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“Exploring foreign language interaction through activities planned on topics of students’ professional interest”

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ABSTRACT

This article describes an action research, whose main objective was to identify the way some activities planned on topics of students’ professional interest affected Foreign Language Learning (FLL). Interaction and communication were the cornerstone and the main achievement. As Van Lier (1998) highlights, the keys to learning are exposure to input and meaningful interaction with other speakers. Assuming the risk to communicate among themselves and with the teacher was part of the search. Fourteen students, who belong to the Law program, fifth semester and attending English Level IV were observed, surveyed and recorded in order to characterize the way they interacted in the Foreign Language (FL). The research showed three categories: The categories established from the analysis of data were: 1) Controlled Interaction through content and task and skill-based interaction, helped the students to interact in the EFL. 2) Semi controlled Interaction through negotiation-based interaction, generating-based interaction and decision-making interaction changed the students’ interaction and 3) Communication raising through engagement and empowering-based interaction affected the students’ interaction.

KEY WORDS: Classroom Interaction, Task-and Content-Based Learning, EFL classroom.

RESUMEN

Este artículo describe una investigación acción. Cuyo principal objetivo fue identificar la manera como algunas actividades planeadas en temas de interés profesional afectaron el aprendizaje de la segunda lengua. La interacción y comunicación fueron los aspectos más relevantes y logros principales. Como Van Lier (1998) recalca que la clave para el aprendizaje es la exposición e interacción significativa con otros hablantes. Asumir el riesgo de comunicarse entre ellos y con el profesor, fueron parte de la investigación. Catorce estudiantes, quienes pertenecían al programa de Derecho, del quinto semestre y atendieron el nivel IV de Inglés, fueron observados, encuestados y grabados para caracterizar la forma en que ellos interactuaron en la Lengua Extranjera. Las categorías que se establecieron del análisis de datos fueron: 1) La interacción controlada a través de la interacción basada en contenidos, tareas y habilidades ayudaron a los estudiantes a interactuar con el inglés como lengua extranjera. 2) La interacción semi controlada a través de la interacción basada en la negociación, la interacción basada en la generación y la interacción en la toma de decisiones cambió la interacción de los estudiantes. Y 3) El aumento en la comunicación a través de la interacción basada en el compromiso y las facultades afectaron la interacción el los estudiantes.

Palabras Claves: Interacción en el Salón de Clases, Aprendizaje basado en Tareas y Contenidos, Inglés como Lengua Extranjera en el Salón de Clases.
INTRODUCTION

A reflection based on an interactive classroom and students’ professional topics of interest goes in the direction of providing learners of English with more than linguistic items. It addresses the principle of giving them reasons “to learn language, learn about language, and learn through language” (Halliday, M. 1985). Giving context for learners to interact with, expanding their own ability to grasp meaning, building up new knowledge, solving problems and interacting meaningfully are undoubtedly some of the main concerns of the current research.

This reflection involved working in groups in order to share abilities and information; it also implied solving problems, exploring knowledge and recycling or reinforcing critical thinking. It also involved suggesting, innovating, acting, doing, learning through own learning strategies and styles, and changing their own roles with the purpose of making a meaningful communication.

In this article the reader will find a theoretical framework that aims at content and task-based learning and the different types of interaction that take place in the classroom. Those concerns are based on sources from local and national research. In the final part, the results, conclusions and implications for further research and pedagogical practice will be drawn in terms of how classrooms activities planned of topics of interest affect the students’ foreign language interaction.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Activities Centered on Topics of Students’ Professional Interest

Teaching departs from the point of introducing new knowledge in order to get learners attention and interest. Teachers, theoreticians, methodologists and psychologists have always claimed discovering the best and safer path to go through and being successful in the task of teaching and learning. Different conceptions, approaches, methods, didactics, classroom
strategies, innovations and research have been formerly and currently applied in order to solve the thorny point of success in FL settings.

The new language must provide, beyond aspects of the language such as grammatical structure, spelling and pronunciation, “a strong and meaningful component which must fill the life of the learner with an enjoyable and unforgettable experience that enriches his cognitive dimension but that establishes points of learners consideration about his own culture in comparison to the one of the target language” (Fajardo, A. 2000).

As it was mentioned above, creating a classroom where students are active participants, who work cooperatively with the goal of learning and helping their peers learn is crucial today in our educational settings. However, there is another key aspect to be worked, and which is related to the activities teachers plan for their students. Are the learning activities good enough to promote interaction? Are they really thought on students’ needs and interests? Can they help students reflect and build up knowledge about the world around them? In this sense, Pineda (2001) claims that “successful language learning occurs when the students are provided with target language material in a meaningful contextualized way with the aim of acquiring information and knowledge” (p.14)

Likewise, Aguilar (2001) introduces a research proposal in order to motivate their students to learn English by responding to their interests and learning styles. She points out that centering on learners’ interests, and on how they participate actively in classes and how they see their real-life experiences, engage them in a real interaction. Gómez and Arcos (1998) bring forward a project work guideline to develop with students, which may help them communicate in a FL, make decisions and work independently on a topic of their interest in a real life context. Finally, González (2001) introduces a proposal to develop oral interaction by applying cooperative learning. Those findings are quite relevant because they have broken traditional patterns and students feel they can express their ideas freely, interact with their partners and assume responsibility in their own learning processes.

However, when students feel they do not have a good communicative competence, their oral interaction is affected and their role changes, as they prefer to be passive agents (it has been mentioned) in the classroom. Canale (1983), (cited by Ramos, 2004) states that “communicative competence implies a linguistic code competence that is related to the grammatical accuracy at the sentence level, including lexical items and rules of word formation, sentence formation, literal meaning, pronunciation and spelling” (15)

According to Hymes (1972) and Bachman (1990), communicative competence has to do with the functional use of language. They emphasize that communicative competence requires realistic interaction among learners using meaningful and contextualized language. These are decisive aspects when thinking about activities, which encourage the development of oral communicative competence or production among learners.
Integration of Language and Content (Topics of Professional Students’ Interests) in FL.

Later research conducted by Cantoni (1987) had contributed to the development of a model of language, integrating language learning and content instruction in the second or FL classroom. This new approach also links language skills and content. Integration and content in L2 is justified for several reasons; some of them are:

The main purpose of language is communication. So, language learnt more effectively for communication in meaningful and purposeful social and academic context should be part of any academic search. Bearing in mind that the language main function is the interactional point of view, people use the language to talk about the surrounded world and their every day experiences; rather than relating the nature of language.

This is one of the reasons for integrating foreign language interaction through activities planned on topics of students’ professional interests. They know and need to know more about their daily experiences or subject matter at the university. Cantoni (1987) argued that when learners’ second language is both the object and medium of instruction, the content of each lesson must be taught simultaneously with the linguistic skills necessary for understanding.

Language instruction provides a substantive basis for learning. Content is highly motivating to catch students’ attention; when a class is focused on a topic of students’ professional interest, they will feel they are not only acquiring a new language; they are also developing concepts and skills associated with subject content.

Content provides a cognitive basis for language learning having “real” meaning. Instead of merely catching the target language in terms of structures and functions, students will be aware that it gives shape to the communicative process. Additionally, students learn content at the same time as they develop significant levels of language proficiency (Genesse, 1987; Lambert and Tucker, 1972).

As students not only appropriate language but also how to apply it in situations such as giving opinions about Divorce in Colombia and in other countries for example, a possible connection can be done with cultural practices in different countries where the TL is spoken. Students will also have to contrast and appreciate different cultures at the time their knowledge grows in reference to the places where the target language is spoken.

Classroom Interaction

When we refer to classroom interaction, it is necessary to start reviewing, on the one hand, some concepts of communication and communicative competence, and on the other, clarifying how a FL classroom can explore interaction in the process of learning a foreign language.
It has been stated that people have found different ways to ‘communicate’ with others, not only through a linguistic code, but also through other manifestations of language: arts, mimics, drawings, in order to share their feelings, thoughts and views about their world. Therefore, communication is one of the most important elements in human interaction, especially in education, and how its use through a foreign language classroom challenges teachers and learners to contribute meaningfully.

When people have the ability to communicate with others in a L1 or in a L2, communication shows some characteristics: “meaningful, conventional, appropriate, interactional and structured” (Richards, 1990). Gaining proficiency in a FL and being able to interact depends on many purposes: approaching other cultures, meeting new people, sharing customs, valuing the native culture, respecting lifestyles, etc. Additionally, students might be motivated to get better professional opportunities, and to share real-life experiences.

Students and teachers spend most part of their classes in a classroom. We cannot get away from the fact that teachers need to do more than just supply learners with a number of language structures to manipulate, but to create classrooms where learners and teachers have the opportunity to interact spontaneously; where they both draw on their experiences, ideas, and imagination. Byrne (1988) describes the foreign language classroom as the place to socialize, to bring the outside world into it, to escape on an imaginative level.

Interaction has taken a relevant role in foreign language learning; there are different concepts for interaction. Thomas (1991,7) in his definition of the verb interact “acting reciprocally, acting upon each other”, highlights the need to communicate with others. Brown (1994) defines it as: “Interaction is, in fact, the heart of communication; it is what communication is all about; we send messages; we receive them; we interpret them in a context; we negotiate meaning; and we collaborate to accomplish certain purposes” (1994,159).

Many researchers have studied the aspect of classroom interaction; we find studies from Chaudron (1995), Malamah-Thomas (1987), Allwright & Bailey (1991) and Ramos (2004), among others. To try to come up with a definition of classroom interaction, Chaudron (1995) states that interaction is: acting reciprocally, acting upon each other; it means, that a teacher acts upon the class, but the class consequently modifies its next action and so forth. For this purpose, the students’ reactions become itself an action evoking a reaction in the teacher which influences his / her subsequent action. As a result, according to Malamah – Thomas, (as cited by Ramos, 2004) “there is a constant pattern of mutual influence and adjustment”.

The researchers mentioned previously have considered interaction as a key factor that affects learning. Their studies have been focused on teacher’ talk, including types of speech, explanations, questions and feedback that take place in the classroom, as well as modifications, amount, and types of speech. They also have focused on students’ talk; they
have analyzed the way students interact among themselves and with the teacher in the classroom.

Some other authors such as Baker and Freebody (1993) have focused their investigations on the organization of literacy activities in the classroom work, specifically in the social production of classroom competence as they consider the way classroom interaction influences literacy. Ramos (2004) explains this case in her project: “Power relations in the EFL classroom through oral interaction” as a clear example of how the social relations that happen in the classroom do affect the learning situations. “When students are in contact with other students and when they are involved in literacy activities, they grow together and learning is achieved” (p.7). Furthermore, Ramos (2004) mentions that interaction in the classroom is not just a unilateral way but a two-way type of relation in which not only students but also teachers are expected to play a role according to which learning can be enhanced.

In connection with what Ramos (2004) mentions, through interaction and the use of language, we show who we are, the culture or community we are part of, our beliefs and our identity. All-Wright (as cited in Ellis 1995) draws great importance to interaction, and conceptualizes it as “the fundamental fact of classroom pedagogy” because “everything that happens in the classroom happens through a process of live person-to-person interaction”. It is in this context where Foreign Language Learning takes place.

Apart from the fact that classroom interaction enhances the students’ knowledge, the interactions that take place in the classroom deal with what students bring to the classroom: their previous knowledge and experiences. Ramos (2004) mentions that their background is brought to the language-learning situation and it is the one that reinforces them, because making use of it, they interact in the classroom. She further asserts: “Students’ previous experiences and their culture and society are valuable when empowering them in the classroom.” (p.11). It implies that the use of students’ previous knowledge in the classroom through interaction empowers the students’ learning and helps to develop their oral skills.

**Principles on Interaction**

Brown (1994) suggests seven principles for structuring a theory of interaction in the classroom. To this research, I considered the next ones:

- **Automaticity:** interaction focuses attention on meanings and messages and not on grammar. Therefore, students are free to interact without language pressure.

- **Intrinsic motivation:** students become engaged with each other in speech acts of fulfilment and self-actualization, and they appreciate their own competence to use language.
Risk-taking: interaction requires certain degree of risk of failing to produce intended meaning, or failing to interpret intended meaning, of being laughed at, of being shunned or rejected.

Interlanguage: the complexity of interaction entails a long developmental process of acquisition. Numerous errors of production and comprehension will be a part of this development. In addition, the role of teachers’ feedback is crucial to the developmental process.

As has been said previously, the teachers’ role in classroom interaction is crucial. They can play many roles in their classes. Brown (1994) claims: “Just as parents are called upon to be many things to their children, neither can teachers be satisfied with none role”. (p.160). Consequently, there are some possibilities where teachers can apply their abilities, some of which are more conductive to creating an interactive classroom. In this endeavor the teacher’s role that I took into account into the process is the following:

The teacher as a facilitator: he/she makes learning easier for students, helping them to clarify doubts about language to negotiate the process that they obtain from their goals. This kind of teacher requires staying away from the directive role and allowing students, with his/her guidance, to find their own pathways to success. Brown (1994:161) adds to this kind of role: “a facilitator capitalizes on the principle of intrinsic motivation by allowing students to discover language through using it pragmatically rather than telling them about language.”

Freire (1987) (as cited by Ramos, 2004) establishes that “the problems and the needs of students themselves must be the starting point in the classroom because this confirms and legitimizes the knowledge and experiences through which students give meaning to their lives” (p.13). Therefore, one important aspect to bear in mind in classroom interaction is the developmental orientation that values and attempts to amplify students’ prior knowledge and experiences.

**Teachers and Students’ Roles**

The different roles that teachers and students can play during classroom interaction are explored in this part. By roles, I mean the ways in which instructors and students view their roles in the classroom. Regarding interaction, Brown (1994:159) mentions that theories of communicative competence emphasize the importance of interaction as human beings use language in various contexts to “negotiate” meaning, or simply stated, to get one idea out of your head and into the head of another person and vice versa.

One of the teachers’ roles in creating an interactive language classroom is the initiation of interaction. Therefore, the best way to develop the initiator’s role and sustaining the interaction is to develop a repertoire of questioning strategies. In FL classrooms, where
students often do not have a great number of tools for initiating and maintaining language, the teachers’ questions in an interactive classroom can fulfill a number of different functions. (Adapted from Brown, 1994: 165).

For Ellis, a key factor in the language acquisition process is “the opportunity afforded the learner to negotiate meaning with an interlocutor, preferably one who has more linguistic resources than the learner and who is adept at foreigner /teacher talk” (1984a, p. 184). Learners need the opportunity to interact with other speakers allowing modification of speech to take place, leading learners to negotiate meaning through interaction. The learner should be involved in cooperative activities and project work which are interesting to them. The role of the teacher in this perspective would be to provide students with opportunities for meaningful interaction, and to establish content which motivates the students; so, there is a real need and willingness to negotiate meaning.

On the other hand, one of the students’ roles is to take the risk of answering questions, no matter whether he/she fails in producing language mistakes, but he/she produces meaning. However, they have to take advantage of what they know; of what they read in different articles; of what they prepared before presenting a debate, a project; of what their classmates are producing too, and so forth.

To conclude, the interactive classroom sheds light on the possibility, not only to learn about the target language, but also to know other cultures, and share with their classmates and teachers, through ideas, experiences, questions and activities that focus their thoughts and beliefs about the world. Here language, as Tsui (1995) claims, “is at once the subject of study as well as the medium for learning” (p.36). It also requests teachers to plan carefully the activities to be developed in the classroom and students to participate actively in the interaction process. That is to say, motivated to learn; thus, classroom interaction stems necessity as judged by the teacher, and is full of ideas on how to make our classrooms more active.

**Tasks-Based Activities in Interactive Classrooms**

In the field of second language learning/teaching, one aspect that has received a lot of attention in recent years is based on the kind of activities students carry out in the FL classroom where one of the tendencies is based on tasks. According to Nunan (1991:10) a task is “a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than on form.”

When Nunan (1992) speaks about design and development of communicative language learning tasks, he makes us reflect about the importance of considering syllabus design as “what learners will learn”, and the methodology as “how learners will learn”. Therefore, the design of learning tasks is part of methodology. Curriculum planning, he says, is like an
integrated set of processes, involving “what and how”. For this purpose a learning task is a range of situations with a variety of learners’ types, especially for ESP teachers.

Expanding on the previous constructs, Willis (1996) (cited by Ariza, 2004) in “Curricular Units: Powerful Tools to Connect the Syllabus with Students’ Needs and Interests”, conceives tasks as activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose in order to achieve a specific outcome. Besides, Willis (1996) gives six types of tasks that could be developed from simple tasks to more complex ones; they are: listing, ordering and sorting, comparing, problem solving, sharing personal experiences, and creative tasks. It is important to take into account that the possible starting point for task activity is based on students’ interests, personal or previous knowledge, problems, and experiences.

Consequently, the role of tasks in teacher development, particularly in the use of tasks analysis, is a means of encouraging a reflective methodology. Thus, it is important to look for activities inside tasks that encourage interaction in the classroom, in which students can discover and take advantage of their topics of professional interest to interact in the foreign language (FL).

Ariza (2004) highlighted Willis’s proposal (1996), where “the task-based learning framework has three main components: pre-task, task cycle and language focus” (p.144); three important components that this project has developed during the research. “The pre-task component is related to the introduction of the topic. The task cycle has three moments. In the first part, students do the task collaboratively; afterwards, during the planning stage, students get prepared to report to the whole class the way they developed the task, informing on the decisions taken. Finally, students report on the process carried out. The last component refers to the language focus, which contains the analysis and the practice. In the former, students examine and discuss specific features of the texts, and in the latter, practice of new concepts is carried out.” (p.144)

The communicative task “involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language, and their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form.” Nunan (1992: 10). Moreover, one of the main FL classrooms concerns is to design some specific tasks-based activities in order to help the students to take the risk of interacting in the classroom using the foreign language. For this purpose, communicative learning tasks as input to obtain an interactive classroom is a possibility that Littlewood in Nunan (1992) considers: “the learner must distinguish between the forms he/ she has mastered as part of his linguistic competence, and the communicative functions which they perform. In other words, items mastered as part of a linguistic system must also be understood as part of a communicative system:” (p. 13)

One of the goals interaction looks for is the learners’ confidence and the parallelism development of the FL from the language they know. Likewise, students engage in using
language purposefully and cooperatively, concentrating on building up meaning. Furthermore, Fountain and Vale (1996: 217) state some advantages of a task-based activity:

- “Suits mixed-ability groups
- Allows for a rich language input
- Provides a highly motivating context for language
- Provides authentic context for language
- Motivates students to take risks with language and to look for language they want to use rather than repeat predetermined language from a textbook
- Encourages social interaction and peer teaching
- Encourages success at the individual student’s own cognitive and language skill level.”

Franco and Muñoz (2000) in their project “Task-Based Activities: A way to initiate fourth grade children in writing texts in English” considered that the task-based approach allows learners to become active constructors of the language due to the fact that while students focus their attention on carrying out a specific practical task, e.g., interviewing someone, completing charts or organizers, they are actively constructing the language. As the tasks become more complex, they challenge students to use all the knowledge they are acquiring and their previous knowledge. And based on it, new language is constructed.

Some other research studies have demonstrated the importance of students’ prior knowledge; Nuñez, Pineda and Téllez (2004) in “Key aspects for developing your instructional materials” stated that a crucial aspect to promote an adequate atmosphere for learning is the activation of prior knowledge. Besides, these authors based on Dick and Reiser (1989) add that this activation helps students to feel confident when getting in contact with the information to be learned.

This activation can be initiated by means of rich activities before the main topic is confronted. Nuñez et al. (2004) point out: “Vocabulary exercises, visual aids, mental mapping strategies, and graphs are useful means by which we can explore prior knowledge. In addition to the activation of prior knowledge, we should also keep in mind the type of interaction that our activities foster. Besides individual practice, there must be opportunities for pair and group work that could maximize their chances for exchange of information.” (p.130)

Tasks are also an instrument to stimulate and use the previous knowledge that students have obtained, and based on it, new knowledge is constructed. Thus, the new knowledge will restructure the previous one and, in this way, it leads to its improvement.
On the other hand, tasks have some important components. They are useful instruments that contribute to their selection, adaptation and transformation. Nunan (1991) identifies six tasks components: goals, input, data, activities, settings and roles. The Goal is the intention that the teacher has with the task. It is the bridge between the task and the curriculum. Input is the data that form the starting point of the tasks; for instance: guiding, handouts, organizers, transparencies, films, and so on. Activities are what learners do with input. Roles refer to the parts that teachers and students are expected to play in performing a task. Finally, the settings are the classroom arrangements specified in the tasks; that is, if in order to carry out a task, the class needs to be arranged in some specific way.

It is relevant to think about student's lifestyles, interests and needs, because they may become a tool to engage students in the language learning process. Some teacher-researchers have tried to focus on these concerns, and have interesting findings that have helped to promote oral interaction in classrooms settings. Viáfara and González (2002) claim the importance of task-based learning as an opportunity students have to interact in EFL classes (Through four samples of tasks: information gap, reasoning gap, opinion gap and problem solving, which were designed to be developed at university levels.)

Research questions and objectives

The questions for this research were originated in my interest to encourage students to use the FL through my classes. Moreover, when I noticed that students did not feel confident enough in interaction and communication, I started wondering about how this problem could be solved. This was the main difficulty I faced with a third level class at the School of Law at local UPTC- Tunja.

A successful experience with the students was the opportunity they had to choose their topics of interests specially those of their profession, controlling each activity of the process. The task proved to be rewarding when they worked on topics of their professional interest, but the most important aspects were: the interaction and attitudes. Therefore, I was interested in looking for the activities that could help the students to obtain better results in working interactively with students’ professional interests.

Trying to provide a possible solution, I decided to implement a methodological plan under the principles of interaction, as a way to encourage students to do things with English. In addition, I observed that activities centered on students’ attention gave them the opportunity to express freely and meaningfully. That is why my questions are stated as follows:

Main Question

1. How do classroom activities planned on professional topics of interest affect students’ Foreign Language interaction?
Sub-Questions

1. What kinds of activities help students of Law to interact in the Foreign Language Classroom?

2. How does students’ interaction change in the Foreign Language?

Research design

Type of study

Following a qualitative research approach, this project based its methodological design on Action Research, which includes: planning, action, systematic observation and reflection; all of them repeated as many times as the process produces the changes sought.

Data collection and Instruments

The data were collected during an academic term (sixteen weeks) by means of collection sources which included videotapes, observation formats, surveys, transcriptions and students artifacts. The instruments to collect the data were applied to fourteen students.

Carrying out the research

This research was developed in three units planned on topics of students' professional interest. Each unit was composed of six stages following some activities prepared in order to answer the main question and to categorize the activities that helped the students to interact. The following chart shows the planning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exploring</th>
<th>Getting Informed</th>
<th>Focused on Language</th>
<th>Intensive Reading</th>
<th>Expanding and Producing</th>
<th>Generating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. Sharing with a partner</td>
<td>D. Pre-reading activities</td>
<td>Focused on Language</td>
<td>Preparing Comprehension Questions</td>
<td>Giving oral Account to the group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E. Reading</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F. Conceptual map</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G. Summarizing</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of Transparencies</th>
<th>Game to Classify words</th>
<th>Conceptual Map</th>
<th>Reading and Listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of Transparencies</td>
<td>Guessing Information</td>
<td>Conceptual Map</td>
<td>Reading and Listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions and Answers</td>
<td>Exchanging Information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Questions and Answers</td>
<td>Listening Exercise</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Listening Exercises</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intensive Reading</th>
<th>Expanding and Producing</th>
<th>Generating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparing yes/no and whquestions</td>
<td>Giving oral Account to the group</td>
<td>Discussion ActivitiesDebating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Once the population was selected, the procedure used for carrying out the research was:

- An observation stage, where I took notes in the middle and at the end of each class in order to reflect about them. Those reflections and observations were categorized in observation formats which include what learners did, principles, the teacher's purpose and the comments. (see table No. 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT LEARNERS DO</th>
<th>PRINCIPLE</th>
<th>TEACHER’S PURPOSE</th>
<th>COMMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Previous knowledge</td>
<td>Exploring Giving opinions Making comments</td>
<td>To engage target language To state meaning</td>
<td>Students were participating actively; they used the brainstorming technique whose purpose is “to initiate some sort of the mixing process...it is often put into excellent use in preparing students to read a text, to discuss a complex issue, or to write on a topic”. Brown (1994:181) and the target language was promoted. (see video: 2 minute (2'))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-reading organizer</td>
<td>Approaching Observing Guessing Decoding</td>
<td>Skill development</td>
<td>The organizer chart helped students to give their personal points of view. This kind of activity helps the students to focus on what is important. Bromley et al. (1999) claim that students highlight key concepts and vocabulary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-reading activities</td>
<td>Approaching: Answering questions Listing paragraphs Skimming</td>
<td>Pre-reading techniques</td>
<td>Students were introduced to the topic based on the questions and skimming activity, &quot;which is a type of rapid reading&quot; Richards (1992:322) in this way, students got the main ideas from the reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarizing</td>
<td>Awareness Organizing the information Referring to dictionary Consulting the teacher and the partners</td>
<td>Reading and understanding Purposeful reading</td>
<td>Students had the opportunity to reinforce what they did in the previous activities and to condense their main ideas from the text and their own points of view about it. (see video: '16')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debating</td>
<td>Expanding Exchangeing knowledge Expressing opinions Defending points of view</td>
<td>Decision-making Use of the target language Meaningful communication</td>
<td>They were active, confident and motivated to interact with the topic, and the target language was promoted.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Application of three surveys, each one at the end of each unit, in order to gather personal students’ information from the activities, feelings and engagement in the process. (See annex 1).

- Checking the videos to identify categories that emerged from the observation formats, the surveys’ results and some students’ artifacts. (See annex 2).
Transcriptions from three specific stages, during the three units, were taken in order to produce an accurate description about the way the students interacted with the teacher and among them. Unit 1: Stage No.5. Expanding. Activity: Discussion activities. Unit 2: Expanding. Activity: Plenary session. Unit 3: Expanding. Activity: Project presentations. I took into account the Brown's Interaction Analysis System BIAS, Brown (1975) (mentioned in Malaham-Thomas (1991)).

These are the basic categories of description in BIAS:

**TL:** Teacher lectures, describes, explains, directs

**TQ:** Teacher questions

**TR:** Teacher responds, accepts feelings of the class; encourages, jokes with pupils

**PR:** Pupils respond

**PV:** Pupils volunteer information, comments or questions

**S:** Silence. Pauses

**X:** Unclassifiable

The results were taken in terms of the times that each student interacted. I took three keys for each intervention:

**Key:**

↓ Teacher interacts with student

↑ Student interacts with teacher

↔ Interaction between two students. (See annex 3)

Chart No.1 shows an example of the observation format based on the field notes; and it can be corroborated with the video and the surveys’ results. The example is related to unit 1: Marriage. Three stages were selected at random: exploring, intensive reading and generating. The main purpose of this observation was to explore FL interaction through activities planned on topics of students’ interest. The activities were based on strategies designed to provide input and to promote output. They were on specific stages, activities, skills and principles.

The following tables show the stages designed to provide input and output:
Table 2: Strategies/stages designed to provide input

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE</th>
<th>ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>SKILLS</th>
<th>PRINCIPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploring</td>
<td>Previous Knowledge, Giving opinions, Making comments, Decoding, guessing, finding out.</td>
<td>Speaking, listening, writing</td>
<td>Interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting Informed</td>
<td>Pre-reading: observing, guessing-decoding, matching</td>
<td>Reading, Speaking</td>
<td>Approaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reding: Identifying general and Secondary ideas.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summarizing: Mapping, Concluding.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing on Language</td>
<td>Grammar-vocabulary Meaning-Context</td>
<td>Sampling, writing</td>
<td>Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensive Reading</td>
<td>Cooperate, Work with others, complete tasks, built confidence, and give and get feedback</td>
<td>Reading, speaking, writing</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Strategies/stages designed to promote output.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE</th>
<th>ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>SKILLS</th>
<th>PRINCIPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expanding</td>
<td>Socializing, Round table, project work, workshops, presentations, film discussion, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cooperative Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producing</td>
<td>Websites, papers' discussion, debating, problem solving, publishing, writing, etc.</td>
<td>Speaking, listening, reading</td>
<td>Decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generating</td>
<td>Pre-research exercises</td>
<td>Speaking, reading, writing</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

Categories emerged after reading and analyzing the data. In order to find common patterns, a code system was applied to all the instruments related to the research questions. While observing the interaction, I found out that Controlled interaction helped the students to interact among them and with the teacher. Other category was found in terms of how the students’ interaction changed through Semi-controlled interaction, and the last one, how the Communication raising affected the students’ interaction. Besides that, I also transcribed some activities and wrote comments about them. With those transcriptions I found out the
students who interacted the most. In the activities were either the students or the teacher and the way they did. Three students were selected at random. (See annex 3. A transcriptions example and the control format).

Conclusions

The main objective of this research was to identify classroom interaction through topics of students’ professional interest. This project also aimed at categorizing some of the activities that helped the target population to interact in the FL classroom and at characterizing the way students’ interaction changes when using the target language.

In order to answer the main question, how do classroom activities planned on professional topics of interest affected students’ foreign language interaction, a communication raising through engagement-based interaction and empowering-based interaction affected the students’ interaction.

Then, to answer the first sub-question, what kind of activities helped the students to interact in the FL classroom, a series of tasks and skills-based interaction that fostered students to interact were designed, taking into account topics of their profession; in this case, Family Law. The students were able to give opinions about topics as Marriage, Divorce and Family Violence. Special vocabulary, expressions and situations related to their field of study helped students to interact with the target language in a meaningful way.

In relation to the second-sub question, how does students’ interaction changed in the Foreign Language, was mediated by Semi-controlled interaction through negotiation-based interaction, decision-making interaction and generating-based interaction.

Further, the research’s objective was to give some patterns in order to improve the ESP in terms of planning activities based on topics of students ‘interests to use the FL in an interactive way. It also aimed at identifying the way some activities planned on professional topics of interest affect the students’ interaction.

Besides, this project aimed at enriching Law curriculum; in terms of making the English subject a part of the philosophy of the Law program: to form lawyers with an integral knowledge and with a global vision. Moreover, this project could give the university the possibility to involve students in their different fields of study through the FL. Finally, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) could make a new sense in the teaching and learning of English.
Implications for further research and pedagogical practice

After finishing this research, I drew some conclusions which must be taken into account in our pedagogical practice. To get started: a new classroom model whose syllabus must begin with real students, analysis is urgently needed. The kind of syllabus that I propose is one in which active and cooperative students interact meaningfully in the FL. This implies that we, teachers, should not expect to have fluent speakers of English in the absence of adequate exposition where students can interact among themselves and with their instructors.

Another important aspect to be considered is how the teachers’ questions empower interaction and meaningful learning, and of course the use of the target language.

It is important to be innovative with the materials we are using in the FL Classroom. This is a topic that deserves further research in terms of analyzing what kind of materials help the students to use the FL in a meaningful way, besides the materials, the contents promote interaction in the way students face their topics of interest.

Finally, it is necessary to continue researching about the methodology teachers are using in the EFL classroom, and how when they promote opinion, suggesting, guessing, sharing and building up knowledge by means of interaction, students begin to get involved in a meaningful learning.
Annex 1: Survey to students
EXAMPLE OF THE FIRST SURVEY
UNIVERSIDAD PEDAGÓGICA Y TECNOLÓGICA DE COLOMBIA
MASTER OF ARTS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING
(Self-report)

STUDENT: ________________________________ DATE: __________________

TOPIC: MARRIAGE

1. From the activities, which ones helped me to use the FL? Which ones did not? Put an X in the ones you choose:

   YES    NO

   Previous knowledge (the big question)
   Sharing with a partner your definitions
   Pre-reading organizer
   Pre-reading activities
   Reading

   Conceptual map
   Summarizing
   Focused on language
   Written report
   Oral report
   Discussion activities (K-W-L Sequenced chart)

2. From 1 to 5, from the followings skills, which ones I improved? How did these skills help me to improve my English? 1 = a little  5 = a lot

   Listening       
   Speaking       
   Reading        
   Writing        

3. How did I feel through the activities developed?

   Confident ______ 3) Reliable ______  5) Active ______
   Inhibited ______ 4) Sociable ______  6) Others ______

4. From 1 to 5 how did the topic help me to improve both my language and to increase my knowledge?

   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

5. What did I like most about the activities? Why?

   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
The Big Question

Valid Marriage
- Person of sex: Woman & Man
- Not in propiety age

Invalid Marriage
- Same sex
- In some countries, the age
- The marriage involuntary
- Inadequate age
- Parens

Marriage
- What? Is the patient two persons?
- Person with purpose
- Common purpose
- How the paternity
- The promotion and other objectives

Legal Impediments
- Non Fuerza and Dolos
- Power
- Volunteer in relation with the age
- Concern, in some countries, to have other marriage
- Bigamy
- Interdictio legal
- Incapacity in relation with the age

Legal Relationship of Husband and Wife
- Sexual Relationship
- Common Paternity
- Be free deciding to have sons
- Protection
- Divorce and
- Divide the common paternity

Personal Opinion about Marriage
In the modern society the marriage
departure is change, in the past the
objective of this was the
One more between two persons, now
the more important is life, is the
economic protection and the paternity

ANNEX 2: example of student's artifacts
ANNEX 3: A transcription example

Transcriptions
T: teacher
A: Andrés
T1: Teresa
S: Sheila

UNIT 2: Divorce STAGE No. 5 EXPANDING Activity: Plenary session

T: well, now we are going to do a plenary session, because you have already read, discussed, and shared ideas about divorce in U.S.A., in other countries and in Colombia. So in this moment you have many opinions or points of view to share, so, the discussion starts right now.

A: In this afternoon we are going to discuss about divorce in Colombia and in U.S.A. the divorce in these countries are similar but the process is different. The grounds in Colombia and U.S.A. only differ in the conviction of a felony and the commissions’ right and their grounds are similar as the sexual relation after the marriage. The cruel and inhuman treatment habitual drunkenness … The divorce ends the marriage and all civil effects. Now we are going to discuss about it.

T1: according to the reading and discussions, what is your opinion or what do you think about divorce in general?

S: in my opinion, the interest of the state is to maintain good marriages, for that reason, the divorce is a healthy thing when the couples don’t understand each other.

S: The divorce is an excellent alternative to dissolve a bad marriage and to separate the right properties

T: another opinion? Personal opinion or taken from the text

A: in my opinion, the divorce definition in Colombia and USA is similar because divorced is defined as a process that finishes legally the marriage.

T1: what do you think is the difference between divorce in Colombia, USA and other countries?

S: the difference is the process. In Colombia there aren’t grounds to divorce for impotence, and in USA, it does. In Colombia there is jurisdiction and in USA, conviction of a felony. In Colombia There is one law about divorce, in USA is according to each state.

T: O.K. very good Jenny. O.k. Natalie?
T1: I agree with Jenny, the grounds of divorce in USA differ from one state to another, because USA is a federal Republic and Colombia is a Central Republic.

T: O.K. now we are going to listen to Teresa, she is going to present some conclusions about this plenary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENTS</th>
<th>STUDENT ~TEACHER</th>
<th>TEACHER ~STUDENT</th>
<th>STUDENT ~STUDENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>↑ (1 time)</td>
<td>↓ (2 times)</td>
<td>←→ (1 time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(3 times) ←→</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>↑ (1 time)</td>
<td></td>
<td>←→ (2 times)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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