧИ), които, наред с останалите стратегии за чуждоезиково изучаване (СЧИ), играят решаваща роля при осъзнаването на езиковия материал. Представени са същността на ССЧИ и видовете, на които те се поделят. Подходите на взаимодействие са третирани от гледище на ползите от прилагането на ССЧИ в процеса на преподаване, въз основа на информация от специализирани източници, както и в перспективата на данни, произтичащи от анализа на разработено от автора изследване и проведено сред докторанти. Изследването цели проучване на оценката на обучаемите на приложените интерактивни подходи, насочени към по-пълноценното осъзнаване на преподаваните категории от всички езикови равнища. Резултатите от проучването са представени, коментирани и, по-нататък в заключението, мотивирани в рамките на няколко фактора, ключовият сред които е употребата на когнитивните СЧИ, провокирана от тази на прийомите на взаимодействие; така, интерактивните подходи индиректно допринасят към ЕО. Комуникативните техники не само влияят положително на ЕО, но и на основните параметри на учебния процес по АОЦ и АСЦ и, следователно, на комуникативната компетентност на обучаемите.*