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LANGUAGE CLASSROOM DYNAMICS: AN ATTEMPT AT ANALYSING THE LANGUAGE-EMOTIONAL-COMMUNICATIVE PROCESSES IN A CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Key words: language classroom dynamics, second language learning

1. Introduction

The objective of the present paper is to make an attempt at analysing the dynamic interaction between the language-emotional-communicative processes which occur in language classrooms and both the natural conditions as well as student-/teacher-generated factors in classroom environments. In the paper, a linguistic experiment conducted in three language classrooms with English as the students' second language is described and an analysis of the research outcome is undertaken. Among the natural conditions in the language classrooms examined in the experiment are the number of students in each of the three language groups and the natural stage in the course of language teaching different in each group. The examined student-generated factors apply to the socio-communicative processes within the language group and the interaction among the students while dealing with a language task; whereas the teacher-generated factors are analysed with regard to the teacher-student interaction on different levels in the course of the task.

The analysis of the research outcome also serves a better understanding of the mechanisms which govern successful communication in English as the second language. Thus, the analysis of the experiment results might also be considered a voice in the discussion on homeostatic tendencies in a language classroom.

2. Language classroom as an environment of interdependencies

The very process of acquiring a second language in a language classroom environment encompasses such a variety of interactions between the learner, the teacher and the whole of the classroom reality that an attempt at analysing the mechanisms which drive successful communication in the second language always remains a challenge to a linguist/researcher. Therefore, the ecological approach to language learning has been chosen as a suitable one in the present paper as it allows for analysing the entirety of the language-emotional-communicative processes which occur in classroom realities. As rightly observed by Tudor citing Van Lier, "an ecological perspective on language learning offers an alternative way of looking at the contexts in which language use and language learning are situated", as perceived by the scholar, the ecological perspective proposes "a conception of the learning environment as a complex adaptive system, of the mind as the totality of relationships between a developing person and the surrounding world , and of learning as the result of meaningful activity in an accessible environment" [Tudor 2001, 9]. It appears that an attempt at understanding the language-emotional-communicative processes in a classroom environment may only be made by analysing local classroom realities in context and with the awareness that the learners constantly communicate and interact dynamically with the classroom environment on a variety of levels.

2.1. Language learners as communicators

The notion of a language learner as a communicator has been chosen in the present paper as it encompasses the whole of the mechanisms involved not only in acquiring the second language but also in the language learner communicating with the outside world on a multitude of levels as well as experiencing the process of learning and developing his/her most suitable learning strategies. Puppel explains the notion of a communicator as one "regarded as being determined by interdependencies operating across the natural (and thus inevitable) coalition of bio-centric, socio-centric, and culture-centric levels together with the entirety of their interrelated variables and necessary feedback mechanisms" [Puppel 2008, 15]. A language learner as a communicator is constantly confronted with both the natural conditions in a language classroom environment or ecosystem as well as the student-/ /teacher-generated factors which affect the language-emotional-communicative processes which have their starting point in the communicator's mind and to which the communicator dynamically responds in accordance with his/her bio-socio-cultural background.

In what follows, a local experiment conducted in three different language classroom environments will be described. The analysis of the research results will be undertaken with the aim to make an attempt at understanding the mechanisms which drive the process of the students' (communicators') successful communication in English as their second language.

3. The experiment

3.1. The objectives

The aim of the experiment was to analyse the dynamic interaction between the students' approach to dealing with an English language task, the very process of doing the task as well as the students' ability to communicate in English as their second language (L2) and the conditions in a given language classroom ecosystem as well as both students- and teacher-generated factors which affect the language-emotional-communicative processes in a classroom environment. To be specific, the conditions in the classroom ecosystems referred to (1) the number of students in each language group (ecosystem) and (2) the naturally-conditioned context of the language task, that is whether the task was given together with a unit test to be evaluated or separately depending on the course of language teaching in each examined group. The students-generated factors applied to the social-communicative interaction among the students while approaching the task or the notion of group mind whereas the teacher-generated factors referred to (1) further modification of the context of the language task by asking the students to sign the paper with either their name and surname or their first name/initials only (2) the level of the teacher's control over the students dealing with the task and (2) the teacher's description of the task in which it was referred to either as a challenge or an easy review exercise.

The aim of the experiment was also to conduct an analysis of the complexity and dynamism of the language-emotional-communicative processes in the examined language classrooms as well as to make an attempt at analysing the mechanisms which encourage successful communication in English as the second language.

In what follows, three main assumptions underlying the research in questionnaire enumerated:

1. both the conditions in a classroom ecosystem and the students- as well as teacher-generated factors affect the language-emotional-communicative processes in a language classroom and, in this way, modify the students' (communicators') approach to a given task, the process of dealing with the task as well as communication in English as the second language;

2. the interaction between the language-emotional-communicative processes in the classroom environment and both the conditions in the examined classroom ecosystems and students-/ teacher-generated factors is highly dynamic and non-linear;
3. the communicative context of the task and the social-communicative interaction among the students (communicators) while dealing with the task have a strong influential potential in the examined groups (ecosystems) and thus affect the language-emotional-communicative processes to a high degree.

In the following section the procedure of the research will be presented and both the conditions in the classroom ecosystems as well as the teacher-generated factors which aimed at modifying the language-emotional-communicative processes in each of the language groups will be outlined.

3.2. The procedure

The research was conducted in three groups of Polish students aged 13-14 in a private language school in Olsztyn, Poland. The experiment was carried out during classes in English as the students' second language. The three groups of 9, 2 and 5 students were pre-intermediate learners of English at A2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages[1].

3.2.1. The task

The students in each of the groups were asked to do a language task which involved the students' written communication in English as the second language answering open questions. The objective of the exercise was twofold. Firstly, it was a natural revision stage of the lesson with the intention to prepare the students for communication in English and to revise the language material they are already familiar with, that is the use of expressions 'let' and 'be allowed to' in both past and present tenses. Secondly, the task was planned ahead as the main part of the experiment in which the students were asked to give answers to 5 open questions in English using their own ideas. Chart 1 presents the handout prepared by the teacher, distributed to the students and used in the task:

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[1] For more information on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages visit, http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/elp-reg/cefr_EN.asp.

Give your opinion on the following issues:

1. What are the students at your school never allowed to do? Why?

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2. What do your parents let you do at the weekend? Why?

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3. What do you think children shouldn't be allowed to do? Why?

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4. What didn't your parents/brother/sister let you do when you were a child? Why?

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5. What would you like to be allowed to do during your English class? Why?

....

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....

Chart 1. The handout used in the task applied in all the three groups

It is significant to indicate in the description of the experiment procedure that in each of the three groups the task was given to the students at a different stage of the natural course of language learning, that is, in groups 1 (9 students) and 2 (2 students) the review task was given before (group 1) and after (group 2) a unit test to be evaluated; whereas in group 3 (5 students) the task was given as a review exercise on a different day when the students were already familiar with the test results. In this way, the context of the task naturally shifted either to a task perceived as one to be evaluated or to a typical review exercise depending on the conditions in each of the groups.

Apart from the naturally-conditioned context of the task, three sets of teacher-generated factors aiming at modifying the language-emotional-communicative processes in the classroom ecosystems were applied during the task. Firstly, the further modification of the context of the task was planned ahead by the teacher and applied by asking the students in groups 1 and 2 to sign the handouts with their full name and surname. In group 3, in contrast, the students were asked to sign the paper only with the first name or their initials. Secondly, in groups 1 and 2, the task was described by the teacher

as a challenge to the students, whereas in group 3 it was referred to as an easy review task. Thirdly, the teacher modified the level of control over the students dealing with the task, that is, in groups 1 and 3, the teacher moved around the classroom supervising the students throughout the task by closely observing the process of the students' answering the questions, whereas in group 2 the teacher's supervision of the students consisted in observing the course of the task from a distance. It should be emphasized, however, that in each of the groups the teacher's control over the students dealing with the task was retained and that in both cases the teacher was ready to offer help to the students and answer any possible questions.

The conditions and different sets of teacher-generated factors modifying the language-emotional-communicative processes in the classroom ecosystems applied in the three groups are outlined in chart 2 below:

Conditions		

Group 1
a. 9 students
b. context of the task:
   the task given before a writ-
   ten unit test to be evaluated
	Group 2
	a. 2 students
	b. context of the task:
	   the task given after a writ-
	   ten unit test to be evaluated
		Group 3
		a. 5 students
		b. context of the task:
		   the task given on a different
		   day than the unit test, the
		   students already familiar
		   with the test results

Teacher-generated factors modifying the language-emotional-communicative processes in the language classrooms		

Group 1
a. modifying context:
   the students asked to
   sign the paper with their
   full name and surname
 	
b. modifying the students'
   perception of the level of
   difficulty of the task and/or
   the perception of a certain
   level of prestige connected
   with dealing with the task
   successfully:
   the task described by the
   teacher as a challenge to
   the students
c. modifying the level of
   control over the students
   dealing with the task:
   teacher'sclose observa-
   tion of the course of the
   task
	Group 2
	a. modifying context:
	   the students asked to
	   sign the paper with their
	   full name and surname
	
	b. modifying the students'
	   perception of the level of
	   difficulty of the task and/or
	   the perception of a certain
	   level of prestige connected
	   with dealing with the task
	   successfully:
	   the task described by the
	   teacher as a challenge to
	   the students
	c. modifying the level of
	   control over the students
	   dealing with the task:
	   teacher's observation
	   of the course of the task
	   from a distance
		Group 3
		a. modifying context:
		   the students asked to
		   sign the paper only with
		   the first name or their
		   initials
		b. modifying the students'
		   perception of the level of
		   difficulty of the task and/or
		   the perception of a certain
		   level of prestige connected
		   with dealing with the task
		   successfully:
		   the task described by
		   the teacher as an easy
		   review task
		c. modifying the level of
		   control over the students
		   dealing with the task:
		   teacher'sclose observa-
		   tion of the course of the
		   task

Chart 2. A juxtaposition of the conditions in the language classrooms and sets of teacher-generated factors modifying the language-emotional-communicative processes in the examined language groups.

In what follows, the results of the research in the language classrooms will be discussed and an attempt at analysing the mechanisms which drive successful communication in English as the second language will be made. Simultaneously, the discussion on the research results will be divided into subsections in accordance with the area of language-emotional-communicative processes in the classroom environments it applies to.

3.3. The results

The results of the research have shown that all the examined areas of language-emotional-communicative processes in the language classrooms such as the students' approach to dealing with the language task, the very process of doing the task as well as the students' ability to communicate in English as their second language (L2) were in an uninterrupted and dynamic interaction with the conditions in the language classrooms (ecosystems) as well as teacher-/student-generated factors. With the above observation in mind, it has to be clarified that the following division of the discussion on the experiment results into areas of the aforementioned processes is to be considered a sketch of the whole of constantly interrelated and interacting mechanisms in the classroom environment.

3.3.1. The teacher-student interaction and the naturally-conditioned context of the task

The significance of the communicative context of the task the students (communicators) were faced with was clearly visible during the experiment. As has already been indicated, all the three groups were at different stages of the natural course of language learning and thus the context of the task (whether it was given together with a test to be evaluated or not) was affected by the natural conditions in each of the language groups. However, it was also to a large extent for the teacher-student interaction that the communicative context of the task was shifted. That is to say, in groups 1 and 2 in which the task was given before or after a unit test respectively and in which the students were asked to write both their name and surname on the answer sheets, the students visibly considered the task a part of the unit test and, simultaneously, a task to be evaluated. The students' reaction to the context shift was immediate and resulted in a change in the students' attitude towards dealing with the task in that they either started working quietly on their own considering the task the first part of the test (group 1) or continued the quiet individual work started during the test considering the task the final part of it (group 2). In group 3, in contrast, in which the task was given to

the students on a different day after the test and the students were asked to sign the papers with their first name or initials only, the task was perceived by the students as a standard review exercise during which the level of the students' interaction was visibly higher (a further analysis of the social-communicative interaction among the students while dealing with the task will be undertaken in the following subsection of the present paper). It is also significant to observe that a strong need to name the context of task before the very exercise was immediately shown by the students themselves in that in all the three groups, irrespective of whether the students were asked to sign the papers with their name and surname (groups 1 and 2) or only their first name/initials (group 3), the students immediately asked the teacher whether they might get marks for the task and all the three groups were informed that there was a possibility for the task to be later evaluated.

Interestingly, not only was the effect of the communicative context of the task visible in the level of the students' social-communicative interaction and their immediate response to the teacher's instructions, but it was also observable in the students' written communication in English as their second language especially with respect to the length of their written utterances as well as the level of creativity involved in answering the questions in the task (both the abovementioned aspects of the students' communication in English will be analysed in the following subsections).

3.3.2. The context of the task and the students' social-communicative interaction

As has already been indicated, the interaction between the communicative context of the task and the students' social-communicative interaction was observable throughout the task. The interaction varied in accordance with the students' emotional attitude towards one another, that is the communication in the examined groups appeared to be modified either by observable competition between the students or reciprocal help during the task. In what follows the course of the task juxtaposed with the students' behaviour in each of the examined groups will be outlined.

Firstly, although in groups 1 and 2 the task was initially perceived as a part of the test which resulted in the students working quietly on their own, the interaction between the experiment participants finally occurred. In group 1 (9 students), some of the students started communicating encouraged by one of the students' attempt at trying to consult friends about one of the answers to the questions (it was allowed in the task – the teacher's instructions did not involve comments on the students working on their own), yet the students continued communicating quietly only by whispering to each other. Interestingly, some the students did not cooperate with the others eagerly

even if encouraged and some did not communicate with other students at all. Thus, it might be concluded that the social-communicative interaction among the students in the group was partially suppressed. It appears explicit that the communicative context of the task perceived as a part of a test in group 1 affected the interaction among the students in that visible competition among the students was present. From above it follows that there occurred a visible dynamic interaction between the social-communicative interaction in the group and the communicative context of the task, in which the influential potential of the context of the task appeared to be the factor to which the students, in this instance, reacted stronger.

Secondly, in group 2, the natural conditions in the language group that is the number of students (2) appeared to have played a significant role in the social-communicative interaction. Similarly to group 1, the students initially worked on their own, however, it was, again, due to one of the students' comment concerning ideas to answer one of the questions that the communication was triggered and continued throughout the task. Interestingly, the students in group 2 also communicated quietly, yet helped each other by openly and eagerly discussing the grammar rules concerning the use of 'let' and 'be allowed to' so that the communication was held in a more conversational tone between the two students and consisted in mutual help rather than competition. It appears that, in this instance, the social-communicative interaction affected the students to a higher degree than the communicative context of the task. It might also be concluded that it was to a large extent for the natural conditions in the classroom ecosystem that is the number of students in the group that the communication between the students aimed at helping each other rather than competing during the task. Furthermore, the interaction between the students in the group could be referred to as group mind since the students did not refrain from communicating throughout the task and continued helping each other openly while dealing with the task attempting to solve the problems together.

Thirdly, in group 3 (5 students), in which the task was perceived as a typical review exercise as the students were already familiar with the test results and were asked to sign the paper with their first name or initials only (see chart 2), the social-communicative interaction among the students occurred throughout the course of the task. Similarly to group 2, the students were eager to help one another, however the questions they asked applied to using creative vocabulary rather than grammar rules. Additionally, the communication was not held in a conversational tone but consisted in asking and answering single questions among the students. What was also noticeable was the time the students spent on giving written answers to the questions which was much longer than in the two previous groups. It must be underlined that the students' written utterances were also much longer than in the other two groups, which indicated the students' willingness to

answer the given questions thoroughly. With the above observations in mind, it might be concluded that, in contrast to group 1, in group 3 the main aim of the communication among that students was reciprocal help rather than competition, which appears to be to a large extent for the communicative context of the task which was not perceived as a test. Accordingly, one might draw a conclusion that there occurred a dynamic interaction between the communicative context of the task and the social-communicative interaction in the group and both of the two factors appeared to have affected the students to a large extent. The influential potential of the social interaction within the group was visible also in the time the students spent on answering the questions as well as in the length of their written utterances and the choice of more creative ideas to answer the questions (a more thorough analysis of the students' communication in English as the second language will be undertaken in the following subsection of the paper). It might also be concluded that the communication among the students in the group which continued throughout the task, yet was not held in a conversational tone might have resulted from the number of the students in the group (the natural conditions in the classroom environment).

In addition to the above remarks, it appears that the level of teacher's control over the students dealing with the task that is whether they were closely observed during the task (groups 1 and 3) or the teacher's supervision was limited to observing the students from a distance (group 2) did not affect the students to a large extent. To be specific, in all of the groups the social-communicative interaction between the students occurred (it was allowed in the task) irrespective of whether the teacher was observing the process of the students dealing with the task closely or from a distance, yet the communication varied in accordance with the communicative context of the task. Thus, it might be stated that the language-emotional-communicative processes in each of the groups were most visibly affected by both the factors that is the context of the task and the social-communicative interaction within the groups. The analysis of how and to what extent all the factors in the examined language classrooms affected the students' communication in English as the second language will be undertaken in the following subsection.

3.3.3. The students' communication in English as the second language and a voice in the discussion on homeostatic tendencies in a language classroom

As might be observed in the aforementioned sections, both teacher-/ /student-generated factors as well as natural conditions in the examined language classrooms interacted with each other dynamically and in a non-linear way. It has been observed that the communicative context of the task

and the social-communicative interaction within the groups were the most influential factors affecting the language-emotional-communicative processes in the classroom environments. Needless to say, none of the abovementioned factors suppressed the students' ability to communicate in English as the second language, on the contrary, the research results have shown that the students in each of the groups were successful in communicating in English. To be precise, although in every examined group the conditions in which the communication occurred varied and some of the factors which affected the language-emotional-communicative processes were more powerful and explicit, all of the students in the three groups received marks equal to or higher than 75% of a correctly completed task. The students' overall results in completing the task are presented in chart 3:

Group 1 (9 students) 100% of the students received marks equal or higher than 75% of a correctly completed task: 75-79% – 2 students 80-84% – 4 students 85-100% – 3 students	Group 2 (2 students) 100% of the students received marks equal or higher than 75% of a correctly completed task: 75-79% – 1 student 85-100% – 1student	Group 3 (5 students) 100% of the students received marks equal or higher than 75% of a correctly completed task: 80-84% – 2 students 85-100% – 3 students

Chart 3. The students' overall results in completing the task.

However, as has already been indicated in the previous subsections, the differences between the students' results in completing the task applied to the length of the students' written utterances and the choice of vocabulary used in the task. To be specific, in groups 1 and 2 the students' utterances were similar in length, that is the average number of words used in the task was 85 and 84 in groups 1 and 2 respectively. In group 3, in contrast, the average number of words used in the task was 113. It is essential to emphasize that the number of words to use was not given in the teacher's instruction to the task and it was the students' choice how long their utterances would be. Another observable difference in the students' answers to the task was the choice of vocabulary. As has already been indicated in the previous subsection, the students in all the three groups communicated with each other during the task. However, the questions the students asked each other in groups 1 and 2 applied mainly to the correct use of grammatical expressions and forming sentences unlike in group 3 in which the questions applied to the use of more sophisticated vocabulary. Interestingly, the difference in the choice of vocabulary in the students' utterances in group 3 was visible and thus it might be concluded that in group 3 the students showed the tendency to be more creative in choosing the vocabulary to answer the questions in the exercise.

It is essential to emphasize that in each of the language classrooms the language-emotional communicative processes were affected by different

sets of factors and so were the students' written utterances, yet the level of language correctness in each of the groups was similar (see chart 3). Although the task was described by the teacher as a challenge to the students in groups 1 and 2 and as an easy review exercise in group 3, the students appeared to naturally develop strategies to deal with the here-and-now circumstances of the context shift, the interaction within the group and the teacher and find their own solution to communicate in English successfully. It was largely for the communicative context of the task and the group interaction that both the students' approach to the task and the strategy used in dealing with the task (e.g. the length of the utterances or the focus on grammatical correctness/more sophisticated vocabulary) were modified, yet all the factors which affected the language-emotional-communicative processes in the examined language classrooms acted as a trigger for the students' successful communication in English. It must be underlined that in all of the examined classrooms there might have occurred other factors which affected the students' emotions and communication and which were beyond the scope of the experiment. Factors such as the students' physical or emotional state on the particular day of the experiment were not analysed in the research. The experiment had its limitations and is to be considered an attempt at presenting and analysing a local research outcome.

Nevertheless, the research analysis provides insights into the mechanisms which drive the process of communication in English as the second language. It appears that provided that there do not occur factors which suppress the students' (communicators') willingness to communicate in the second language, the students develop their own strategies to 'navigate' through the factors which affect their emotions and communication and achieve a state of balance in that they communicate in the second language successfully. With the above observation in mind, the local research results might be considered a voice in the discussion on homeostatic tendencies in a language classroom in that there might be observed a dynamic mechanism of striving for balance (homeostasis) in the students'(communicators') attempts at searching for the most suitable solution to the problem/challenge they are faced with and taking action in accordance with the conditions in the classroom ecosystems as well as the student-/teacher-generated factors in order to successfully communicate in English. The abovementioned process appears to have its natural potential in that it appears to be largely dependent on the students' intrapersonal factors such as, among others, the emotional state and personal characteristics of each and every student [Bogusławska-Tafelska, Świderska, Wiśniewska 2010]. As highlighted by Tudor, "…our students are (…) human beings whose interaction with language study is influenced by a variety of attitudinal and experiential factors" and "who interact with teaching procedures in an individual manner as part of the broader goal of creating a personal understanding of language and of language learning in the here-

and-now of their lives" [Tudor 2001, 15]. A language learner as a communicator interacts with the ecosystem conditions as well as factors operating within the classroom environment he/she is confronted with and, owing to the process, enriches his/her emotional-language-communicative experience and develops at a variety of levels. Therefore, it appears that the role of the teacher in every classroom environment is to encourage the process by enabling the students to experience a wide range of language learning situations and cherishing the natural diversity of students and their interactions striving for balance in the classroom environment.

4. Conclusions

The intention of the paper was to undertake a preliminary analysis of the experiment results with the aim to investigate into the interaction between the natural conditions in a language classroom as well as both teacher-/ /student-generated factors and the language-emotional-communicative processes in a classroom environment. The research results have confirmed that both the conditions in a classroom ecosystem and the students- as well as teacher- generated factors affect the language-emotional-communicative processes in a non-linear and dynamic way and thus modify the students' (communicators') approach to a given task, the process of dealing with the task as well as communication in English as the second language. It has been observed that the communicative context of the task and the social-communicative interaction among the students (communicators) while dealing with the task had the strongest influential potential in the examined language groups. It has also been stated that, in the local research, there occurred a dynamic process/mechanism of striving for balance in the communicators' attempts at searching for the most appropriate solution to the challenge they were faced with, and thus successful communication in English, in accordance with both interpersonal as well as intrapersonal factors and natural conditions in the classroom environments.

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Summary

LANGUAGE CLASSROOM DYNAMICS: AN ATTEMPT AT ANALYSING THE LANGUAGE-EMOTIONAL-COMMUNICATIVE PROCESSES IN A CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

The main objective of the paper is a preliminary analysis of the dynamic interaction between the language-emotional-communicative processes which occur in language classrooms and both the natural conditions as well as student-/teacher-generated factors in classroom environments. In the article, a linguistic experiment conducted in three language classrooms with English as the students' second language is described and an analysis of the research outcome is undertaken. The analysis of the research outcome serves a better understanding of the mechanisms which govern successful communication in English as the second language. Thus, the intention of analysing the experiment results might also be considered a voice in the discussion on homeostatic tendencies in a language classroom.

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