CAS LX 400
Second Language Acquisition

Week 10a. Input and interaction

Input ≠ intake
• Inuktitut—input:
  Qasuisarsvigssarsingitluinarpuq
  ‘Someone did not find a completely suitable resting place.’

  tired  cause.be suitable  not someone
Qasu- iir-sar-vig-ssar-si-ngit-luin-ar-puq
  not place.for find  completely  3sg

Input ≠ intake
• After three long nights of griping, John finally found his slipwoggle.

• Knowing so much about the rest of the sentence can tell us quite a bit about the parts we don’t know yet. (Slipwoggle is a noun, a possessible thing; to gripen(?) is a verb, a process that one can perform over an extended period of time). We can then make use of this to build our language knowledge (here, vocabulary).

What makes input into intake?
• Apperception: Recognizing the gap between what L2’er knows and what there is to know.
• Comprehensibility: Either the semantic meaning is determinable or the relevant structural aspects are determinable.
• Attention: Selecting aspects of the knowledge to be learned (from among many other possible things) for processing.
• Output: Forcing a structural hypothesis, elsewhere used to shape input into a form useful for intake.

Input → apperception
• Some input is apperceived, some isn’t.
• That which isn’t is thought of as blocked by various “filters”:
  – Time pressure
  – Frequency non-extremes
  – Affective (status, motivation, attitude, …)
  – Prior knowledge (grounding, analyzability)
  – Salience (drawing attention)
Apperception → comprehension

- Modification of speech to learner ("foreigner talk")
- Redundancy
- Negotiation for meaning
  - (often, but not necessarily always, meaning is a precursor to being able to assign a syntactic representation).

Foreigner talk

- Like the better-known phenomenon of "baby talk", it also turns out that people conversing with others whom they perceive to be non-native speakers (NNSs) will often use a form of "foreigner talk"—modified language forms presumably intended to simplify the utterance.

- Slower, clearer articulation
- Higher frequency vocabulary, fewer idioms
- Providing more definitions
- Less elliptical
- More gestures
- Short, simple sentences
- Moving topics to the front of the sentence, new information to the end of the sentence
- More repetition, restatements.
- Recasting NNS’s incorrect statements

- The ways in which this happens varies a lot—where it happens at all, there are many different ways that sentences are “simplified”.

- The adjustments often happen in the face of an evident lack of comprehension.

- NNS: How have increasing food costs changed your eating habits?
- NS: Well, I don’t know that it’s changed them. I try to adjust.
- NNS: Pardon me?
- NS: I don’t think it’s changed my eating habits.

- NNS: How have increasing food costs changed your eating habits?
- NS: Oh, rising costs… we’ve cut back on the more expensive things. Gone to cheaper foods.
- NNS: Pardon me?
- NS: We’ve gone to cheaper foods.
Foreigner talk

• The “simplification” sometimes even sacrifices grammaticality, which is probably of dubious value both for comprehension and learning.

• Basil: It’s not fire; it’s only bell.

• NNS has an object from a grab-bag, NS is trying to guess its identity.
  – NS: Ok, little guy! Yeah, yours! Okay! Yours is it for eat?
  – NNS: Eat. No.

Comprehension

• In general, this appears to be in service of comprehension—done in order to make linguistically less sophisticated interlocutors able to understand.

• Once there is understanding, we also are ready for there to be intake of the input as well.

“I’d like to buy a TV.”

• NNS is trying to buy a TV, but accidentally called a repair shop.
  • ...
  • Ah Sony please.
  • We don’t work on Sonys.
  • Or Sylvania.
  • Sylvania?
  • Uh huh.
  • Oh, Sylvania, OK. That’s American made.
  • OK.

“Backchannel cues”

• L2’ers often foil this process by providing “backchannel cues” which indicate to the NS that communication is proceeding, comprehension has been achieved. “Smile and nod”.

“I’d like to buy a TV.”

• All right. Portables have to be brought in.
  • Hm hm.
  • And there’s no way I can tell you how much it’ll cost until he looks at it.
  • Hm hm.
  • And it’s a $12.50 deposit.
  • OK.
  • And if he can fix it that applies to labor and if he can’t he keeps the $12.50 for his time and effort.
  • Hm hm.
I’d like to buy a TV.

• How old of a TV is it? Do you know off hand?
• 19 inch.
• How old of a TV is it? Is it a very old one or only a couple years old?
• Oh, so so.
• The only thing you can do is bring it in and let him look at it and go from there.
• New television please.

Comprehension vs. output

• Comprehension can come in various ways, some of which have nothing to do with the structure.
  – With some knowledge of the situation, and assuming speaker will make sense, be relevant, provide given and new information appropriately, be cooperative, the listener can come quite close to understanding the meaning without having any kind of syntactic analysis for it.
• If learning the structure of the target language is considered to be the ultimate goal, *this* kind of comprehension may be unhelpful.

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Output and negative evidence

• Of course, output will give the L2’er practice, allow for the “automation” of certain things allowing attention to shift elsewhere.
• Additionally, output provides an opportunity for negative evidence, correction from the outside.

Negotiating for meaning

• Very often a NS-NNS (or NNS-NNS) conversation will involve a fair amount of *negotiating for meaning*—where understanding has not happened, the conversation takes a detour to repair the problem.

Negotiating for meaning

• (S) Had to declare—declare?—her ingress.
• (J) English?
• No. English no *(laugh)*… ingress, her ingress.
• Ingless?
• Ingress. Yes. I N G R E S S more or less.
• Ingless.
• Yes. If for example, if you, when you work you had an ingress, you know?
• Uh huh an ingless?
• Yes..
Negotiating for meaning

- Uh huh OK
- Yes, if for example, your homna, husband works, when finish, when end the month his job, his boss pay—mm—him something.
- Aaaah.
- And your family have some ingress.
- Yes, ah, ok ok.
- More or less ok? And in this institution take care of all ingress of the company and review the accounts.
- Ok I got, I see.
- Ok. My father work there, but now he is old.

Pre-empting negotiation

- In the category of “foreigner talk” we might also include these…
- Lots of comprehension/confirmation checks and clarification requests:
  - I was born in Nagasaki. Do you know Nagasaki?
  - And your family have some ingress…more or less ok?
  - (When can you go to visit me?) Visit?
  - (…research). Research, I don’t know the meaning.
- Questions often come with suggested responses
  - When do you take the break? At ten-thirty?

Healthy miscommunication

- A failure to communicate can serve to focus attention on areas where the NNS’s grammar is non-native-like, prompting negotiation for meaning and providing possible intake data.
- Michael Long’s “Interaction Hypothesis” is that this kind of negotiation for meaning and resulting attention is necessary for advancement toward the grammar of the target grammar—in part because it connects input, existing knowledge, selective attention, and output in productively trying to solve a current language deficiency.

Still, feedback isn’t everything

- Ideally, a learner produces an ungrammatical sentences, gets negative feedback indicating that there is a problem (those involved in the conversation negotiate for meaning), focusing attention on the problem area, and the learner takes input bearing on this as intake, incorporating it into his/her grammar.

Still, feedback isn’t everything

- Problem is, such evidence is not very consistent—it might be helpful when it happens, but it’s hard to be sure when it is happening.
- First: Not all incorrect forms get corrected (e.g., if the hearer understood).
- Second: Errors leading to misunderstanding might not be revealed until quite a bit later, if at all…

Still, feedback isn’t everything

- NS: When I get to Paris, I’m going to sleep for one whole day. I’m so tired.
- NNS: What?
- NS: I’m going to sleep for one whole day.
- NNS: One hour a day?
- NS: Yes.
- NNS: Why?
- NS: Because I’m so tired.
- …enduring silence…
Still, feedback isn’t everything

- Moreover, how is this useful feedback?
- NS: Did you fly to Singapore yesterday?
- NNS: Did I flled here yesterday?
- NS: Pardon?
- NNS: Did I flled here yesterday?
- How does this help fix the problem?

Still, feedback isn’t everything

- Sometimes it works…
- NNS: There is a library.
- NS: A what?
- NNS: A place where you put books.
- NS: A bookshelf?
- NNS: He pass his house
- NS: Sorry?
- NNS: He passed, he passed, ah, his sign.

Still, feedback isn’t everything

- Feedback (“negative evidence”) is just too inconsistent to be reliable—to really be the whole story about how people learn a second language.
- Interaction does seem to help, though, for whatever reason…

Mackey 1999

- Looked at question formation in ESL speakers.
- Tasks (designed to spark questions)
  - Story completion
    - Working out a story by asking questions
  - Picture sequencing
  - Discovering the order of a picture story
  - Picture differences
    - Identifying the differences between similar pictures
  - Picture drawing
    - Describing or drawing a picture.

Mackey 1999: Procedure

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Mackey 1999: staged acquisition

- 2: SVO?
  - Your cat is black?
- 3: Fronting Wh/Do
  - What the cat doing in your picture?
- 4: Inversion (auxiliaries not do)
  - Have you drawn the cat?
- 5: Do/Aux-second (wh-front, inversion)
  - Why have you left home?
- 6: Uninverted in embedded clauses
  - Can you tell me where the cat is?
Mackey 1999: subject groups

- Interactors
  - Interactionally modified input through tasks
- Interactor unreadies
  - Interactionally modified input through tasks
- Observers
  - Watch interactionally modified input
- Scripteds
  - Predmodified (scripted) input through tasks
- Controls

Mackey 1999

- Scripted (premodified) group
- NS: and now under it draw a pear. A pear is a fruit. It is like an apple. The color is green. Draw the pear under the book. Can you draw it?
- NNS: Ok ok I got it. Look like apple (draws)
- NS: Good. Now on the right of the pear draw an umbrella.

Mackey 1999

- Interactor group
- NS: Underneath it is a pear, it’s green
- NNS: What is it a bear?
- NS: A pear, pears are fruit, it’s a fruit, juicy like an apple
- NNS: Ok pear, fruit like Japanese fruit nashi very delicious. You saw this in Japan? Have you eat one?
- NS: Yeah I did but a nashi is round yeah? Pears are round on the bottom, narrow on top. Have you eaten one here in Australia?
- NNS: Yes thank you. I had a pear in my lunch (time) not…juicy? (draws) Like this?

Mackey 1999: Increase in stage 4 & 5 questions in posttests

- Mackey claims that her study shows that the interactors have a significant advantage over the non-interactors, based on the previous graph (production of high-stage questions).
- Yet—should *advancing stage* be the real goal? In that, the observers also benefited.
Mackey 1999

• Delayed benefit—
• Interestingly in the latest posttest (2 weeks after the treatment), the numbers of high-stage questions had continued to grow.
• Suggests perhaps that this had focused attention on areas that needed work, but the grammatical changes were not implemented immediately.