TECHNIQUES THAT FACILITATE THE ACQUISITION OF ORAL INTERACTION IN FRENCH LANGUAGE CLASSES

ТЕХНІКИ, ЯКІ СПРИЯЮТЬ НАБУТТЮ НАВИЧОК УСНОЇ ВЗАЄМОДІЇ НА ЗАНЯТТЯХ ФРАНЦУЗЬКОЇ МОВИ

Chuhai A.O.,
Assistant Professor at the Department of Foreign Languages at the Faculty of Mathematics
Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv

Kostiuk M.M.,
Candidate of Philological Sciences,
Associate Professor at the Department of Romance Philology
Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv

As well as oral comprehension, written comprehension and written expression, oral interaction is considered to be very beneficial and important in the learning of languages in general – French will be used here to illustrate. In terms of success in language learning, oral interaction is simply a matter of conversing directly with another, expressing one's own opinion, point of view and exchange of information. In this study some benefits of distance interaction have been outlined such as using with lightning speed Internet-based resources for preparation, technical support (slide presentations, discussion boards), psychological aspects (less stress, better concentration) and networking opportunities. Still, such challenging skills as community building, direct access to a «live» teacher for inspiration and feedback and "live" activities should not be ignored. Therefore, it is paramount for teachers to know some techniques in order to improve an aspect of oral communication in language classes. Some activities that really «work» are proposed. While analyzing an oral interaction during the French classes, we took into consideration three aspects. Firstly, general linguistic skills. Speech acts and functions stayed central in the oral interaction. Presence of questions or requests can be taken as a strong indicator of interactivity in oral interactions which assume the presence of an interlocutor. Questions in their various manifestations are considered to be a fundamental part of oral interaction. Requests for clarification or explanation are also indicators of oral interaction. Questions can help to clarify some semantic or linguistic issues. The presence of discourse markers was also taken into account in the analysis. Secondly, some qualitative aspects, such as range, accuracy, fluency, interaction, coherence. Finally, communicative language competences. Students could manage very short, isolated utterances, with much pausing to search for expressions, to articulate fewer familiar words, and to correct communication. The influence of oral interaction for the learning of the language in general is analyzed. Oral interaction is an integral part of foreign language competencies and could easily be practiced during online distance learning.
Key words: *interaction, communication, face-to-face, at a distance, oral expression, foreign language, French.*

Окрім говоріння, письма та аудіювання, усна мовленнєва взаємодія є важливою під час вивчення іноземної мови. Вона передбачає спілкування з іншими людьми, висловлення власної думки, точки зору та обмін інформацією. Метою нашого дослідження було визначення та аналіз нових технік, які сприяють набуттю навичок усної взаємодії на заняттях французької мови. У статті визначено деякі переваги набуття навичок усної взаємодії під час дистанційного навчання, такі як, наприклад, технічна підтримка (можливість показати презентацію, надати можливість студентам спілкуватися у міні-групах) та психологічні аспекти (менше стресу, більше концентрації). Однак, це не применшує важливості проведення занять в режимі офлайн, де є можливість проводити безліч активностей та вправ. У статті запропоновані деякі техніки для покращення навичок усної мовленнєвої взаємодії між студентами на заняттях французької мови. Наприклад, обговорення в невеликих групах або у парах, дебати, презентації, рольові ігри, обговорення, короткі виступи, диктанти, тощо. Перераховані програми, які можуть бути дієвими та стимулювати говоріння студентів, наприклад нuagesdemots, flipgrid, kahoot та інші. Запропоновано конкретні проекти, які можна реалізувати зі студентами як під час занять в режимі офлайн, так і під час онлайн-навчання. Вибір автентичних матеріалів є важливим під час роботи над проектами, оскільки вони є оптимальним засобом розуміння культури іншої країни. Наш аналіз показав, що для покращення навичок усної мовленнєвої взаємодії слід враховувати три аспекти. По-перше, загальні мовленнєві вміння та навички. Уміння влучно поставити запитання є важливим для подальшої успішної комунікації. Уточнюючі запитання ілюструють зацікавленість мовця та передбачають продовження спілкування. Крім того, дискурсивні маркери є тими мовними інструментами, які структурують висловлювання. Другий аспект – якісні комунікативні ознаки: логічність, точність, змістовність, тощо. Студенти мають використовувати прості граматичні структури, які є для них зрозумілими. Логічність висловлювання робить мовлення впорядкованим та структурованим. Третій аспект – комунікативна компетентність. Комунікативна компетентність формується зокрема в умовах безпосередньої взаємодії, тому спілкування наживо сприятиме цьому.
Ключові слова: *взаємодія, комунікація, контакт, онлайн, офлайн, іноземна мова, французька мова.*

Introduction

Studying a foreign language at distance is a challenging process both for students and teachers. Nevertheless, learning at distance has to give the same results and show students' achievements as learning in classes. As well as oral comprehension, written comprehension and written expression, oral interaction is considered to be essential in the learning of one's first language and subsequent languages. Oral interaction holds a special place in a distance education context. A complex analysis of different aspects of oral interaction in distance learning should be carried out.

There are several definitions of the notion, «interaction». For instance, the Cambridge Dictionary defines interaction as an occasion or situation when

two or more people communicate with or react to each other [2]. The Collins Dictionary and Larousse Dictionary have a more precise definition: a mutual or reciprocal action or influence [4, 8]. So, interaction is an important communication, action or influence. In studying a foreign language it's vitally important to make this influence or action successful and beneficial for learners.

Let us recall here an aspect of interaction that appears in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: *in the interaction, at least two actors participate in an oral and / or written exchange and alternate the moments of production and reception which may even overlap in oral exchanges* [5]. We should observe the factors that can influence the communication and interaction among students.

It's very possible to define an interaction via distance in the same way, while keeping in mind some specific peculiarities: an electronic device instead of a real person, Internet speed, technical skills and other abilities and knowledge needed to perform specific tasks in distance.

Thereupon, interaction is an important communication action or influence. In learning languages it's vitally important to make this influence or action interesting for students. In the interaction, students participate in an oral exchange and alternate the moments of speaking and listening.

Background

As is known, interaction between people uses the cognitive mechanisms and facilitates learning. The central role of interaction as a language activity in the acquisition of a foreign language, and in particular of oral interaction has been pointed out in a great number of studies. For instance, according to Michael H. Long, the language acquisition is achieved through interaction and some communication strategies when the speaker asks another speaker to paraphrase, repeat or clarify something. Later on, other scientists Pica, Kanagy and Falodun defined four types of communication: exchange of information, exchange of opinion, making decision and resolution of problem. Certainly, speakers play the crucial role in all types of communication [11].

The notion of *oral interaction* has been thoroughly analyzed in the works of R. Negretti and J. Pellettieri. Negretti has based her analysis on the usage of Webchat software in a group setting and defined some aspects of oral interaction: overall structure of interaction and sequence organization, turn-taking organization (especially openings and closings), turn design, expression of paralinguistic features and some pragmatic variables [11]. Pellettieri has focused on the issue of grammatical competence in a study of chatting as a tool for the negotiation of meaning [10]. These scientists have proven an important role for chatting in the development of different linguistic competences.

Most scholars have concluded that new technologies help with practicing speaking in real time and between students not only of the same group but with students of other groups or even countries. Besides, there are different ways to create the communication online: by means of video conferencing, audio chat and audio without chat. Different analysis showed a dominant role of the pragmatic aspect of oral interaction online.

Studies that have opposed face-to-face interaction compared to distance interaction showed some benefits and disadvantages of both variants. For example, the analysis of American Richard Kern showed higher level of exchanges at distance than in face-to-face communication with teacher [6]. His analyses showed that during distance classes students used simpler and shorter sentences that facilitated communication and gave more time for everybody to speak. Nevertheless, Mark Warschauer showed an opposite result indicating that students used more formal language in electronic discussion [12]. Both outlined the importance of non-verbal communication: gestures, facial expressions, body movements, sounds and so on.

Thus, oral interaction in the real world is a multidimensional activity that includes a number of different aspects while oral interaction in distance is based firstly around technical aspects.

Methods

In our work we used *netnography* as a basic approach, an online research method that is understanding social interaction in contemporary digital communications contexts. Netnography is a specific set of research practices related to data collection, analysis, research ethics, and representation, rooted in participant observation. It is an interpretive research method that adapts the traditional, in-person participant observation techniques of anthropology to the study of interactions and experiences manifesting through digital communications [7]. We used conversations of students during French classes at distance as the main data.

We've used diverse aspects of netnographic research: *research focus* (our research was focused on data provided by groups of students that have been working online); *communication focus* (textual communication and some multimedia communication such as video, audio, pictures); *research method* (observational data); *data collection* (possibility to download communication data). Netnography is a naturalistic, immersive and adaptable method that let us to make a good analysis.

In our paper we defined the research field – oral interaction during online classes. We had to retrieve data from student's communication and data from personal observation. We analyzed data with several manual methods. Certainly, we paid attention to the research ethics in order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

During two months we have analyzed the effectiveness of oral interaction in two groups of four and eight students. All these students had an A1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

The learning has occurred with the help of a Zoom program and other online tools that encourages students to participate in oral interaction: «Share Screen» (teacher's screen, student's screen and a virtual whiteboard), «Breakout Rooms» (division of the main virtual room into smaller virtual rooms), «Polling» (multiple choice polls) and «Nonverbal Feedback» (allow students to express opinions by clicking on icons).

We worked with two topics: «My appearance» and «The place I live». After a number of oral activities students had to present two projects in groups.

We collected data for two months, providing a lot of communication results. We observed not only linguistic changes and peculiarities but also behavior and social acts of groups of students. Before our experiment we asked students for permission to film them during the lessons. The process of analysis has been divided into 6 levels: *Introspection phase* (the analysis of theoretical works on oral interaction as an aspect of learning a foreign language in general); *Investigation phase* (the choice of a topic for the analysis and main methods); *Informational phase* (we reminded students that they approved our recording our classes); *Interview phase* (we made a list of different online programs and activities that could improve the oral competencies); *Interaction phase* (the process of working with students); *Interpretation phase* (the analysis of data) and *Integration phase* (making the results and outlining some useful recommendations).

Results

Working on oral interaction in a distance class should certainly start with a scrupulous selection of programs and activities. Besides the program, Zoom and its online tools, we actively used such programs as: https://www.nuagesdemots.fr/ (in order to create word clouds); https://davebirss.com/storydice-creative-story-ideas/ (the classic story ideas generator); https://info.flipgrid.com/ (a simple, free, and accessible video discussion app); https://uk.padlet.com/ (a place where you can create a single or multiple walls) https://wordwall.net/ (a great number of quizzes, match ups, word games, etc.) and others.

The first month of learning was devoted to the topic *«My appearance» («Mon apparence»)*. After a number of speaking activities and exercises with the programs indicated earlier students could present the PROJET #1.

Students had to imagine their "tribe" with a particular style of clothes. Firstly, they formed small groups and chose the name of their "tribe". Together they made a list of clothes, shoes and accessories that the members of tribe would wear. After that, students wrote small texts of presentation of their tribe. After that they presented orally their projects. During the preparation time, students asked a lot of questions and solved problems encountered in relation to the content of the indications among themselves or with the teacher. After working on a lexical and grammatical aspects of the topic, time had been given out for oral interaction. After all, they recognized the collage with some photos and texts. Exposing of collages, interacting presentations and comparing have been a an exciting and thrilling culmination on working on the topic.

The second month students worked on the topic *«The place I live» («L'endroit où j'habite»)*. Students have a number of different speaking activities: role-play, discussing, pair work, small group work, short talks, running dictation, sentence auction, alibi and many others. Finally, they had to present the PROJET #2. Students prepared a questionnaire about the room (decoration, personal objects, activities) and make a sondage. In small groups, they had to ask each other about the tastes, how to decorate the room, and about activities in this room. After that they proposed some ideas of «relooking». At the base of the answers of each other they presented the affiche and then made a collage. The final presentation of collages has been accompanied by a number of commentaries and interesting discussions.

The data has been associated with three levels: General linguistic skills; Qualitative aspects and Communicative language competences.

General linguistic skills. Speech acts and functions stayed central in the oral interaction. Presence of questions or requests can be taken as a strong indicator of interactivity in oral interactions which assume the presence of an interlocutor. Questions in their various manifestations are considered to be a fundamental part of oral interaction. Requests for clarification or explanation are also indicators of oral interaction. Questions can help to clarify some semantic or linguistic issues.

Our analysis showed that speaking activities prompt students to be very active and dynamic. Most students asked simple questions, they were ready to communicate, repeat and rephrase things. Students sometimes asked for a translation or an explanation, especially during the preparation of the project. The usage of electronic dictionaries was very high.

The presence of discourse markers was also taken into account in the analysis. Students used a lot a discourse marker *à propos (by the way)* that allowed them to shift the topic and to persist on a certain point of view. We noticed a number of verbal and facial signals that indicated that the student understood or acknowledged what he/she was saying: for instance, nods, smiles and other nonverbal means. Verbal feedback words and structures have been taken into account. The most used were: *Je comprends (Got it)*

or *Vraiment (Really?)*. Discourse markers such as *do you agree*, *what do you thin"* and so on were present to elicit such responses. There were also instances of discourse markers such as *well*, etc. There were also many discourse markers which might be classified as feedback tokens. For example, really, is that so, me too, excellent/good for you. *D'accord (I agree)* and *c'est vrai (that's true)* were used copiously to express agreement. We can conclude that more than 50 turns of discourse markers were used by students.

Qualitative aspects. Range: Students used simple phrases related to the topic. *Accuracy*: Students used simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns. While speaking they didn't have opportunity to consult an external resource quickly. *Fluency*: Students could manage very short, isolated utterances. But pausing and articulating with less familiar words disrupted the communication and sometimes even stopped it. *Interaction*: Students asked and answered questions about details. They can interact in a simple way but communication is totally dependent on repetition, rephrasing and repair. *Coherence*: Students constantly used links and connectors like *and* (*et*). The *pauses* were always short (one or two seconds). *Repetitions* were very frequent in the conversation at a distance. There are number of *interruptions* from the speaker himself/herself.

Communicative language competences. Students had a very basic range of simple expressions about personal details and needs of a concrete type. They showed only limited control of a few simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns in a learnt repertoire.Pronunciation of learnt words and phrases could be easily understood. But we noticed the tendency that students tried harder to articulate and pronounce correctly because they were very close to the camera. Because of distance learning students didn't use a lot of polite forms such as saying please, thank you, sorry, etc. Students could manage very short, isolated utterances, with much pausing to search for expressions, to articulate fewer familiar words, and to correct communication.

According to the various parameters of oral interaction, the *chatline* was very interactive and conversational in style. The chat sessions contain a lot of speech acts, including greetings, exclamations and wishes.

However, a lot of students pointed out that some problems with sound or video had occurred from time to time, and as a result, problems with understanding and presentation of an activity in general.

Conclusions

There are a number of different technics that facilitate the acquisition of interactive competence and oral interaction. For example, speaking activities such as discussion in small groups or pairs, debates, presentations, role-play, discussing, short talks, running dictation, sentence auction could be very beneficial and interesting for students. Programs can serve as a bridge between learners (*nuagesdemots*, *flipgrid*, *kahoot*, etc).

Our analysis appears to confirm a high level of *interactivity* between students during speaking activities in French classes. The *chat* sessions described in this paper indicate that learners were very tolerant and polite. The number of repairs and clarification requests is quite low. Authentic activities stimulated students to cooperate and communicate.

Two final two projects have been presented with a great success. Students showed great progress and were satisfied with their results. Nevertheless, some technical problems appeared sometimes and disrupted some activities.

On the one hand, we can confirm that oral interaction is quite successful. Students have shown very good results in this skill. Benefits of distance learning for oral interaction: Use of lightning speed Internet-based resources for preparation; technical support (slide presentations, discussion boards, breakout rooms); psychological aspects (less stress, better concentration, less intimidating and threatening for shy students); networking opportunities and better general linguistic skills (especially phonological control, accuracy and interaction). Oral interaction is an integral part of foreign language competencies and can easily be practiced during online distance learning.

On the other hand, even modern and fashionable technical problems can never replace the real face-to-face communication. Such challenging skills as community building, direct access to a «live» teacher for inspiration and feedback and «live» activities should not be ignored, for they are not compensated for by the noted technological advances.

REFERENCES:

1. Blake, R. Computer Mediated Communication: Window on L2 Spanish Interlanguage. *Language Learning and Technology*. 2000. Vol. 4, 1. Pp. 120-136. Last visited November 2023: http://llt.msu.edu/vol4num1/blake/default.html

2. Cambridge international dictionary of English. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. Last visited November 2023: https://dictionary.cambridge.org

3. Chun, D. Using Computer Networking to Facilitate the Acquisition of Interactive Competence. *System*, 1994, vol. 22, 1. pp. 17-31. DOI : 10.1016/0346-251X(94)90037-X

4. Collins English dictionary. Glasgow: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994. Last visited November 2023: [https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/interaction]

5. Council of Europe. Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Cambridge, U.K: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 2001.

6. Kern, R. Restructuring Classroom Interaction with Networked Computers: Effects on Quantity and

Characteristics of Language Production. *The Modern Language Journal*, 1995. Vol. 79. Pp. 457-476. DOI : 10.1111/j.1540-4781.1995.tb05445.x

7. Kozinets, Robert V. Netnography: Redefined (Ed. 2.). London: Sage, 2015. 221 p.

8. Larousse. Dictionnaire. Paris: Larousse, 2020. Last visited November 2023: [https://www.cdictionnaires/francais/interaction/43595]

9. Negretti, R. Web-Based Activities and SLA: a Conversation Analysis Research Approach. *Language Learning and Technology,* 1999. Vol. 3, 1. Pp. 75-87. Last visited November 2023: http://llt.msu.edu/vol3num1/negretti/index.html.

10. Pellettieri, J. Negotiation in Cyberspace: The Role of Chatting in the Development of Grammatical Competence. In Warschauer, M. & Kern, R. *Network-based Language Teaching: Concepts and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Pp. 59-86.

11. Tudini V. Conversational elements of online chatting: speaking practice for distance language learners? *Pratique et recherche*, 2003. Vol. 6, 2. Pp. 83-99. https://doi.org/10.4000/alsic.2238

12. Warschauer, M. Comparing Face-to-Face and Electronic Communication in the Second Language Classroom, *CALICO Journal*, 1996. Vol. 13. Pp. 7-26.