

Weaving Language and Learning in Negotiating for Meaning

REGINA VIA G. GARCIA

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8948-4985>

reginavia.garcia@cvsc.edu.ph

Compostela Valley State College

Compostela Valley Province, Philippines

Originality: 100% • Grammar Check: 95% • Plagiarism: 0%



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

ABSTRACT

Achieving understanding of interlocutors in an English classroom is essential in successful communication, learning, and second language acquisition. Through these interactions, interlocutors can negotiate meaning by changing the linguistic form, conversational structure, and message content, or all three. This qualitative content analysis research focuses on the interactions produced between teacher and student or between the students themselves with the use of Michael Long's Negotiation for Meaning (NfM). The research, conducted in Compostela Valley State College Main Campus, involved five (5) sections of first-year college students enrolled in General Education 2 - Purposive Communication along with their respective instructors. Interactions throughout the class were recorded and then transcribed for further analysis. According to the findings, three (3) signals from NfM are primarily utilized to achieve meaning; comprehension check, clarification request, and confirmation check. These signals functioned in the interaction through eliciting understanding, correcting, probing, recalling, and clarifying. The most used signal was a clarification request, and the most used function of these signals is understanding. The findings suggest that the negotiation in the interaction mostly required previous utterances to be clarified and that the main goal of negotiation is to achieve comprehension of the meaning being negotiated.

Keywords — Social Science, negotiation for meaning, linguistics, classroom interaction, qualitative content analysis; Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Communication is an essential tool for a functioning society, even more so in a classroom. It is within these four walls where students are cultivated and nurtured to freely express their ideas, learnings, and sentiments through words. However, struggles in communication are evident in today's educational institutions, specifically in English classrooms, where one of the greatest challenges is to have students express their thoughts in a comprehensible manner. According to Zhiping and Paramasivam (2013), students suffer from anxiety in relation to communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. Students become fearful of committing mistakes as they communicate with their teachers and peers through English. Making errors using the target language has become an embarrassing situation in some cultures, such as Indonesia, China, and other oriental countries (Budianto, 2010). Thus, during an English class, they resort to using their mother tongue, disregarding the use of the target language in order to practice effective communication.

As reflected in Okada's (2015) study, Japanese international students studying in the United States of America experienced language anxiety. The students felt anxious during provoking situations involving tasks related to processing and output. A Japanese native learning English as a second language had experience anxiety during the learning process (Matsumoto, 1989). For the students to make the most of their study, it is important to reduce the fear of negative evaluation. Furthermore, as the years of learning the English language progressed, the anxiety experienced by students increased. According to Eladi (2016), students studying English Language and Literature at Cumhuriyet University in Turkey experienced a moderate level of anxiety, and it was later observed their language anxiety levels did not decrease.

In the Philippines, English teaching and learning have been successful; however, it is facing new challenges (Wa-Mbaleka, 2014). If not properly handled, the negative effect will have visible repercussions. Thus, awareness of the English language as an international language throughout the world is vital. In college, the use of English is given importance since it is considered as the universal language which most societies use to communicate. Consequently, teachers are left in a quandary as to how to effectively teach students to communicate properly

through English to produce understandable sentences. It has been suggested by Farangis (2013) that classroom activities should mimic real-life use of the language. Added to that, teachers should create opportunities for students, which can, in turn, promote individual learning opportunities. The practice is the best way to learn (Norton, 2013). For students to communicate through the use of the English language, practice and opportunities should be present.

To promote the students' language learning, a better understanding of the interaction process is essential. Language learning does not arise through interaction but in interaction. Long's (1981) negotiation for meaning focuses on interaction as a method that can be applied in a natural classroom setting. Interaction provides students ample opportunities to achieve an understanding of the input as well as encouraging the production of output. Negotiation was a method of promoting comprehension. Negotiation can also present opportunities for modification of output and feedback focused on form (Wei, 2012). Thus, exploring conversations and communication processes in an English classroom can improve a students' speaking ability through the practice of negotiation for meaning.

As a teacher, the researcher wants not only to teach my students how to use the English language properly but also to ease, even as far as remove, their fear when it comes to speaking in English. During her class in Speech and Oral Communication, she asked her students, "how are you?" and the class has five to eight students eager to answer the question. However, when she informs them to speak in English since she is handling an English class, the students' eager faces soon disappeared, and they slowly lower their hands. The researchers often get a comment "Bisaya lang, Ma'am, dili mi ka kaya, ulaw Ma'am" (Can we speak in *Bisaya*, Ma'am? We can't do it. We don't want to be embarrassed, Ma'am). A simple and basic question that can easily be answered in English proves to be a struggle for some of her students.

An English classroom should be a space for students to freely express themselves because they feel it is necessary rather than it is a task which they are assigned to do. It should be a place where their inhibitions in using the English language are minimal, and self-expression is a priority. Thus, analyzing and utilizing strategies to help my students express their thoughts using the English language is essential for my practice as my students' teacher and motivator.

FRAMEWORK

This study was viewed through the lens of Long's (1980) Interaction Hypothesis, also known as Negotiation for Meaning (NfM), which holds the belief that interactional conversation produces conversational and linguistic modifications in a discourse which, in turn, facilitates acquisition which provides input essential to the students. As Farangis (2013) explained, the interactional conversation is a method of negotiation which involves communication through an exchange of two or more people.

Long (1981) said that comprehensible input is important for language learning, and the effectiveness is increased when students or NNS enter negotiation for meaning. Negotiation for meaning is further defined as the process in which NNS and competent speakers or NS provide and interpret signals of comprehension. In Long's study, the interaction between NS and NNS, as well as NNS and NNS, avoid and repair lapses in their conversation by making changes through either the linguistic form, conversational structure, and message content, or all three. For NfM, Hatch (1978) believes that students and interlocutors modify and reconstruct their interaction to reach an understanding. Thus, students can understand words and grammatical structures beyond their level of competence.

In addition, Pica (1996) discussed that interlocutors negotiate by anticipating possible problems in communication such as performing clarification questions and checking each other's comprehension, identifying communication problems for each other, and repairing the problems by using signals and reformulations. When an NNS or NS struggles during a conversation, there are signals that assist them during their negotiation for meaning. According to Pica (1985), there are several signals, such as confirmation checks, clarification requests, comprehension checks, self-repetitions, and other-repetitions.

The above lenses were believed to be significant support and guide in this study since the main objective was to know how NfM was utilized by the teachers and students. It was Ellis and Barkhuize (2005) who stated that joint effort is crucial when speakers try to solve misunderstandings for successful communication to occur and that the participants are focused on resolving a communication problem as opposed to the free flow of conversation during an exchange of information. Hence, Ellis' (1998) concept about meaning was proper to be negotiated, not just transferred from one person to another.

Overall, this added to the belief that interaction is important in order to

learn and communicate using the English language. Thus, human interaction is when two or more people engage in reciprocal action. This action may be verbal or nonverbal. Therefore, for the purpose of teaching a language, teachers mainly focus on verbal interaction or communicative interaction (Cummins, 1994).

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to understand different methods in negotiation for meaning in Compostela Valley State College Main Campus' Purposive Communication classes.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the questions (1) to determine the linguistic signals used in negotiating for meaning in an English language classroom; and (2) to identify linguistic signals function in the negotiation for meaning in an English language classroom.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design used in this study was the qualitative content analysis method. This was used to determine how teachers and students used signals to cope with the breakdown in communication in order to achieve an understanding. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), qualitative content analysis is a research method practice through subjectively interpreting the content through a systematic classification process. It focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text. It is a data analysis technique within a rule guided research process, and the research process is bound to common research standards (Mayring, 2014). Qualitative content analysis allows researchers to understand social reality in a subjective yet, specific manner and explore the meanings underlying physical messages.

The greatest advantage of qualitative content analysis is that it is a hands-on approach to research (Forman & Damschroder, 2007). It looks at communication directly; thus, it focuses on the central characteristic of social interaction. Qualitative content analysis was anchored on the signals presented by Long (1980). Through this, the researcher was able to categorize the signals used during the negotiation for meaning by both the students and teachers.

Participants

This study was conducted in a class of first-year students attending Compostela Valley State College – Main Campus and was enrolled in the subject of Purposive Communication. Specifically, the focus was on four (4) sections only. The participants' interaction through the use of the English language was observed. They were suitable participants of this study, as most of them are K-12 program graduates. This assessed their learnings as well as the effectiveness of the K-12 program.

In addition, three (3) English teachers under CVSC's College of Teacher Education who teach Purposive Communication in the respective sections were also participants and part of the class observation and voice recording. They fit participants of this study since they were at the frontlines of teaching students using the English language.

For the inclusion criteria of student participants, first, they must have graduated from their secondary education or the alternative learning system currently attending Compostela Valley State College Main Campus since the focus of the study was first-year college students of the said institution. Second, they must be enrolled in Purposive Communication, as this is a general education class that uses English as the main language for communication and interaction. Lastly, the first language must be Bisaya or Tagalog.

Instrumentation

Before proceeding with the study, a letter asking for permission to conduct the study was written to the College President, a letter asking for permission to gather data regarding the sections and teachers of Purposive Communication was written to the College Program Head, and a consent form was secured from the participants and teachers.

After obtaining the necessary documents, the study was introduced to the participants. The study was conducted for one (1) month, for the first two weeks, the researcher joined the class and observed the natural interaction between students and teachers. The schedule for class observation was two (2) meetings per section at one hour and thirty minutes each week for classes conducted twice a week and three (3) meetings per section at one hour each week for classes conducted a week thrice a week. Details and information from the observation were recorded in the observation log. Simultaneously, during the class observation, a voice recorder was also present to record the interactions in class.

The main method of data collection was classroom observation since it is the most effective method of capturing the interaction between teachers and students.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher employed the strategies essential in qualitative research. Qualitative researchers must consider that dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability as trustworthiness criteria to ensure the precision of qualitative findings. Furthermore, the goal of trustworthiness is to support the argument that the findings are worth paying attention to.

Dependability refers to the issue of reliability. It employs methods that present the idea that the work is repeated, in the same context, with the same methods, with the same participants, similar results would be obtained (Shenton, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) gives emphasis to the notion that dependability relates to the study's credibility and demonstration of the former ensures the latter. Thus, credibility can be secured through overlapping methods such as the focus group and individual interview. To address it directly, the study should be done meticulously to enable future researchers to repeat the work but not necessarily gain the same results; hence, an audit trail must be implemented. In this study, an audit trail was utilized to establish dependability. Furthermore, the data was analyzed and approved for validity. The researcher describes the research steps taken from the beginning of the study to the development and reporting of the results (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Credibility is one of the key criteria which seeks to ensure that the study measures or tests are what is actually intended for. This deals with the questions "how congruent are the findings with reality?" (Merriam, 1998). To establish the precision of the research, the researcher can apply methods establishing credibility through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, and member check (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In this study, the data was validated. It solidifies the data since an expert verified the data.

Transferability is concerned with the study's ability to be applied to different situations (Merriam, 1998). The results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts with other respondents. A researcher can implement transferability through the thick description and purposeful sampling. The thick description refers to describing not just the behavior and experiences, but the context as well, in order for a holistic understanding by an outsider (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Purposeful sampling is where the researcher provides a detailed description of the study, and participants are selected based on the criteria grounded on the research question. In addition, according to Schutt (2018), it will assist the researcher to focus on the participants who are particularly exposed to the issues being studied. In this study, purposeful sampling will be implemented. The participants of the study were students taking up Purposive Communication, which involves the use

of the English language in communication. The teachers selected as participants were English subject teachers who were also using English as a medium of teaching.

Confirmability refers to making sure the steps taken to conduct the study is to help ensure that the findings are the authentic results of the experiences and ideas of the participants, rather than the preferences of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). This can be established by validating the data which the researcher has done. It aided to prove that the study's results accurately portray the participants' responses.

According to Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden (2001), the challenges that come along with qualitative research can be alleviated by having an awareness and use of establishing ethical principles, namely autonomy, beneficence, and justice.

This can be established through informed consent, which means participants exercise their rights as autonomous persons to voluntarily accept or decline to participate in the study (Orb et al. 2000). In this study, consent will be acquired from the student participants and teacher participants. The participants will also have the option to withdraw from participating in the study without any repercussions.

Beneficence refers to doing good for others and preventing harm, which means researchers have the moral obligation to oversee the potential consequences of revealing participants' identities (Orb et al. 2000). Hence, using a pseudonym is highly recommended. In addition, participants should be made aware of how the results will be published. A method to practice beneficence is an audit trail for the benefit of other researchers as well (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). In this study, participants will be informed of the details of the study. Furthermore, they will be given pseudonyms.

Justice refers to equal share and fairness. It is the duty of the researcher to recognize the vulnerability of the participants and their contributions to the study (Orb et al. 2000). In this study, participants will be given credit for their involvement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study investigated the turn-taking produced between English instructors and their students or between students engaged in activities within the classroom environment in order to determine what signals in negotiation for meaning were used and how these signals facilitated negotiation for meaning.

Qualitative content analysis was used in this approach anchored by Michael Long's Negotiation for Meaning theory. The research questions of this study were aimed towards enumerating the linguistic signals used in negotiating for meaning in an English language classroom as well as understanding how these linguistic signals facilitated the negotiation for meaning in an English language classroom.

In this study, the linguistic signals used in negotiation for meaning in an English language classroom were clarification requests, confirmation checks, and comprehension check. These signals facilitate negotiation for meaning by allowing native speaker and non-native speakers to inquire and assess statements in interactions whether or not they understand it or now. One of the conversational processes that facilitate SLA is a negotiation for meaning since it lets the students work to understand the expressed meaning in the L2. As stated by Long (1996):

I would like to suggest 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.

Therefore, if the interaction contains forms and structures which are beyond the NNS's current level of competence, then SLA is facilitated.

The signals used in repairing a communication breakdown during an interaction between the teacher and student or student and student in a classroom were clarification requests, confirmation check, and comprehension check. The most used signal is comprehension check, followed by clarification request then, confirmation check. Since the teacher is motivated for the students to learn during the class discussion, the teacher often verifies if the students understood the topic through comprehension check. These signals facilitated five functions, namely probing, clarifying, understanding, correcting, and recalling.

CONCLUSIONS

With the given results, the researcher concluded that Negotiation for Meaning facilitates SLA by the teachers' or students' need to modify utterances where the interactions used signals. Thus, this encourages the teacher and students to use signals as well to facilitate interaction toward achieving meaning, and the interaction process of negotiation is a way for learners to gain access to the language being learned.

SLA is facilitated through negotiation for meaning because speakers negotiated solutions to communication failures. Thus, the signals used negotiated incomprehensible input to become comprehensible, which then facilitates SLA. In this study, the five functions that are facilitated by the signals in Negotiation for Meaning are probing, clarifying, understanding, correcting, and reminding.

Having gone through the K-12 program, some students still struggle to use the English language in the classroom.

LITERATURE CITED

- Budianto, L. (2010). Students' psychological Factors In Sla: A Dillema For Teachers Of English. *LiNGUA: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa dan Sastra*, 5(1). Retrieved from <http://ejournal.uin-malang.ac.id/index.php/humbud/article/view/614>
- Eladi, S. (2016). Foreign language anxiety of students studying English language and literature: A sample from Turkey. *Academic Journals*, 11 (2), 219–228. Retrieved from DOI: 10.5897/ERR2015.2507
- Ellis, R. (1998). *Second Language Acquisitor Research-What's in it for Teachers?.* IATEFL. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/37ezpCK>
- Farangis, S. (2013). The effect of negotiation on second language acquisition. *Education Journal*, 2(6), 236-241. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/318kGME>
- Forman, J., & Damschroder, L. (2007). Qualitative content analysis. In *Empirical methods for bioethics: A primer*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited. Retrieved from [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1479-3709\(07\)11003-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1479-3709(07)11003-7)
- Hatch, E. M. (1978). *Second language acquisition: A book of readings*. Newbury House Pub. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2SZH2vy>
- Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative health research*, 15(9), 1277-1288. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1988). *Criteria for Assessing Naturalistic Inquiries as Reports*. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED297007>

- Long, M. H. (1981). Input, interaction, and second-language acquisition. *Annals of the New York academy of sciences*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-6632.1981.tb42014.x>
- Long, M. (1996). The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. *Handbook of second language acquisition*. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3j2Oel3>
- Matsumoto, K. (1989). An analysis of a Japanese ESL learner's diary: Factors involved in the L2 learning process. *JALT Journal*, 11(2), 167-192. Retrieved from <https://jalt-publications.org/files/pdf-article/jj-11.2-art2.pdf>
- Mayring, P. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: theoretical foundation, basic procedures and software solution. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/347qZIL>
- Wa-Mbaleka, S. (2014). Teaching English to speakers of other languages: The case of the Philippines. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 3(3), 64-78. Retrieved from DOI: 10.6007/IJARPED/v3-i3/952
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education. Revised and Expanded from "Case Study Research in Education."*. Jossey-Bass Publishers, 350 Sansome St, San Francisco, CA 94104. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED415771>
- Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation*. Multilingual matters. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3nXMJrS>
- Orb, A., Eisenhauer, L., & Wynaden, D. (2001). Ethics in qualitative research. *Journal of nursing scholarship*, 33(1), 93-96. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1547-5069.2001.00093.x>
- Zhiping, D., & Paramasivam, S. (2013). Anxiety of speaking English in class among international students in a Malaysian university. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 1(11), 1-16. Retrieved from <http://www.ijern.com/journal/November-2013/17.pdf>

- Pica, T. (1985). Input and interaction in the communicative language classroom: A comparison of teacher-fronted and group activities. *Input in second language acquisition, 1985*. Retrieved from <https://ci.nii.ac.jp/naid/10018106500/>
- Pica, T. (1996). The essential role of negotiation in the communicative classroom. *Jalt Journal, 18*(2), 241-268. Retrieved from https://jalt-publications.org/files/pdf/jalt_journal/jj-18.2.pdf#page=67
- Schutt, R. K. (2018). *Investigating the social world: The process and practice of research*. Sage publications. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3dugv2P>
- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for information, 22*(2), 63-75. Retrieved from <https://content.iospress.com/articles/education-for-information/efi00778>
- Streubert, H. J., & Carpenter, D. R. (1999). Qualitative research in nursing: Advancing the humanistic imperative. Retrieved from <https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/handle/10822/919136>
- Wei, X. (2012). An introduction to conversational interaction and second language acquisition. *English Linguistic Research, 1*(1), 111-117. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2T5tRjB>