The Mediating Effect of Language Exposure to the Student Interaction and Sociolinguistic Competence of Senior High School Students

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the importance of student interactions influences the process of improving sociolinguistic competence, especially since it plays a crucial role in English proficiency. This study examined whether language exposure mediates the relationship between student interactions and sociolinguistic competence among senior high school students. Data were collected from 179 respondents through adapted questionnaires assessing students' interaction, language exposure, and sociolinguistic competence. Mediation analysis using the Sobel test was conducted to test the hypothesized mediation model. Student interaction was significantly related to sociolinguistic competence, language exposure was significantly associated with sociolinguistic competence, and student interaction was significantly related to language exposure. The indirect effect of language exposure on student interaction and sociolinguistic competence significantly indicated that language exposure mediated the relationship between student interaction and sociolinguistic competence. The intervention showed the consideration of language exposure in improving students' sociolinguistic competence, especially at school. Since the study provided pieces of evidence for the mediating role of language exposure in the relationship between student interaction and sociolinguistic competence, allowing and encouraging the students to be more exposed to the language as they interact using English may be a promising avenue for enhancing sociolinguistic competence, particularly in aiming students' overall English proficiency.

Keywords: *education; language exposure; mediation analysis; sociolinguistic competence; student interaction; Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

For language learners, knowing and using appropriate language in social contexts is crucial to avoid misunderstandings, especially when they're not regularly exposed to the target language (Rahman et al., 2022). This ability is part of sociolinguistic competence, a key aspect of communicative competence, which involves producing suitable utterances for specific social contexts. Despite strong linguistic and grammatical skills, learners often struggle with sociolinguistic competence (Mede &

Dikilitas, 2015; Huong & Hoa, 2021), making interaction difficult (Fikron, 2018). This issue partly arises from not knowing which words fit the situation (Martinez & De Vera, 2019), as learners often lack an understanding of the sociolinguistic rules needed to choose the right language form (Gulomova, 2020). Therefore, learners should have opportunities to practice these skills to improve their language use across various social situations.

Identifying meaning, adapting language to context, and producing appropriate utterances are crucial for effective communication (Kanwit & Geeslin, 2020). Though essential to language learning (Koran, 2016), sociolinguistic rules should be integrated into curricula to guide learners in choosing suitable forms (Mede & Dikilitas, 2015). Sociolinguistic competence can help prevent misunderstandings in cross-cultural interactions, whether in writing or conversation (Subandowo, 2022), and is vital for resolving communication issues (Schmitt & Rodgers, 2020).

Teachers who create a positive learning environment help students develop sociolinguistic skills through direct instruction and classroom interaction, allowing practice in diverse scenarios (Rahman et al., 2022). Group work enhances students' language use, interaction, and interest in various topics (Indus Valley International School, 2021). Teachers should design communicative activities that encourage interaction and impact sociolinguistic performance (Rohmah, 2017; Mede & Dikilitas, 2015). This study draws on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes social interaction in cognitive development (Mcleod, 2023), and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, highlighting real-life settings and the interplay between learners and their surroundings (Tong & An, 2024). Dialogic teaching further supports learning by fostering critical thinking and collaborative knowledge-building (García-Carrión et al., 2020). Overall, student interaction is crucial in the learning process.

A study at Visayas State University found that over half of the students had moderate language exposure, primarily at school or through media rather than at home or with peers (Domingo, 2020). This highlights the importance of increased exposure and interaction for developing sociolinguistic competence, particularly in English (Mede & Dikilitas, 2015; Guliansa et al., 2020). Exposure helps students engage in socialization, learning the skills needed for a second language and adapting to new social customs. English learning should be encouraged both in and outside the classroom, especially with effective methods, to enhance students' abilities to express themselves (Ettlinger et al., 2016; Al Zoubi, 2018). Rahman et al. (2022) focused on instructors' views on developing sociolinguistic competence but did not examine students' perspectives, particularly their ability to communicate appropriately in context. Soriano and Garcia (2021) explored how language exposure enhances grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation through English lectures but did not assess its impact on appropriate language use in context, focusing on media and technology. No research has yet explored the link between student interaction and language exposure in improving sociolinguistic competence among senior high students at the University of Mindanao, which this study aims to address.

This study explores the relationship between student interaction and sociolinguistic competence, mediated by language exposure. It highlights how language exposure influences student interactions and helps them use appropriate language in different social contexts, reducing misunderstandings. The findings are valuable for students, educators, and the education sector, emphasizing the role of language exposure in second language learning and instruction. They may also inform future research and influence educational practices, supporting SDG 4: Quality Education by promoting inclusive and effective learning environments. The study examines levels of student interaction, language exposure, sociolinguistic competence, and the relationships between them, assessing if language exposure mediates the link between interaction and sociolinguistic competence.

METHOD

This section consist the study's method which are the research design, respondents, instruments and materials.

Research Design

The researchers used a quantitative, descriptive-correlational approach to explore the relationships between variables and the mediating effect of language exposure on student interaction and sociolinguistic competence. Data collection involved validating questionnaires, obtaining approval from the Senior High School Department at the University of Mindanao, distributing parental consent forms, and administering surveys. The completed surveys were compiled and backed up to prevent data loss. Statistical analysis was then conducted to assess the mediating effect of language exposure on the students' interaction and sociolinguistic competence.

Research Respondents

The study involved 179 senior high school students from the University of Mindanao, Matina Campus, selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representation across grades and strands. This method ensured comprehensive coverage of all subgroups (Murphy, 2021). The researchers randomly surveyed participants to reflect the role of language exposure in mediating student interaction and sociolinguistic competence. Selection criteria included being a bona fide student, enrolled in the Senior High School Department for the second semester of 2023-2024, and willing to participate, excluding non-participants or those who withdrew.

Research Instruments and Materials

This study used validated questionnaires adapted from various authors to collect quantitative data, with reliability measured using Cronbach's Alpha. The sociolinguistic competence questionnaire had a score of 0.942, student interaction scored 0.947, and language competence was 0.897, indicating strong internal consistency. The sociolinguistic competence questionnaire, based on Nguyen (2017),

assessed indicators like respect and emotional maturity using a five-point Likert scale. The student interaction questionnaire, adapted from Khoul (2003), had 64 items, while the language exposure questionnaire, from Magno and Bunagan (2009), measured exposure from home, friends, and media, all using Likert scales to gauge behavior frequency.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the learners' student interaction, with an overall mean score of 3.74 and a standard deviation of 0.46, indicating consistent responses. Cooperation scored the highest mean of 4.17 (SD = 0.66), rated as high and often observed, while the attitude scale had the lowest mean" of 3.23 (SD = 0.50), rated as moderate and sometimes observed.

Table 1. Level of Learners' Students Interaction

Indicator	Mean	Standard Deviation
Student Cohesiveness	3.96	0.58
Teacher Support	3.81	0.65
Involvement	3.37	0.76
Investigation	3.57	0.71
Task Orientation	4.05	0.62
Cooperation	4.17	0.66
Equity	3.74	0.72
Attitude Scale	3.23	0.50
Overall	**3.74**	**0.46**

The results suggest that students cooperate effectively, fostering a positive learning community. Wu et al. (2022) found that collaborative thinking helps learners share ideas, reducing loneliness and building collective knowledge. Reflective attitudes also aid collaboration, especially with more influential peers. Koul (2013) emphasized the importance of designing learning environments that promote traits linked to positive attitudes and success.

Research shows that teaching techniques and classroom sociocultural environments significantly influence students' eagerness to learn and attitudes. High cooperation fosters collective knowledge, reduces loneliness, and highlights the need for learning environments that encourage positive attitudes for academic success.

Table 2 shows that the level of language exposure has an overall mean of 3.31 and a standard deviation of 0.68, indicating consistent responses. The media indicator scored the highest mean of 4.02 (SD = 0.66), rated as high and often observed, while the home Indicator scored the lowest mean of 2.54 (SD = 1.05), rated as low and rarely observed.

Table 2. Level of Students' Language Exposure

Indicator	Mean	Standard Deviation
Home	2.54	1.05
Friends	2.92	1.08
School	3.77	0.71
Media	4.02	0.62
Overall	**3.31**	**0.68**

These findings align with studies on language exposure. Lee and Smith (2016) found that media significantly supports language development in children from immigrant families, while Johnson et al. (2018) identified home language use as key to language proficiency. These insights suggest educators and policymakers could enhance language learning through media resources and support family-based language activities to foster bilingualism.

Table 3 shows the students' sociolinguistic competence with a high overall mean of 3.91 (SD = 0.448), indicating a strong competence level. The "respect" indicator scored the highest at 4.24 (very high), while "confidence" scored the lowest at 3.54 (high). The high respect level suggests respondents are mindful of others' feelings in interactions.

Table 3. Level of Students' Sociolinguistic Competence

Indicator	Mean	Standard Deviation
Respect	4.24	0.52
Friendliness	4.20	0.59
Confidence	3.54	0.61
Resourcefulness	3.792	0.58
Emotional Maturity	3.790	0.54
Overall	**3.91**	**0.44**

The high rating for respect suggests that respondents are mindful of others' feelings, highlighting respect as vital for a positive classroom environment (Mokracek & Mohammed, 2022). Confidence, though rated high, received the lowest score, indicating that some students feel assured in social interactions. Saidah (2024) notes that school stress and family issues may lower confidence, while Moradiyousefabadi and Ghafournia (2023) found that self-confident students are more active in community activities and persistent in improving language skills.

The high level of students' sociolinguistic competence indicates their ability to communicate effectively through appropriate language and expressions in various situations. Ferra et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of sociolinguistic competence in helping students manage their emotions, which can affect their education. The findings show that learners can handle sensitive topics, listen attentively, express appreciation, and communicate with confidence.

Significant Relationship between Student Interaction and Sociolinguistic Competence

Table 4.1 shows a significant correlation between student interaction and sociolinguistic competence, with r = 0.714 and a p-value of 0.000, which is below the 0.05 significance level. This leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis, indicating that student interactions positively influence their sociolinguistic skills.

Table 4.1. Significant Relationship between Student Interaction and Sociolinguistic Competence

Student Interaction		Sociolinguistic Competence					
		RE	FR	CON	RES	EM	**Overall**
SC	Pearson Correlation	.342**	.509**	.418**	.306**	.338**	.493**
	p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
TS	Pearson Correlation	.313**	.354**	.408**	.361**	.287**	.444**
	p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
INVO	Pearson Correlation	.234**	.262**	.504**	.281**	.335**	.418**
	p-value	.002	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
INVE	Pearson Correlation	.401**	.415**	.397**	.444**	.401**	.527**
	p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
TOR	Pearson Correlation	.505**	.570**	.427**	.474**	.307**	.586**
	p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
COO	Pearson Correlation	.538**	.654**	.405**	.457**	.371**	.621**
	p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
EQU	Pearson Correlation	.455**	.407**	.426**	.449**	.326**	.529**
	p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
ATT	Pearson Correlation	.318**	.291**	.237**	.364**	.285**	.381**
	p-value	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000	.000
Overall	Pearson Correlation	.552**	.614**	.583**	.559**	.475**	**.714****
	p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	**.000**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

According to Rahman et al. (2022), sociolinguistic competence helps language learners choose appropriate language for different situations. Variations in students' backgrounds can influence their interactions, making sociolinguistic skills essential for effective discourse. Findings from Indus Valley International School (2021) suggest that classroom interactions enhance critical thinking, spark new questions, and improve learning skills while fostering teamwork and communication. Instructors should expose learners to their second language to develop sociolinguistically appropriate communication. Additionally, the findings indicate that student interaction significantly mediates their sociolinguistic abilities.

Significant Relationship between Language Exposure and Sociolinguistic Competence

Table 4.2 shows a Pearson correlation coefficient of r = 0.343 and a p-value of 0.000, indicating a significant positive relationship between language exposure and sociolinguistic competence. This suggests that greater language exposure leads to higher sociolinguistic competence in students. Consequently, the null hypothesis regarding the relationship between student interaction and language exposure is rejected. The findings emphasize the importance of increasing language exposure to enhance students' ability to use language appropriately in social contexts.

Table 4.2. Significant Relationship between Language Exposure and Sociolinguistic Competence

Sociolinguistic Competence		Language Exposure				
		HO	FRI	SCH	MED	**Overall**
RE	Pearson Correlation	.075	.212**	.248**	.260**	.236**
	p-value	.317	.004	.001	.000	.001
FR	Pearson Correlation	.067	.142	.176*	.310**	.198**
	p-value	.371	.058	.018	.000	.008
CON	Pearson Correlation	.133	.193**	.215**	.207**	.230**
	p-value	.077	.010	.004	.006	.002
RES	Pearson Correlation	.199**	.247**	.235**	.426**	.332**
	p-value	.008	.001	.002	.000	.000
EM	Pearson Correlation	.188*	.322**	.320**	.304**	.351**
	p-value	.012	.000	.000	.000	.000
Overall	Pearson Correlation	.169*	.283**	.303**	.385**	**.343****
	p-value	.024	.000	.000	.000	**.000**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

A positive correlation is noted, suggesting further research on factors influencing sociolinguistic competence, such as the quality of language exposure, usage contexts, and individual differences. Smith and Jones (2018) found that increased language exposure improves sociolinguistic skills in bilingual children, while García et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of immersion for adult learners. Together, these studies highlight the positive correlation between language exposure and sociolinguistic proficiency, stressing the need for diverse language input to develop pragmatic competence, sociocultural awareness, and communicative effectiveness.

Significant Relationship between Student Interaction and Language Exposure

Table 4.3 shows a Pearson correlation of r = 0.247 and a p-value of 0.001, indicating a statistically significant relationship between student interaction and language exposure. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected, suggesting that these variables are significantly related. This finding warrants further research and potential practical applications in educational contexts.

Table 4.3. Significant Relationship between Student Interaction and Language Exposure

Language Exposure		SC	TS	INVO	INVE	TOR	COO	EQU	ATT	Overall
					Student Interaction					
HO	Pearson Correlation	-.059	-.044	.103	.166*	.074	.051	.045	.187*	.093
	p-value	.433	.555	.170	.027	.325	.494	.552	.012	.218
FRI	Pearson Correlation	.032	.024	.266**	.195**	.109	.130	.081	.206**	.188*
	p-value	.669	.753	.000	.009	.147	.084	.284	.006	.012
SCH	Pearson Correlation	.116	.120	.274**	.255**	.188*	.188*	.164*	.256**	.279**
	p-value	.122	.109	.000	.001	.012	.012	.029	.001	.000
MED	Pearson Correlation	.068	.115	.132	.268**	.281**	.285**	.225**	.213**	.283**
	p-value	.364	.127	.079	.000	.000	.000	.002	.004	.000
Overall	Pearson Correlation	.036	.049	.245**	.268**	.184*	.185*	.143	.268**	**.247****
	p-value	.637	.511	.001	.000	.014	.013	.057	.000	**.001**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

These findings align with Al Zoubi's (2018) research, which indicated that face-to-face English or L2 interactions enhance language exposure. Küçükler and Sulac (2021) emphasized the importance of genuine conversation and student interaction in contextual language acquisition and overall language exposure. This suggests that increased student interaction with English leads to greater language exposure. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to incorporate more interactive exercises into their instruction to enhance language exposure.
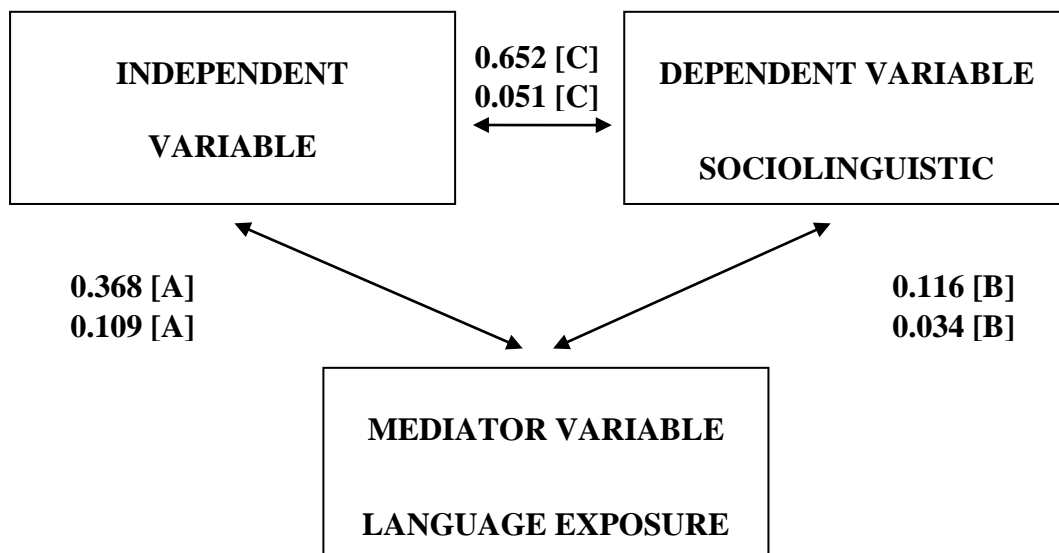
Mediating Analysis

Figure 1. The Mediating Effect of Language Exposure to the Student Interactions and Sociolinguistic Competence

Path A = (0.368) (0.109) MV & IV
Path B = (0.116) (0.034) MV & DV
Path C = (0.652) (0.051) IV & DV
Point of effect = 0.0426
Sobel Test = 2.3997 with *p*-value = 0.0164
Conclusion: The indirect effect between *Student Interaction* and *Social Competence* via *Language Exposure* is statistically significant (p-value ≤ **0.05**).

Figure 1 presents the mediation results. The Sobel test yielded 2.3998 with a p-value of 0.0164, indicating statistical significance at p < 0.05. This shows that language exposure significantly mediates the relationship between student interaction (IV) and sociolinguistic competence (DV). Additionally, the correlation between student interaction and sociolinguistic competence decreased from 0.652 to 0.051, indicating a significant relationship remains through the mediating variable of language exposure.

The study's findings show that student interaction, language exposure, and competency are interconnected, leading to significant improvements in sociolinguistic competence. Emphasizing language exposure and allowing interaction with native speakers can enhance students' sociolinguistic understanding (Mede & Dikilitaş, 2015). The results also indicate that greater language exposure mediates effective communication and sociolinguistic proficiency. Increased exposure positively impacts students' communication skills, while the context of this exposure influences their motivation to learn the target language and may relate to sociolinguistic competency (Martinez & De Vera, 2019). Thus, classroom procedures should focus on enhancing students' sociolinguistic competency (Rehner & Lasan, 2023).

Students exposed to diverse linguistic contexts can better understand social conventions, cultural nuances, and communication styles. This exposure enhances their ability to navigate various social settings and use appropriate language registers when engaging with different individuals. Increased language exposure reduces communication barriers, facilitating interactions. Consequently, greater student engagement in the classroom, particularly in English, increases exposure to their second language and provides opportunities to practice their sociolinguistic skills.

CONCLUSION

This study signifies that students regularly and actively interact with their teacher and one another, as evidenced by their cooperation in the classroom. Additionally, students were regularly exposed to their second language, particularly through media use. Further, based on their respectful interactions, students have a good capacity to use and comprehend language in a variety of social and cultural contexts.

Students who engage in class are better equipped to manage the use of social language. Exposure to different language contexts enhances fluency. Moreover, the

importance of communication in language learning was emphasized. By fostering collaboration and active participation, language exposure can be increased, leading to greater linguistic proficiency and effective communication skills.

Language exposure influences the connection between student interaction and sociolinguistic competence, underscoring its importance in reinforcing this bond. As a result, consistent exposure to a second language, along with interactive experiences, is essential for developing sociolinguistic skills. The research revealed that more interaction allows students to communicate more effectively in real-world situations. Increased language exposure enables learners to observe and adopt proper communication techniques from proficient speakers, thereby improving their sociolinguistic competence.

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