



IMPROVEMENT OF THE TARGET LANGUAGE: DOES MORE EXPOSURE IN CLASS OUTWEIGH TEACHING RULES AND FUNCTIONS?

Dr. Saif Aqachmar

Dr. Saif Aqachmar was awarded a doctorate degree at Ibn Tofail University, Morocco. E-mail: aqachmarsaif@gmail.com

KeyWords

Language Improvement, classroom exposure, target language.

Abstract

The study presented in this article investigated the impact of exposure to the target language on students' EFL, FFL, and SFL improvement at "11 Janvier" high school in Morocco. This qualitative research considered that more exposure to the target language in the classroom is more influencing than language instruction in class. In this way, this study assumed that using the target language communicatively outweighs learning language rules in a language vacuum. The study surveyed 30 teachers of English and French and demonstrated that when language is more utilized either for instruction or for simple communication, the linguistic skills of students improve more considerably. However, when the target language is just a language that represents rules, functions, and irrelevant texts, the outcome is always poor. The study concluded with implications that could be implemented by teachers of languages in different school levels.

Introduction

Many studies have investigated the impact of classroom activities on the development of students' language. However, most of them investigated the impact of classroom activities as being part of a language course not as an environment that provides language input. According to Curtis, The way how an individual characteristically acquires and learns a language depends on a specific linguistic experience that results of an exposure to such language (1974, p.231). In other words, anyone brought up in a language vacuum will neither be able to speak nor understand a language. To put it differently, if one intends to learn a language without getting in contact with it, no success will be the result. Curtis' premise supposed that the only pathway to learn and not to say acquire a language is through exposure to the target language itself. In short, the method and speed with which students learn a new language depend heavily on the extent to which they are exposed to it (1974, p.231). Lipski supposed that language is

a kind of talent structured in the human mind and, unlike Curtis, believes that language might be learned with no need for exposure since it represents the uniqueness of human beings' mental nature (2014).

Exposure, refers to the total amount of time in which an individual has contact with a language, may it be total in verbal or written form, formal or informal ways of communications and in which the individual may have either an active or passive role (Lipski, 2014). Adopting this definition, exposure to a second language occurs whenever individuals engage in conversations in the second language with family members, friends, classmates, and colleagues ; whenever they read books, magazines, and newspapers written in that language ; whenever they come across information being disseminated in different multimedia sources ; or even when they are more passive listeners in any activity or place in which the second language is being spoken. There are many dimensions of exposure, but this study will only focus on exposure to the target language in classrooms.

In order to put an end to this question, this study came to confirm or disconfirm the impact of exposure to language on the development of the target language inside the classroom. The study investigated students of the second year of baccalaureate at "11 Janvier" high school in Morocco. The aim was to answer the following research questions:

- what effects does exposure to language in classrooms have on the English language learning?
- How is the exposure to the target language embraced in the teaching process?
- What activities do support exposure to the target language and guarantee students' language improvement?

1. Review of the Literature

1.1. Target Language Exposure

This study showed the importance that language exposure has on language learning in the classroom. In other words, it demonstrated that the quality of the language environment that the student is surrounded by is crucial to success in learning a new language. The same study points out that if a student is only exposed to classroom drills and activities, they might acquire substantial mastery of classroom communication skills, but still struggle to communicate in a natural language environment.

Language exposure was defined by Lubega (1979) as a vital factor to language learning and as almost entirely the determiner of the type and level of language proficiency emanating from language learning.

Chiswick and Miller (2014) defined exposure as the feature of formal learning and "learning by doing" that impacts the acquisition and fluency in the target language. Even though these two definitions coincide in the fact that considering language exposure as relevant in language learning, they differ in that the former shows it within a unicity character (a factor) and as non-total determiner and emanating result of the target language itself. This shows a lesser value in comparison of the latter, which gives it a wider value when considering it as a diverse feature.

1.2. The Impact of Exposure in Previous Studies

Magno (2009) examined the difference in English language exposure among Taiwanese college students living in Taiwan and the Philippines. The results revealed that the Taiwanese in the Philippines showed significantly higher levels of English language exposure to English compared with the Taiwanese in Taiwan. The results of this study further recommend that the fact of learning English will be strengthened if exposure is solely to the target language.

Similarly, Kaushanskaya and Marian (2009) conducted a study in which they investigated 60 participants: 20 English-Spanish bilinguals, 20 English-Mandarin bilinguals, and 20 English-speaking monolinguals. Participants were all native speakers of the English language and were all comparable in terms of their educational level. Besides, in order to ensure high and equal levels of native-language knowledge across the three groups, standardized English vocabulary tests were administered to all participants. Language-proficiency, learning-history, and current-exposure data were obtained from all bilingual participants using the language experience and proficiency questionnaire (Kaushanskaya, 2009). Participants' learning-history data revealed that English-Spanish and English-Mandarin bilinguals were exposed to their L2 primarily in the family context, and that they had spent very little time exposed to formal L2 schooling. Data were collected regarding the relative contribution of different learning environments to L2 acquisition. In both groups of bilinguals, participants reported that on a scale of 0 (not a contributor) to 10 (most important contributor), exposure to family members was the most important contributor to their L2 acquisition, whereas schooling was the least important contributor, the results of this suggest a general bilingual advantage for novel word learning. This bilingual advantage has been observed previously in adults who have acquired their multiple languages through classroom exposure. This study demonstrated a bilingual advantage for word learning in bilinguals who had acquired their two languages early in life through naturalistic immersion.

On the other hand, Ortiz and Garzon (2007) conducted a study about the English teaching practice at a language institute by observing classes and interviewing teachers and students. This process allowed them to draw some conclusions about the pedagogical practices at language schools. They carried out this project during one academic semester and found out that the role of materials and the learners' and teacher's interaction showed that the educator in charge made use of the communicative model. Two features of this model related to exposure were captured in the teacher's class. First, the use of the target language all the time maximizing students' opportunity to be in contact with English: "If students get enough exposure to language and opportunities for its use and if they are motivated, then language learning will take care of itself" (Harmer,2007). In the previous study, creating more contact with the English language was highly prioritized to guarantee better exposure to the target language. The act of comparing sets of pictures and noting similarities and differences, and discovering missing features in a map or pictures among others exposed learners to the natural use of the target language.

Unlike the previous studies, Hideyuki (1997) investigated the attrition of the English language capacities by students whose native language was English. These junior/senior high school students spent a significant period of time (more than three years) in non-English-speaking. They were only given one hour a day (five days per week) of formal English instruction. Additional attention was given to the subject's writing proficiency to see if their English Language skills have changed since being away from the English language environment. Students were administered

a written test on a cross-sectional framework of the subjects in order to examine various aspects of writing. The results showed that when compared to those junior high school learners of Japanese, scores increased at a more rapid rate than those who were not native English speakers. Based on the findings, intensive exposure to the English language gave those senior high school learners a solid foundation of language skills. Consequently, the five-hour English lessons were enough for these returnees to maintain and improve their skills even after being away from the English language environment.

Exposure was defined as the product of the number of years the student reported having spent in an English-speaking country and the amount of English the students said they spoke every day (on a scale of 1 to 10) (Krashen, 1976). Krashen (1974) claimed that, when the effects of "exposure" and formal instruction are compared, it is reliably the case that more instruction means higher proficiency, while more exposure does not necessarily mean more proficiency in ESL. This compared instruction and exposure by matching both pairs of foreign students for one of these variables to see whether the student who excelled in one of the two is more proficient in English. The measure of the amount of formal instruction was simply the students' report of the number of years he or she had studied English in a school situation. No questions were asked concerning factors such as the methodology used, the presence or absence of a language laboratory, how often the class met, and the amount of time each student devoted to his studies.

In Krashen (1974) students were asked to indicate years spent in an English-speaking country and to indicate how much English they spoke each day (on a scale of 1 to 4). Subjects with the same number of years spent in the country where English was spoken, and the same report of speaking were considered to have the same exposure score. Students' samples differed somewhat. In his study, subjects were registered in an intensive, 20-hour per week institute designed to prepare foreign students for studies in American colleges. In Krashen (1974), subjects were enrolled in a part-time extension program; these students were, on the average, older, and many were permanent residents or citizens of the United States. The measure of proficiency used in the first study was teacher ranking (which correlated significantly with local placement tests), and in the second study, the Michigan Examination in Structure was used. In the first study, six out of fourteen pairs of students matched for years of formal study of English were consistent with the hypotheses that more exposure meant more proficiency; that is, in only six cases, the students with more exposure showed a higher ranking.

Similarly, in the second study, more exposure was associated with a higher score in only ten out of twenty-one cases, which is consistent with the hypothesis that exposure has no consistent effect on second language proficiency. When students were matched for exposure scores; however, it appeared to be the case that more instruction did indeed mean more proficiency. To conclude with the related studies, this last study also showed the importance of exposure on language.

Ajileye (1998) in his study "The effect of exposure to English language activities outside the classroom on written English", investigated the effect of English language use outside the classroom on written English of one hundred were randomly selected from four secondary schools in Ilorin (Nigeria). This research focused on the effects of extra

school language activities- on written English. The study came up with the conclusion that there is a significant relationship between students' exposure to English language use through extra-school language activities and their proficiency in English language. The findings of this study revealed that exposure to the target language is the key for students' success in language mastery. It also suggested that teachers should play more active roles in helping students find the right path for their learning.

View all the literature reviewed, it was obvious that more exposure outweighs more learning in improving students' mastery of the target language. For this reason, this study was meant to re-question the previous findings and retest their assumptions.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Approach

This study adopted a qualitative method to analyzing the research data. With this method, it was possible to elucidate teachers' view and opinions. It was also possible to collect data that brings back tutors' experiences and observations in the act of teaching and learning.

2.2. Sample Population and Sampling Technique

The sample in this study was composed from 30 foreign language teachers who work at "11 Janvier" high school in Elhajeb School district. It incorporated 15 teachers of French and 11 teachers of English and 4 teachers of Spanish.

The sampling adopted was convenience sampling since not all participants in this study were chosen randomly. The sampling technique targeted only teachers of French, Spanish and English who were already known and not selected following random selection procedures.

2.3. Data Collection Procedures

Interviews were used to collect data and better understand such phenomenon. The gathered interview reports were filled in the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS), and they were analyzed accordingly.

3. Results and Discussion

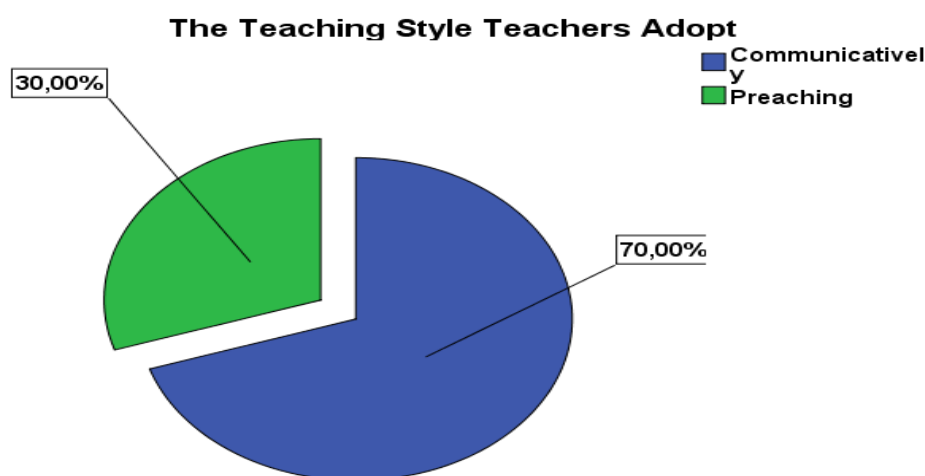
3.1. Teaching Style Adopted by Teachers

Teachers were asked about their teaching styles. They had to choose between two dichotomous choices either teaching communicatively or preaching. After analysis, the results revealed the following.

Table.1. *The teaching style of teachers*

The Teaching Style Teachers Adopt					
Valide	Effectifs	Pourcentage	Pourcentage valide	Pourcentage cumulé	
Communicatively	21	70,0	70,0	70,0	
Preaching	9	30,0	30,0	100,0	
Total	30	100,0	100,0		

Figure. 1. Teaching style teachers adopt.



According to the table and figure, it was obvious that more teachers adopt a communicative teaching style. With this type of instruction, students get more exposure and improve their linguistic capabilities better.

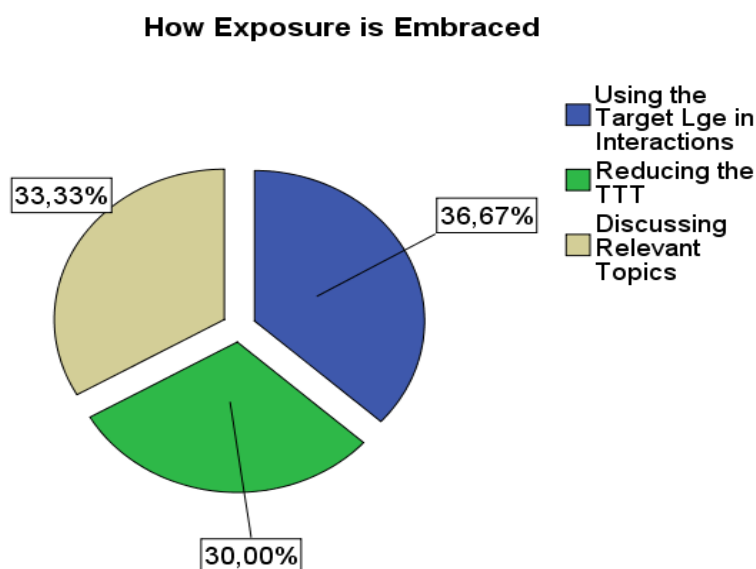
3. 2. What Teachers Do to Embrace Better Exposure

Teachers were asked to report about what measures they take to foster exposure to the target language. While interviewing teachers, the final report revolved around three main concepts. First, using the target language in class. Second, reducing the TTT (the teacher talking time). Third, discussing relevant topics. The results demonstrated what follows.

Table.2. How exposure is embraced

How Exposure is Embraced					
		Effectifs	Pourcentage	Pourcentage valide	Pourcentage cumulé
Valide	Using the Target Lge in Interactions	11	36,7	36,7	36,7
	Reducing the TTT	9	30,0	30,0	66,7
	Discussing Relevant Topics	10	33,3	33,3	100,0
	Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Figure.2. How exposure is embraced.



Both the table and figure showed a great deal of adjacency between using the target language in class, reducing the TTT, and discussing relevant topics. A 6% or 3% of difference between the three variables would never make the difference. However, it revealed that the three ways that teachers use to seek better exposure widely practiced among teachers.

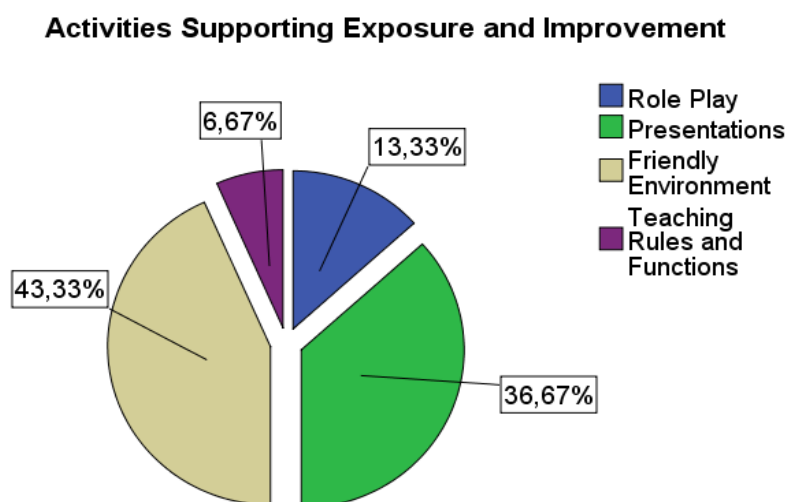
3.3. Classroom Activities that Support Exposure and Improvement

Teachers were asked about the activities they use to support exposure and guarantee improvement. They had to choose between using role play, presentations, free writing activities, building a friendly environment, discussing interesting topics, or teaching rules and functions. The results came as follows.

Table.3. Activities supporting exposure and improvement

Activities Supporting Exposure and Improvement					
		Effectifs	Pourcentage	Pourcentage valide	Pourcentage cumulé
Valide	Role Play	4	13,3	13,3	13,3
	Presentations	11	36,7	36,7	50,0
	Friendly Environment	13	43,3	43,3	93,3
	Teaching Rules and Functions	2	6,7	6,7	100,0
	Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Figure.3. Activities used by teachers to support exposure and improvement



The results showed that building a friendly environment occupied the first position with 43.33% of teachers. It was followed by using presentations 36.67%. Role-play came third with 13.33%, and teaching rules and functions was last with 6.67%. No teacher resorted to using free writing or choosing interesting topics to embrace exposure.

Following the results, it could be said that the environment of the learner and the learner-centered method of teaching is believed to enhance exposure and improve the linguistic skills of the learners. As for teaching rules and functions, it was obvious that some teachers still believe that teaching rules could help students get better mastery of the target language.

3.4. Findings

Teachers of languages in Morocco adopt a communicative style for teaching their students the target language because they believe that it could help them increase exposure and learn better. Moreover, they are all aware that a communicative environment is the key for students' language exposure. The finding also demonstrate that teachers do reduce their TTT (teacher talking time) and give more chances for students to contribute into the building of the language lesson.

Though most of the teachers believe that topic relevance is fundamental for a successful communicative lesson, they are still resistant to evoke topics within their students' interest. Contrary to what teachers do in class, they all think that working in a friendly environment, using presentation, and role-play could certainly facilitate students exposure and improvement.

4 . Conclusion

This study focused on teachers' practices in class and the way in which they enhance language exposure and improvement of students' outcomes. It assumed that better classroom practices could always foster the linguistic skills of students. The results confirmed all the study assumptions and delineated what methodologies, styles, and activities could be adopted to make a language class a rich environment that guarantees exposure and practice.

Implications for Teachers

Teachers should foster communication and the use of the target language in class. They should tolerate students' independent learning and make it part of their teaching style. Besides, teachers of different foreign languages have to cooperate and coordinate to enhance improvement. They should not resist sharing both successful experiences and unexpected failures.

Teachers should not consider the textbook as the ultimate source of language, but search and make use of other sources, which could also be brought by their students. Furthermore, they should see language instruction as an extension of the human being' natural way of learning.

References

- Ajileye, S. (1998). The effect of exposure to English language activities outside the classroom on written English: A study of selected secondary schools in Ilorin. Department of modern European languages, University of Ilorin, Nijeria.
- Chiswick, B. R., & Miller, P. W. (2014, January 15). [Scholarly project]. Retrieved from <http://repec.iza.org/dp7880.pdf>
- Curtis, L. Langer and Hofstadter on Painting and Language: A Critique. The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 331-342. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/428419>

- Harmer, J. (2007). *How to Teach English*. Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Limited. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/34720971/How_to_Teach_English_2nd_Edition_Jeremy_Harmer_PDF
- Hideyuki, (1997). A study of The Effects of Onset-Age and Exposure Duration on the L2 as Observed in Brain Activation: an FNIRS Study. Japan, School of Language Education and Information Science, p 31.
- Kaushanskaya, M., & Marian, V. (2009). The bilingual advantage in novel word learning. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 4(16), 705-710. doi:doi:10.3758/PBR.16.4.705
- Krashen, S. (1974) *Language Learning*. A journal of research in Language Studies, p 235-245.
- Krashen, S. (1976) Formal and Informal Linguistic Environments in Language Acquisition and Language Learning. *Tesol Quarterly*, 157-168. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3585637>
- Lipski, J. (2014). Spanish-English code-switching among low-fluency bilinguals: Towards an expanded typology. *Sociolinguistic Studies*, 8(1), 23-55. doi : 10.1558/sols.v8i1.23
- Lubega, S. (1979, January 01). The effect of the nature and amount of exposure on language learning: A study based on the English language proficiency of students in six Ugandan schools. Retrieved from <https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.463683>
- Magno, C. (2009) Assessing the Level of English Language Exposure of Taiwanese College Students in Taiwan and the Philippines. *Asian EFL Journal*. Retrieved from <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1429345>
- Ortiz, J. Z., & Garzón, L. P. (2007). A Study of the English Teaching Practice at a Language Institute, 9. Retrieved from Ortiz, J. Z., & Garzón, L. P. (2007). A Study of the English Teaching Practice at a Language Institute, 9.

