

University of Cambridge Application (UniCamApp):
UniCamApp#1: Research Proposal

The study I intend to undertake falls within the field of interaction-based research and examines the role that interaction with texts plays in the development of lexis and morphosyntax in contexts where English is learned as a foreign language. In such settings, learners rarely have opportunities to engage in real-life communication with native speakers. Instruction typically places greater emphasis on reading and writing while paying less attention to interpersonal communication. As a result, students often develop strong Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) while their Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) remain underdeveloped.

This research draws on both empirical observation and personal experience to investigate how reading contributes to language development when opportunities for verbal interaction are scarce or nonexistent. Traditional interactionist approaches to second language acquisition view verbal interaction as central to development, arguing that interlocutors modify conversation, recast utterances, and restructure their interlanguage through negotiation of meaning, which in turn facilitates the expansion of their linguistic repertoire. However, such negotiation presupposes the presence of a More Knowledgeable Other—a native or near-native speaker—who provides input, feedback, and scaffolding. My research seeks to shift this perspective by exploring contexts where learners interact not with other speakers but with texts themselves. The central argument is that interaction with texts can also be a mediating process through which language development occurs.

The theoretical foundation of this study draws on sociocultural theory, particularly Lantolf's notion of mediation, and approaches reading as an ecological activity that reflects the dynamic relationship between learner, text, and linguistic environment. To conceptualize this form of interaction, I introduce several interrelated constructs: Linguistic Imaging, Realization of Forms, Cloze Mental Structures, and Extended Forms. Linguistic Imaging refers to the learner's ability to represent linguistic forms first as visual and then as mental representations during reading. Realization of Forms describes the internal process through which exposure to textual input activates awareness of morphosyntactic structures, functioning as the textual equivalent of negotiation of meaning in oral interaction. Cloze Mental Structures, inspired by the cloze

procedure used in testing, represent the learner's unconscious ability to recall complex syntactic patterns without explicit awareness of grammatical rules. Extended Forms refer to formulaic sequences or "chunks" of language that are internalized through repeated encounters with written input. Together, these constructs form the basis for a new model of text-based language development, proposing that repeated reading experiences trigger linguistic imaging, which leads to the realization and consolidation of morphosyntactic forms.

To test this hypothesis, I will employ a mixed-methods design combining qualitative and quantitative measures. A narrative inquiry into my own learning trajectory will allow me to examine the cognitive and perceptual processes that occur during interaction with texts. Complementary data will be collected from learners engaged in extensive reading programs or enrolled in curricula that prioritize academic literacy over conversational fluency. Their experiences will provide insight into how textual engagement supports form recognition and internalization. Quantitative instruments such as cloze tests, recall tasks, and morphological recognition exercises will be used to identify traces of the proposed constructs—Cloze Mental Structures and Extended Forms—within learners' linguistic output.

By developing this context-oriented model of text-based interaction, the study aims to broaden the scope of interactionist theory and highlight alternative pathways to second language development in EFL contexts. It argues that meaningful linguistic progress can occur even in the absence of direct interpersonal communication, provided that learners engage deeply with textual input that stimulates linguistic awareness. Such an insider perspective, grounded in under-researched Global South contexts, has the potential to enrich theoretical understandings of mediation and provide valuable pedagogical insights. Ultimately, the findings could inform curriculum design, reading pedagogy, and language policy by reframing reading not merely as a receptive skill but as an active, ecological process that fosters form realization and language growth.