Differences between the EFL and the ESL Language Learning Contexts

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to describe and compare the EFL and ESL learning contexts with respect to the availability of conditions that facilitate L2 acquisition. 6 volunteers from a group of students participating in a summer study abroad program filled out questionnaires regarding their English usage before and during the study abroad program. Analysis of the data found that not only did the subjects report having had more L2 contact in the ESL context than in the EFL context but that the nature of that contact was more conducive to language learning in that it made available more input made comprehensible and comprehensible output. These findings help to begin to understand the differences between the two language learning contexts and how educators may be able to adjust classroom conditions to increase conditions that are believed to facilitate L2 acquisition.

1. Introduction

Currently in Japan, the issue of English education has received a lot of attention. One of the major foci of these discussions has been the issue of whether or not English should be taught in the elementary schools (Brown, 2006). In contrast, to date the issue of how to make existing English classes more effective has received less attention. Certainly, however, trying to improve the effectiveness of English education is equally important. Given that it is often considered easier to learn a language in a second language setting as opposed to a foreign language setting, insight might be gained into understanding the mechanism that drives second language (L2) acquisition by comparing these two settings. Therefore, this study will approach the issue of language education by comparing the language learning contexts in second language settings with the language learning context in foreign language settings.

2. Literature Review

Some researchers (Freed, 1995; Huebner, 1995) have noted that there is a per-

ceived difference between learning a language in a second language (SL) context and learning a language in a foreign language (FL) context[1]. Moreover, many researchers (Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg, 1993; Carroll, 1967; Diller & Markert, 1983; Freed, 1990; Lennon, 1995; Spada, 1986; Tonkyn, 1996) have found that studying an L2 in an SL context (for example on a study abroad program) has a positive impact on learning that language. Given the seemingly superiority of the SL learning context for learning an L2, one issue that has not been explored is how the SL learning context differs from the FL learning context.

The term context as it is used here should be understood to refer not simply to the environment in which the learner is situated at a given time, but also to refer to the learner's relationship with that environment. Thus, two learners sitting in the same classroom at the same time may be experiencing two different language learning contexts. For example, one learner may ask and answer many questions; this behavior could require the teacher and/or the other students to respond and give feedback to this student. Another student may sit quietly and answer questions only when called on directly. Due to their different in-class behaviors and the responses they generate from those around them, these students create different contexts for language learning for themselves, even though they are in the same place at the same time. There have been two different ways to investigate context in researching its effects on SLA; one is to look at the amount of L2 contact that learners have, and the other is to look at the conditions available for L2 learning.

Research on the Impact of L2 Contact on L2 Acquisition

In previous research, context has sometimes been operationalized in terms of the amount of contact that learners have with the L2. Unfortunately, this research has not reached any consensus regarding the impact that L2 contact has on L2 acquisition. While some researchers (Day, 1985; Krashen and Seliger, 1976; Mason, 1971; Upshur, 1968), have found that amount of L2 contact has little or no impact on L2 acquisition, others (Bialystok, 1978; Brecht and Robinson, 1993; Monshi-Tousi, Housseine-Fatemi, and Oller, 1980; St. Martin, 1980; Seilger, 1977) have contended that it does have an impact. Moreover, two researchers (Freed, 1990; Spada, 1986) found that while overall L2 contact had no significant impact on L2 acquisition, type of L2 contact did.

One major problem with this research, however, is the way that these studies view context. By defining context as L2 contact, these researchers assumed that all types of L2 contact provided learners with the same opportunities to learn an L2 (e.g.,

speaking with friends, listening to the radio). While, Spada (1986) and Freed (1990) attempted to overcome this problem by classifying activities as either interactive or non-interactive, this did not account for differences in how learners participated in any given activity, e.g., how active the learner was when speaking with friends. By defining context in a different way, it may be possible to get a clearer picture of how that context might affect language acquisition.

Conditions Claimed to Facilitate SLA

In focusing on a possible correlation between amount of L2 contact and L2 acquisition, the literature discussed in the previous section, has taken the view that the learner needs exposure to comprehensible input in order to learn the L2. There was very little recognition of other conditions[2]. For example, Spada (1986), in commenting on why *watching television* would be given less weight than *engaging in a conversation* in the coding of the data collected by her language contact profile, stated:

> The rationale for the differential assignment of quantitative values in this case is that although the same amount of time is spent in both activities, they can be viewed as being qualitatively different… Presumably, watching television does not make the same communicative demands on the learner as engaging in conversation. Furthermore, even though watching television can be a rich source of linguistic input to the learner, it may not always be comprehensible input, depending on the learner's proficiency level. In conversation, however, the learner is more likely to obtain comprehensible linguistic input, because of the necessity for the learner to negotiate meaning with his/her interlocutor. If, as Long (1982) maintains, negotiation of meaning is the key to getting comprehensible input, which in turn is thought to aid the second language acquisition process, then conversational interaction in English can be viewed as contact which is more beneficial to the learner than mere exposure to linguistic input via the radio, television, etc. (p.186)

Recent literature, however, has found that in addition to comprehensible input there are other contextual conditions that facilitate L2 acquisition.

Input

Within the SLA literature, at least two different input conditions can be identified:

1) Comprehensible input (Krashen, 1981, 1983, 1985)

2) Input made comprehensible (Long, 1985; Pica & Doughty, 1985)

Each of these conditions focuses on a different type of input.

Krashen (1981, 1983, 1985) defined comprehensible input as being input that is at level *i+1*, where *i* is equivalent to the learner's current level (1985: 2). He stated that even though the input is at a more advanced level than the learner's current level, the learner is aided in understanding it by context and extralinguistic information (1983). Thus, comprehensible input is not simply input that the learner can understand, but is input that the learner understands **and** that is slightly beyond the learner's current level.

Input that is made comprehensible is distinguished from comprehensible input. With input made comprehensible, the addressees in some way indicate the they have not understood the input (e.g., by asking for clarification or confirmation) so that the speakers modify it in a way that makes it comprehensible (Pica and Doughty, 1985). Thus, the input that the learners receive is consciously modified by the speaker in order to promote comprehension.

Output

With respect to output, at least two different conditions have been proposed:

1) Production practice (Swain, 1985)
2) Comprehensible or modified output production (Swain, 1985, 1995)

While each of these conditions focuses on a different function of output, each defines output in the same way, i.e., as the act of producing the second language (Swain, 1995).

One output condition that has been proposed is the production practice condition. Swain (1995) pointed out that in practicing the L2, learners are helping to improve their interlanguage fluency, but not necessarily their accuracy.

Swain (1985, 1995) argues that learners can be aided in their attempts to improve their proficiency by being asked to modify their output. In cases where the learners' interlocutors indicate that the learners' output is not comprehensible, these indications might prompt the learner to "recognize some of [their] linguistic problems" (1995: 126). In recognizing these problems, the learners' attentions may either be turned to "something [they] need to discover about the L2" (1995: 126) or to the fact that they have drawn incorrect hypotheses about the L2 which need to be reformulated in order to avoid further inaccuracies.

Summary

The research into the effect of L2 contact on L2 acquisition has shed little light on how context affects L2 learning when that research defines context as the amount of contact the learner has with the L2. One of the major problems with this research is that it has treated each type of activity involving L2 contact as equally beneficial in L2 learning and has assumed that the only part an individual learner can have in the language learning context is to seek out L2 contact. By re-conceptualizing the understanding of context as the degree to which conditions that facilitate L2 acquisition can be found, more of an emphasis can be placed on the learner's role within the context. By focusing on the conditions that are available in the context, one can look at what the learner may be doing during L2 contact that may facilitate learning the L2. In approaching the issue in this way, a clearer picture of the differences between the SL and FL learning contexts can be drawn. Therefore, the question that this study will focus on is:

> How does the ESL context differ from the EFL context with respect to the degree to which the conditions claimed to facilitate SLA can be found?

3. Methodology

Subjects

For this study, 6[3] female subjects volunteered among 34 students participating in a summer study abroad program with a prestigious private university in the eastern United States. All volunteers were students who, at the time of the study, were enrolled at either a private women's university in Japan or a private women's junior college in Japan.

Data Collection

The majority of studies (Day, 1984, 1985; Freed 1990; Kaplan 1989; Seliger, 1977; Spada, 1986) that have collected data on L2 learners' contact with their L2 have done so by means of a questionnaire. For this reason, a similar questionnaire was used in this study; however, the form of the questionnaire was modified in order to give attention to the various proposed conditions that facilitate L2 acquisition.

Each subject was asked to fill out a questionnaire at the end of every other week during the months of June and July, before the study abroad program. During the program (August), the subjects were asked to fill out the questionnaire at the end of each week. There were two reasons for collecting the questionnaire every week

during the course of the study abroad program rather than every two weeks. First, based on Seya's (1995) findings that students undergo an adjustment period when they arrive abroad, it was expected that subjects' patterns of contact with the L2 might initially change more abruptly when abroad. Second, it was expected that the schedule of the study abroad program – participants spent the first week living with an American family, the second two weeks of the program living in a college dormitory, and the fourth week staying in a hotel in New York City – might also have an impact on the subjects' patterns of contact with the L2.

The Questionnaire

In order to compare the ESL and EFL language learning contexts, it is necessary to describe them. In following the above discussion, 8 factors were chosen with which to describe the two contexts: the amount of Text-Media Interactive Contact (TMI Contact), the amount of Human Interactive Contact (HI Contact), the different types of TMI Contact, the different types of HI contact, the availability of comprehensible input, the availability of input made comprehensible, the availability of production practice, and the availability of output made comprehensible.

In order to describe each context with respect to each feature, questionnaires were used to gather data and then scores were created to correspond to each factor. First, the subjects were asked to record the number of times that they participated in each of 24 activities (12 TMI Contact activities and 12 HI Contact activities) in a given reporting period. These data were used to calculate the first 4 scores: the amount of TMI Contact, the amount of HI Contact, the different types of TMI Contact, and the different types of HI Contact. Furthermore, subjects were asked to choose a conversation that they had during the reporting period in which they (the subjects) had difficulty understanding their interlocutor and report how much they (the subjects) had spoken, how much they (the subjects) had understood, and how many times they (the subjects) had asked their interlocutors to repeat themselves. These data were used to calculate two more scores used to describe the different contexts: a comprehensible input score and an input made comprehensible score. Subjects were also asked to choose a conversation that they had in the reporting period in which their interlocutors had difficulty understanding them (the subjects) and report how much they (the subjects) had spoken and how often their interlocutors had asked them (the subjects) to repeat themselves. From these data, two more scores were calculated: a production practice score and an output made comprehensible score.

Statistical Analysis

All the measures that were used to describe each of the L2 learning contexts were analyzed using an ANOVA. Once the averages of the measure in question were calculated for the two different contexts, the ANOVA was performed to determine whether or not there was a difference between the contexts for the measure in question. In addition to determining the F score, an effect size was also determined. The reason for including an effect size was to see to what degree there was a difference in the language learning contexts with respect to each variable (Cohen, 1988). For the ANOVA, Cohen recommends using the effect size **f**. This effect size is the standard deviation of the means of the groups divided by the standard deviation within the populations. Cohen notes that since one of the assumptions of the ANOVA is that the variance for the samples being compared are equal, it is acceptable to use the standard deviation for either group in calculating the effect size **f**; however, since the ANOVA is robust in the violation of the assumption of equal variance, in practice, it is possible that the standard deviations for both samples will not necessarily be equal. For this reason, in calculating the effect size, the standard deviation for the ESL scores was used. While this choice was clearly arbitrary, it allowed for consistency in calculating the effect size. For purposes of this study, if **f** was larger than 0.325, which is between what Cohen refers to as a medium effect size of **f** (0.25) and what he refers to as a large effect size of **f** (0.40), it was determined that there was a difference between the two contexts with respect to the given measure.

4. Results and Discussion

L2 Contact

In the EFL context, the subjects had an average of 18.195 TMI contacts per 2 weeks (see Table 1). In the ESL context, they had an average of 69.125 TMI contacts per week. An ANOVA done to determine the statistical difference between these two averages showed that the two averages were significantly different ($F (1, 10) = 5.966$, $p < 0.05$). Furthermore, the effect size (**f** = 0.518) was larger than 0.325. Thus, it can be concluded that each week in the ESL context, the subjects had significantly more TMI L2 contact than they had every two weeks in the EFL context.

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Table 1: TMI L2 Contacts

	EFL Context		ESL Context	
	Date	**TMI Contacts**	**Date**	**TMI Contacts**
Reiko	6/17	33	8/6	44
	6/29	42	8/11	47
	7/19	33	8/19	66
			8/24	70
Kazumi	6/15	16	8/6	121
	7/10	12	8/11	42
			8/19	35
			8/24	419
Hanako	6/16	14	8/6	96
	7/11	8	8/11	117
	7/29	1	8/19	68
			8/24	116
Midori	6/15	16	8/7	37
	7/6	15	8/19	39
	7/27	18	8/24	17
Keiko	6/20	1	8/6	18
	7/13	2	8/11	15
			8/19	40
			8/24	32
Sayaka	6/20	41	8/6	35
	7/6	31	8/11	23
	7/21	29	8/19	51
			8/24	80

Table 2: TMI L2 Contact Types

	EFL Context		ESL Context	
	Date	**TMI Contact Types**	**Date**	**TMI Contact Types**
Reiko	6/17	6	8/6	11
	6/29	4	8/11	9
	7/19	5	8/19	10
			8/24	7
Kazumi	6/15	6	8/6	9
	7/10	5	8/11	8
			8/19	8
			8/24	8
Hanako	6/16	7	8/6	10
	7/11	6	8/11	11
	7/29	1	8/19	11
			8/24	9

	6/15	6	8/7	8
Midori	7/6	4	8/19	10
	7/27	5	8/24	7
	6/20	1	8/6	8
Keiko	7/13	2	8/11	8
			8/19	10
			8/24	8
	6/20	5	8/6	9
Sayaka	7/6	8	8/11	9
	7/21	7	8/19	9
			8/24	9

At the same time, in the EFL context, the study abroad subjects received their TMI contact from an average of 4.723 types of TMI contact while in the ESL context, they received their TMI contact from an average of 8.93 types of TMI contact (see Table 2). An ANOVA performed to determine the statistical significance of the difference between these two averages showed that the two averages were significantly different ($F_{(1, 10)} = 29.832$, $p < 0.001$), and that the effect size ($\mathbf{f} = 2.782$) was very large. Thus, it can be seen that the subjects received their TMI contact from a larger variety of TMI L2 contact types in the ESL context than they did in the EFL context.

In the EFL context, the subjects had an average of 9.167 HI L2 contacts every two weeks; in the ESL context, they had an average of 169.388 contacts every week (see Table 3). An ANOVA performed to determine the statistical difference between these two averages found a trend toward significance ($F_{(1, 10)} = 2.872$, $p < 0.150$), and that the effect size ($\mathbf{f} = 0.346$) was larger than 0.325. It should be noted, though, that the reason that the two averages were not found to be statistically significant was due to the extremely large standard deviation in the reported amount of HI L2 contact during the study abroad program (see Table 3). Furthermore, this extremely large standard deviation was largely attributable to one subject (Hanako). This subject reported having had 787, 812, 623, and 332 HI L2 contacts in her four weeks in the ESL context. In comparison to this, the highest number of contacts reported by any of the other subjects in any one-week period in the ESL context was 128 contacts reported by Keiko. If Hanako's reported contacts are removed from both the EFL context data and ESL context data, the subjects reported having had an average of 9.934 HI L2 contacts every two weeks in the EFL context and an average of 75.566 HI L2 contacts every week in the ESL context. The ANOVA performed to determine the statistical difference between these two averages found

that they were significantly different (F (1, 8) = 21.231, p < 0.005), and that the effect size (**f** = 1.092) was much larger than 0.325. Thus, the average number of HI L2 contacts that the subjects had each week in the ESL context was significantly higher than the average number of HI L2 contacts that the subjects had every two weeks in the EFL context.

Table 3: HI L2 Contact

	EFL Context		ESL Context	
	Date	**HI Contacts**	**Date**	**HI Contacts**
Reiko	6/17	3	8/6	111
	6/29	3	8/11	63
	7/19	8	8/19	70
			8/24	64
Kazumi	6/15	15	8/6	180
	7/10	5	8/11	66
			8/19	32
			8/24	35
Hanako	6/16	8	8/6	787
	7/11	4	8/11	812
	7/29	4	8/19	623
			8/24	332
Midori	6/15	11	8/7	29
	7/6	6	8/19	25
	7/27	5	8/24	22
Keiko	6/20	0	8/6	81
	7/13	0	8/11	108
			8/19	128
			8/24	67
Sayaka	6/20	17	8/6	59
	7/6	46	8/11	138
	7/21	20	8/19	109
			8/24	99

Table 4: HI L2 Contact Types

	EFL Context		ESL Context	
	Date	**HI Contact Types**	**Date**	**HI Contact Types**
Reiko	6/17	2	8/6	6
	6/29	1	8/11	8
	7/19	4	8/19	5
			8/24	5

Kazumi	6/15	5	8/6	6
	7/10	2	8/11	9
			8/19	7
			8/24	7
Hanako	6/16	3	8/6	9
	7/11	2	8/11	8
	7/29	2	8/19	7
			8/24	10
Midori	6/15	4	8/7	6
	7/6	3	8/19	7
	7/27	2	8/24	5
Keiko	6/20	0	8/6	8
	7/13	0	8/11	5
			8/19	7
			8/24	5
Sayaka	6/20	5	8/6	7
	7/6	6	8/11	10
	7/21	5	8/19	7
			8/24	7

At the same time, in the EFL context, the subjects received their HI L2 contact from an average of 2.75 types of HI L2 contact while in the ESL context, they received their HI L2 contact from an average of 6.96 types of HI L2 contact (see Table 4). An ANOVA performed to determine the statistical difference between these two averages found that there was a significant difference between them ($F (1, 10) = 25.782$, $p < 0.001$), and that the effect size ($f = 2.020$) was much larger than 0.325. Thus, the subjects received their L2 contacts from a significantly larger variety of types of contact in the ESL context than they did in the EFL context.

Input Conditions

In the EFL context, in conversations where they reported having had difficulty understanding their interlocutors, the three subjects reportedly understood an average of 48.50 seconds of every minute of their interlocutors' speech (see Table 5). In the ESL context, they reported that in these types of conversations, they understood an average of 48.58 seconds of every minute of their interlocutors' speech. An ANOVA performed to determine the statistical difference between these two averages, found that they were not significantly different ($F (1, 4) = 0.000$), and that the effect size ($f = 0.005$) was much smaller than 0.325. Therefore, it cannot be concluded that subjects understood their interlocutors more or less in the ESL context than they did in the EFL context.

Table 5: Amount understood (in seconds) of 1 minute of
interlocutors' speech

	EFL Context	ESL Context
Kazumi	46.86	39.61
Hanako	55.43	53.80
Sayaka	43.20	52.33
Average	48.50	48.58

Table 6: Number of times per minute of interlocutors' speech
subject asked interlocutor to repeat or explain

	EFL Context	ESL Context
Kazumi	0.05	0.66
Hanako	0.44	1.53
Sayaka	0.51	0.47
Average	0.33	0.89

In the EFL context, in conversations where they reported having had difficulty understanding their interlocutors, the three subjects reportedly asked their interlocutors to repeat or explain what they (the interlocutors) had said an average of 0.33 times per minute of their interlocutors' speech (see Table 6). In the ESL context, in these same types of conversations, they reportedly asked their interlocutors to repeat or explain what they (the interlocutors) had said an average of 0.89 times per minute of their interlocutors' speech. An ANOVA performed to determine the statistical difference between these two averages found that they were not necessarily statistically different ($F_{(1, 4)} = 2.407$), but that the effect size ($\mathbf{f} = 0.490$) was larger than 0.325. This can be understood to mean that the subjects had asked their interlocutors to repeat or explain what they (the interlocutors) had said significantly more often on an interaction-by-interaction basis in the ESL context than they had in the EFL context.

Output Conditions

In the EFL context, in conversations where the subjects reported that their interlocutors had had difficulty understanding them (the subjects), the subjects reportedly spoke for an average of 37.34 seconds for every minute of the conversation (see Table 7). In these types of conversations in the ESL context, the subjects reported having spoken for an average of 42.31 seconds per minute of the conversation. An ANOVA that was performed to determine the statistical difference between these two averages found that they were not statistically different ($F_{(1, 4)} = 0.093$), and that

the effect size (**f** = 0.160) was smaller than 0.325. Therefore, it can be concluded that on an interaction-by-interaction basis, the subjects did not report having spoken more or less in the ESL context than they reported in the EFL context.

In the EFL context, in conversations where subjects reported that their interlocutors had difficulty understanding them (the subjects), the subjects said that their interlocutors asked them (the subjects) to repeat or explain themselves an average of 0.74 times per minute of the subjects' speech (see Table 8). In these types of conversations in the ESL context, the subjects said that their interlocutors asked them (the subjects) to repeat or explain themselves an average of 1.30 times per minute of the subjects' speech. AN ANOVA to determine the statistical difference between these two averages found that they were not significantly different (F (1, 4) = 0.804), but that the effect size (**f** = 0.338) was larger than 0.325. Therefore, it can be concluded that on an interaction-by-interaction basis, the subjects were reportedly asked to repeat or explain what they had said more often per minute of their speech in the ESL context than they had been asked in the EFL context.

Table 7: Amount (in seconds) of each minute that subjects spoke

	EFL Context	**ESL Context**
Kazumi	13.02	30.92
Hanako	60.00	36.00
Sayaka	39.00	60.00
Average	37.34	42.31

Table 8: Average number of times per minute interlocutor asked subject to repeat or explain herself

	EFL Context	**ESL Context**
Kazumi	0.35	1.19
Hanako	1.54	2.17
Sayaka	0.33	0.53
Average	0.74	1.30

Discussion

From the above discussions about amount and types of L2 contact and conditions that are believed to facilitate SLA, a number of differences can be seen between the ESL context and the EFL context. First, the subjects had considerably more L2 contact, both TMI and HI, in the ESL context than they had in the EFL context.

Moreover, they were receiving both their TMI contact and their HI contact from larger varieties of types of contact in the ESL context than in the EFL context.

At the same time, on an interaction-by-interaction basis there were clear differences in the degree to which input conditions and output conditions could be found in the ESL context and the EFL context. First, while there was no difference between the two contexts with respect to the amounts of comprehensible input the subjects received, in the ESL context, they elicited more input made comprehensible than in the EFL context. Moreover, while they did not practice production any more in the ESL context than they did in the EFL context, the subjects were encouraged to produce more comprehensible output in the ESL context than they were encouraged to produce in the EFL context.

In conclusion, in the ESL context, on an interaction-by-interaction basis, the subjects elicited more input made comprehensible, and were encouraged to produce more comprehensible output than they did in the EFL context. At the same time, because the subjects received considerably more L2 contact in the ESL context than in the EFL context, certain other conclusions can also be made. First, because of the large disparity in the amounts of L2 contact in the two contexts, it can be concluded that overall the subjects received considerably more comprehensible input and elicited considerably more input made comprehensible in the ESL context than they had received in the EFL context. Moreover, for the same reason, overall the subjects practiced production considerably more and were encouraged to produce more comprehensible output in the ESL context than they had received in the EFL context.

5. Conclusion

Before discussing the larger implications of the data presented above, two limitations of this study should be discussed. The first limitation of this study is with the size of the sample. While data from 6 subjects were used in comparing the EFL and ESL learning contexts with respect to the amount and types of TMI and HI contact, data was collected from only 3 subjects in comparing the EFL and ESL learning contexts with respect to the availability of input, output, and interaction conditions. It would certainly be preferable to have data from more subjects in a future study.

The second limitation regards the use of questionnaires. While, as mentioned, many of the studies looking at the relationship between amount of contact and L2 acquisition also used questionnaires, most of the research that has been done on

language learning conditions has been done by collecting actual language samples. For this reason, this study should be considered more of an exploration into possible differences between the two language learning contexts.

The purpose of this study was to look at the differences between the EFL context and the ESL context. On the one hand, it was found that subjects had much more contact, both TMI and HI, with English in the ESL context than they had in the EFL context. Furthermore, it was found that these subjects also had a much larger variety of contacts with English in the ESL context. Due to this large difference in the number and varieties of contacts, it can be concluded that there was a large difference in the degree to which conditions that facilitate L2 acquisition can be found in the two contexts. Furthermore, it was found that, on an interaction-by-interaction basis, in the ESL context subjects received more input made comprehensible, were encouraged to produce more comprehensible output, and negotiate for meaning more with their interlocutors. This finding is important because it helps to understand the mechanism that may be driving the improvement that learners show during study abroad. While previous research focused on the contact that learners had with the L2, it did not look at either how the contact was driving the subjects improvement nor what the differences were between the ESL context and the EFL context. By finding that there are specific differences between the EFL context and the ESL context with respect to the degree to which certain conditions that facilitate L2 acquisition can be found, we begin to understand ways in which the EFL context can be changed in order to increase the availability of conditions within that context.

First, it may be desirable to try and increase the amount of in-class interactions that students have in the EFL context. It may also be desirable to try and find ways to get students to ask more questions when they do not understand what has been said. Finally, teachers may also want to take note of how often they encourage students to re-formulate what they (the students) have said when what they (the students) have said is not grammatically correct, regardless of whether or not the teachers can understand what was said. It should not be understood, however, that these suggestions should take the place of formal instruction. If the goal of EFL classes is to help students improve in all aspects of proficiency, it may be necessary to increase the opportunities for them to speak in class, and to negotiate meaning in class. Instruction, however, will still play an important role in helping students make the most effective use of these opportunities.

Based on the findings of this study, there are a number of areas in which future

research should be conducted. As mentioned above, because the findings in this study are based on self-report data, it is important that similar types of research be undertaken using more objective methods. For example, Matsuda (2003) used diaries to collect information on activities in which students participated over a given period. Also, Brecht and Robinson (1993) collected data on language learning context by using diaries kept by students, student interviews conducted by field-workers, and notes and journals kept by field-workers. Finally, Zentella (1997) gave subjects tape recorders in order to collect samples of the language that they used in different settings and with different interlocutors. Using these methods would give a more comprehensive and objective understanding of how often subjects participated in different activities, in which activities and in which contexts they participated, and to what degree different conditions could be found in those contexts. Moreover, research should continue to be conducted on the identification of conditions for L2 acquisition, investigating the impact of these conditions on interlanguage development. To do this, researchers might consider what impact different conditions have on interlanguage development, and how these conditions can be provided more effectively in the EFL classroom.

Notes

[1] Due to the issue that this study investigates as well as the way that researchers and writers have at different times conflated and contrasted the terms second language and foreign language, this writer will make a conscious effort to make certain distinctions. In cases where the term second language would be used to either a second or foreign language, i.e., where reference to the language learning context is not relevant, the abbreviation L2 will be used; however, in cases where the writer is making specific reference to the language learning context, the abbreviation SL will be used for second language and the abbreviation FL will be used for foreign language.

[2] Of course one of the main reasons for this is that much of this literature was written at a time when comprehensible input was considered the most important environmental condition for SLA.

[3] There originally had been 7 subjects, but one of the subjects dropped out before the conclusion of the study. Moreover, with respect to the language learning conditions available in the different contexts, only 3 of the subjects provided enough data to be included in the analysis.

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