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THE CONTRIBUTION OF PAULO FREIRE AND AUGUSTO BOAL IN THE MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING ITALIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

This paper is a contribution from the Studies on Language Acquisition (SLA), especially Interactional Studies field, and from Conversational Analysis (CA) to the Critical Pedagogy of Paulo Freire. It wants to offer a proposal of linguistic measurement of speakers' involvement in language class conversations encouraged by the pedagogical premises of Paulo Freire declined into practice through the game-exercises of Augusto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed*. The analysis of the most significant conversational sequences is presented to show the validity of a critical language teaching approach in developing language competence. The topics that will be presented derive from an experimental research between groups, within the context of an Italian L2 language course in the *Centro de Linguas Modernas* (CLM) of the University of Santiago De Compostela. The results consist in the comparison of conversational turn-taking system organization produced within the two different group-classes.

INTRODUCTION

Dialogue is the center of Paulo Freire's popular educative model, especially in language education. Nowadays there are a lot of examples of language approaches referring to Freire's pedagogy, but few or none are engaged in the task of explaining in which way it works within the

process of language learning. My contribution is aiming principally at explaining where its efficiency in linguistic terms comes from, by discussing significant spontaneous language data. The parallel purpose is to highlight the validity of a critical language methodology and, in order to do so, a broad range of tools from the Conversational Analysis equipment will be used. This practice wants also to increase that field called Critic Applied Linguistic claimed by Alastiar Pennycook in the 1990 : "What I am arguing for here is a pedagogically and politically engaged critical applied linguistics which is responsive to its social, cultural and political context and which uses a notion of transformative critique as its main mode of inquiry". As he said at the beginning of his work, this expression is not really used, but he will describe it later as "an emergent approach to language use and education that seeks to connect the local conditions of language to broader social formations, drawing connections between classrooms, conversations, textbooks, tests, or translations and issues of gender, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, culture, identity, politics, ideology or discourse".

The main question that generated the research proposal asked: in which terms of Freirian Pedagogy, declined in the game-exercises of A. Boal, can be considered a vector of the development of fluency, accuracy and proficiency in foreign language learning?

My first hypothesis considered that a critical language teaching approach generates a learner's involvement and participation in the group-class conversation. In doing so, it creates more opportunities to practice actively the language. What I want to analyze is the grade of learners' involvement in the classroom discussions, taking Ciliberti's definition of involvement as "active participation of all the students to the life of the group-class, as negotiability of points of view and interpretations, as acceptance of diversity". In order to elicit dialogue within the group-class, I organized Freire's pedagogical premises after Boal's techniques of his Theater of the Oppressed, thinking of them as collaborative partners sharing the same objective of raising people's critical consciousness. This choice intended to develop a critical dialogue to realize the co-construction of meaning of the conversational topics. In the first part, I will present a brief overview of the theoretical background and the methodology used; in the second, I will present in the first part the elements within

the experimental group session which in my opinion motivate and enhance the use of a critical language teaching approach, by discussing the collected language data:

1. How to let learners meet as active members of society rather than only as students of the same language;
2. How to co-build the dialogue through the game-exercises of TDO;
3. The overwhelming effects of a critical education in language teaching and learning.
4. How to operationalize the emotional involvement raised from the co-built dialogue, as vector of the development of interactional competencies in the foreign language.

Finally, I will discuss the main results elicited by the comparison of the treatment in the two groups, giving my conclusion on the possibility of defining learner's involvement in linguistic terms, together with considerations about the limits of the work and consequent further suggestions for future research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Within the Interactional Studies, "language learning is a unique event in the mind of learner and is the product of interaction with the others". Referring to the Hypothesis of Interaction formulated by Long, Ellis wrote: **"**The interaction hypothesis can now be summarized as a hierarchical three-part statement. The first part advances the central claim that learners need to comprehend input in order to develop their inter-languages. The second part states that opportunities to modify the structure of a conversation promotes comprehension. The third part concerns the conditions that create opportunities for restructuring".

This contribution clarifies how interaction works in the process of language competence develop. Moreover, the subsequent hypothesis of Comprehensible Output formulated by Swain8 suggests that the production of sentences in interaction is crucial for developing language competence. Recently, in line with the former, Nuzzo and Grassi9 argued that interactional dynamics are fundamental to the process of pushing output.

As introduced below, I consider the concept of involvement in conversa-

tion as Ciliberti does. But, since it can be considered a relative and not objective concept, I found it important to operationalize it, in order to treat it in a scientific manner and be able to measure it practically. In order to do so, I chose to start from the methodological tools of Orletti's definition in her work on the inequality of power in conversation. She stated that during a conversation, speakers can produce "strong" moves and "weak" moves: Orletti10 defines a strong move as one that creates a new conversational sequence because it determines the next interlocutor's action, while a weak move doesn't produce anything new in the interaction because it is dependent and subordinate to the strong one. For example, a question is a strong move because it generates a reply sequence, which confirms the reply as a weak move. So, replying after a question is an expected action in the conversation. From this premise, I can say that conversational involvement and the level of participation are indirectly proportional, in the sense that the more is the grade of involvement, the less is the grade of expectancy of the conversational moves by the speaker. The parameter by which a conversational move is defined as strong or weak is the TRP (Transition Relevance Place): where the current speaker turns into the current listener and vice-versa. To explain it better, TRP is the adequate place in the conversation where a speaker turn-change can take place. Within this theoretical framework, conversational involvement coincides with the engine that makes strong a speaker's conversational move. From this assumption, I could observe two main "involvement moves" occurred in the class conversations of the two groups:

(a) Self-selection (Self-S), which is when one speaker takes his/her turn;
(b) Other-initiated other-repair 11 (Other-REPAIR): when one speaker perceives a problematic linguistic expression and carries on its repair.

These two strong moves can be provoked by the presence of a question, requiring a reply, or by a certain linguistic form (trouble source) requiring a repair, a correction. To visualize better the concept, I made a continuum of the conversational strength moves depending on the TRP presence or absence, where at the left we find the weaker and the right the stronger:

Continuum

- _____ +

(Self-S+TPR) (Self-S + REPAIR) (Self-S - TRP)

(Question/Reply) (Other -REPAIR)

As we can see, self-selection in a repair context is a weaker move than the one in absence of any kind of TRP because it is more unexpected. I will use this theoretical framework to interpret the conversational turn-taking system organization elicited from the experimental treatment, in order to operationalize participants' involvement in conversation defining strong and weak moves.

Methodology

The research was a between two groups research design aimed at comparing the effects of the linguistic treatment in two different experimental settings. At the beginning of the academic Italian language course at the CLM (*Centro de Linguas Modernas*) of the University of Santiago De Compostela, the possibility to participate in a theater workshop had been presented to the Italian classes of the beginner level as a way to develop expressive capacities and fluency with a mother tongue teacher through special activities from Social Theater. The importance of language as an interpersonal communicative tool and the role of the teacher (as moderator) and the students (as active participants) and the differences between theater and social theater activities were clarified. Students came from various parts of Spain. The experimental group was constituted by volunteer students with high personal motivation (e. g. to overcome shyness and self-insecurity). We could move desks and seats as we liked; there was not a course manual to follow but the linguistic elements of their level course were arranged for the dramatic activity purposes. The treatment had two main objec-

tives: first, to develop language skills by practicing verbal interactions; second, as Freirian pedagogy was the basic theoretical framework, to engage participants in critic reflective activities prompted by the Boal game-exercise. In fact, I consider essential Boal's process of de-mechanization of the learner's body through a new discovery off the five senses12, not a simple warming-up exercise.

The control group, on the other hand, was formed by students who applied for the summer A2 Italian course: most of them had a clear instrumental motivation in obtaining a language frequency certification; few of them wanted to learn Italian to go studying in Italy and only two students applied for pleasure. The course required a manual with didactic units and the space of the room was fixed. During the two weeks of the course, three pre-selected dramatic activities, selected for their gradual complexity in language and dramatic involvement carried previously within the experimental group, were proposed to the control group-class.

The three selected activities of the control group and every session of the experimental one were videotaped to subsequently transcribe the dialogues considering MacWhinney conventions.

What I am going to describe in the following part regards students' model of participation in dialogue and their personal evaluation of the experience.

1. How to let learners meet as active members of society other than only as students of the same language
2. For Paulo Freire, alphabetization process is fundamental to allow the raising of consciousness. Moreover, pedagogy in his formulation promotes the development of a decision-making process together with social and political responsibility.

During one session with the experimental group, I proposed a *rhythmic machine* activity15. This activity asks to represent a concrete or abstract topic with rhythmical and repetitive movements and sounds. Then the rhythm can be faster and then explode or decelerate. The important point is that every participant goes outside the machine and looks at the whole system to have a wider view of the total action. The topic tackled was the difference between the State of Spain and the region of Galicia, since it is a widely debated issue in the region. In

the representation of the two realities, participants started with some stereotypical aspects and exaggerated them. After the first view of the whole machine, they began to change elements and sounds and at the third trial, they represented something completely different. What was significant was the conversation in Italian was promoted by the physical activity, because participants were engaged in finding a common cultural image, which actually was very different. Below, you can see a transcription extract showing the numerous participants' turns during the dialogue. The speakers alternate their turns to add new information about what it meant to be Spanish: cultural aspects in T23 and T24, geographical coordination in T28, language diversity in T33.

I. extract: Rhythmic machine session: co-building common cultural background about the State of Spain

→ T23*NAT: *ma il flamenco non è tipico*
→ T24*VIC: *non c'è il flamenco c'è il tango e non c'è il paso doble*
T25*MOD: *bueno, un baile, ma il marziano non lo sa*
T26*VIC: *credo che gli orari sono diversi*
T27*MOD: *sì però sono parole queste*
→ T28*LOR: *manca mediterraneo -, atlantico-, cantabrico?*
T29*MOD: *potrebbe essere, le vuoi mettere tutte e 3? già per esempio atlantico o cantabrico-+*
→ T30*NAT: *un GPS per il marziano!*
T31*MOD: *ah ah un GPS per il marziano! ehm# non lo so, una caratteristica che è*
solo del vostro paese!
→ T32*LOR: *allegria.*
→ T33*NAT: *più lingue, i quattro idiomi.*
→ T35*VIC: *diversità?*
→ T36*NAT: *diversità c'è in altri# paesi!*

HOW TO CO-BUILD THE DIALOGUE THROUGH THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED GAME EXERCICES: DE-CONSTRUCTING POWER THROUGH THE IMAGE THEATRE

Another relevant session was dedicated to the *Image theater* technique. This asks to represent a concept with an immobile figure done with

the body and then, if necessary, the moderator can ask for a sound or a movement of the statue to better understand its message. The topic selected in the experimental group this time was the space of power. The exercise was repeated twice: first, every participant did his/her statue and second, after a look at everyone's representation, they were asked to complete another participant's image by interacting with his/her image. After some adjustments of all of the statues, we started a conversation on their meaning. It was meaningful for learners to notice how different one's external interpretation could be with respect to the original idea of the sculpture. The following extract of the conversational sequence shows two important conversational aspects: first, the process of interpretation and sharing of viewpoints managed by learners and second, the fact that every sequence is connected with the previous one by a textual connector that stand in addition (*e, anche*, T02), contradiction (*ma*, T03) and affirmation (*sì*, T08). In some cases, the teacher-moderator is interrupted by participants (T05), which rarely occurs in standard language courses, and in others it happens that one learner preferred asking for language correctness from a peer, before speaking to the whole class, as in T07 and T09. Last turn (T30) shows an example of personal critical interpretation of the statue made by a participant involved in the discussion about power.

II. extract: Sharing points of view through Image Theater

→ T01*NAT: *fare che la gente non possa parlare, il pensiero, non poter esprimere il pensiero*
→ T02*VIC: *e anche può essere una persona che sta con-, con# con lei ma sta dicendo: eh!, non puoi dire*
qualcosa perché non gli# #lascia, non gli lascia [% altera il tono di voce per il discorso diretto]
→ T03*NAT: *ma se está d'accordo? sarebbe di fronte.*
T04*MOD: *sì*, <*ma*#> [>]
→ T05*VIC: [<] <magari> *io lo# farò così, io# io mi #[% si porta le mani alla bocca per coprirla]*
T06*MOD: *farei, lo farei* +…

→ T07*VIC: [*si rivolge a* NAT] *io stesso è unito*?
→ T08*NAT:*sì*
→ T09*VIC: *io stesso*?[% *rivolto a* NAT *che annuisce*]
T10*VIC: *ehm, eu mesm, io stesso,mi###*
T11*MOD: *mi chiuderé#, mi tapperei la bocca.*
T12*VIC: *mi tapperei la bocca.*

In the following part of the same dialogue, I only ask two questions to make participants reflect about what they are doing. What is to be highlighted is that learners reply fast and without hesitation, which is not often granted in a standard language class.

T16*MOD: v*edi, Natalia ha introdotto un tema molto importante, che è il tema dello spazio-,*
dello spazio# del potere-,
→ T17*LOR: uhm uhm+...
T18*MOD: *perché in questa immagine il potere dove sta*?
→ T19*LOR: *alle spalle*.
T20*MOD: *mentre nell'immagine che avevate fatto voi, il potere dove stava*?
→ T21*NAT: *45 # gradi...girato di 45 gradi.*
(…)
T29*MOD: *la sua postura era dritta, ferma e tu invece eri un po' più così e stava davanti,*
in questo caso anche se io sto dietro, perché si capisce che ce l'ho io il potere?
[% NAT *interviene ma non si capisce*]
→ T30*LOR: *senza avisarme senza dirme qui, vad, vado, vado adesso, io... io sto parlando-,*
e mentre, tu# il poder, il podere ti ferma la bocca.

THE OVERWHELMING EFFECTS OF A CRITICAL EDUCATION IN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING: PARTICIPANTS' EVALUATION

The last day of the workshop, participants were asked to draw a representation of their personal path across the language workshop from the beginning to the end, evaluating it. LOR used the metaphor of an

egg crashing to let a new chick be born. The egg symbolizes the passing of time that gave the chance to improve her expression, aptitude, relation with colleagues and aspects of her personality. For this reason, she wrote at the end "classes but more than Italian, to grow as person".

→ T28*LOR*: simboleggia il passo del tempo qui che per me non è stato solo imparare l'italiano, anche per migliorare la mia espressione+,*
(...)
→T31*LOR: *l'attitudine, ehm, la relazione con i compagni e molte cose de#*
de la personalitè, personalitè#
(...)
→ T33*LOR: *personalità chi no non, per questo io scrivo*
lezioni pero molto più che l'italiano, crescere come persona.

Results

How to operationalize the emotional involvement raised from the co-built dialogue, as vector of the development of interactional competencies in the foreign language

The most revealing part of the present conversational analysis is the comparison of participants' reactions between the two observed groups. My hypothesis argued that a major involvement in conversation would have been found only within the experimental group, due to the longer duration of the course. This included a longer period for the participants to reach confidence with each other and to become used to the dramatic activities. On the other hand, I supposed that in the control group there would have been less involvement during the three activities monitored due to their non-standard character for the institutional context. On the contrary, I have found that the same dramatic activities elicited the same type of conversational moves, which I identified, as described earlier, with a certain grade of involvement. Below I present some examples of conversational sequences prompted by the three activities in the different groups.

I. Self-selection in repair context without TRP: other-repair

The first table shows the example of other-repair, here described as self-selection in repair context without TRP because the activity instruction allows a one-by-one conversational turn organization, to let the present speaker express herself. This activity was proposed on the first day of the two groups to its interactional aspect. It required a first moment of interview in couple making some questions to know the interlocutor and second, to assume our interlocutor's identity to talk about him/herself. So many factors could influence participant performance. The extract, on the contrary shows unexpected repair sequence to help the construction of the current speaker, making a medium strong move.

Tab. 1: **First Activity**	
II. Self-selection in repair context without TRP: other-repair	
Experimental group	Control group
T26*LOR: *eh, io ho quaranteci#, quarantacinque anni, eh# eh vivo, abito, eh, a Santiago eh, cosa fa? io fa, io sono archeologo ehm, eh lavoro in una, eh#* → T27*CES: *istituto!* T28*LOR: *istituto de##* → T29*CES: *sientifico*? T30*LOR: *sì, sientifico*.	T198*P12: *studio italiano per hobby+.. [%aspirazione della <h>come <j>].* T199*MOD: *per?* T200*P12: *per hobby* T201*MOD: *per*? → T202*CORO: [% t*utti suggerisco obby* *senza aspirazione della acca e ridono*] T203*P12:####obby [% *senza aspirazione dell'acca*]

II. Self-selection without TRP giving extra comments

The second table offers examples of strong moves because speakers who take the second turn in both groups want not to do a repair but to put emphasis on what the current speaker has finished saying. The second

activity asked participants to choose an object from various items on the teacher's desk and re-invent it in name, function, color, smell and taste. Even in this case, instructions allowed one speaker at a time. It is a very funny game that can prompt numerous unexpected conversational slide sequences. In T67 of experimental group, we have a repair on the verbal item, where ANA propose a more expressive one for "open the door" as JOS is actually saying "pry open" a door; in T82 RU is asking for the taste of the Italian book invented by SI.

Tab. 2: **Second activity**	
Self-selection without TRP giving extra comments	
Experimental group	Control Group
T66*JOS: *un estrumento con quale tu puoi abrire la porta-,* → T67*ANA: *forzare la porta!* [% *enfasi su forzare*]	T81*SI: *Questo non è una chiave,* questo è un *libretto per studiare italiano [% risate]* è molo difficile il libretto! → T82*RU *a che sa*? T83*SI: *sa## a pizza italiana* [% *risate*]

III. Turn-changing without TPR: other – repairs prompted by images

The last table has three examples of the use of dramatic action. As we can see, as in the experimental group as much in the control one, there are turns-change with repair purpose, but this repair is prompted by and made on the interpretation of the image more than on the incorrectness of the sentence. This activity is carried out in pairs: A is miming his routine day while B is describing it verbally. In the first column we find even an overlap of two repair turns where in T016 LOR is restructuring her turn and at the same time ZUL initiates her repair sequence to specify what participant B is "drinking". Within the control group the same kind of repair is found in T310, where SI is correcting the item

worn by student B in his mimic. In fact, SI identified in B's performance some specific elements relating to sport activity, changing the lexical item "pajamas" with "tracksuit". These repairs are significant here because they are made outside of the teacher's instructions: they are spontaneous and elicited by dramatic activity regarding students' personal routines.

Tab. 3: **Third activity**	
Self-selection prompted by images: other-repair	
Experimental group	Control group
T014*LOR:<*toma cafè*>,[//] <*prende caffè*>[>] T015*MOD: [<] <*prende caffè*> → T016*LOR: *no, non prende* <*caffè*>[>] *non le piace.* → T017 *ZUL: [<] <è## succo d›arancia>	T309*MOD: *si toglie o si mette?* ti metti il *pigiama?* → T310*SI: *no, si mette ropa de sport*

CONCLUSION

The analysis of conversational sequences allows one to understand how, in linguistic terms, a critical language teaching approach promotes participants' involvement. In this study I underlined how Boal's Theater of the Oppressed techniques influence the organization of the turn-taking system by prompting an amount of strong moves, like self-selection in absence of teacher instruction. Another strong move is the other-initiated other-repair where the correction is given without hesitation. These types of repair sequences are elicited by the images and performances generated from the TO techniques. Moreover, my initial hypothesis on the control group participation has not been confirmed because we found a lot of sequences elicited by the same activities as the experimental group participants did. In light of this, it is possible to say that a critical language teaching approach promotes speakers' involvement in the dialogue, creating an adequate space for learners to express themselves, entering in deep relation with each other by sharing experiences and points of view. At the end of the

course, participants felt to have experienced something more than a normal language course, a relevant personal experience that gave them new tools to read reality from different perspectives. That is possible because TO techniques, being a practical vector of Freire's critical pedagogy, draw from participants' personal resources in terms of life experience, interests and creativity which prepares both people to enter into relations and linguistic soil to flourish in pushed output. That is manifested by the numerous turns of conversational transcription of experimental groups where several turns are taken in order to share different points of view and co-construct a common cultural background by critical interpretation of images on reality themes (see extracts of *rhythmic machine* and *image theater* activities).

Of course, the present study also presents limits: first, limits in the number of participants involved in the experimental group. That contributed to create a relaxed environment among participants; second, participants originally were all from Europe even if from different countries.

Finally, the two languages taken into account are of the same linguistic family, not so distant from each other.

It would be interesting to repeat the research with students from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds to observe not only the type of turn system organization and intercultural aspects but also how students develop language competence. Nevertheless, this study proposes a new look at critical language teaching approach, offering a contribution to begin its diffusion.

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