



Back to Basics

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The Foundations

- Language is Special and Language Acquisition is Special
- The Nature of Communication

Language is Special? What? Huh?

- Tell me if you like these sentences or not with *-re* (i.e., are they allowed or not in English?)

1. I plan to repaint the walls as soon as I can.

2. He resurfaced the floor after the accident.

3. Jerry replayed the song after the gang requested it.

Language is Special

■ How about these sentences?

4. *John smiled at Robert and in five minutes, resmiled.*

☹ *John smiled at Robert and in five minutes, resmiled.*

5. *The teacher slept for two hours, got up and ate, then reslept.*

☹ *The teacher slept for two hours, got up and ate, then reslept.*

Do you wanna dance?



Language is Special

- English can contract, right? *Want to* → *wanna*, *going to* → *gonna*, *I have* → *I've*.
- 6. *Who do you wanna invite to the party?*
- 7. *Who do you wanna give an A to?*
- 8. *Who do you wanna remove John from the team?*
- ☹ *Who do you wanna remove John from the team?*

Language is Special

9. *I 've done it.*
10. *Should I have done it?*
11. *Should I've done it?*
☹ *Should I've done it?*

Language is Special

- You've been told that *ain't* isn't good English. But how do these sentences sound to you?

12. *I ain't got none.*

13. *I ain't have any.*

☹ *I ain't have any.*



- So, even though *ain't* ain't so good, there are subtle rules as to how to use it *correctly*.

Language is Special

- ...you know that the following sentences are not allowed in English?
 - ☹ *The teacher slept for two hours, got up and ate, then reslept.*
 - ☹ *Who do you wanna remove John from the team?*
 - ☹ *I ain't have any.*
- Did someone teach you? Did someone tell you?
- Nope. That *ain't* what happened to you.

Gasp! There are no Rules!

- The truth is there are no language rules in your head, at least not like those you see in textbooks.
- The mental representation you have for language is abstract. It consists of principles that interact, yielding sentences that “look like” the rules you’re familiar with.

Language is Special

- **The Poverty of the Stimulus Situation:** we all know much more than we could know from either input data or instruction. This is as true of L2 situations as L1 situations. How is this so?
- **Universal Grammar:** human specific and language specific abstract principles that constrain the nature of language
- So how does language acquisition happen?

Nobody Wants to Say it, But I Will

- Everyone learns language the same way.
- Regardless of learning styles, aptitude, motivation, IQ, EQ, gender, race, color, creed, political affiliation, income, hair style, and whether or not a person has run a marathon, all people use **the same internal mechanisms** for language acquisition.

The Three Necessary Players in Acquisition

- **Input:** language out there in the environment
- **Universal Grammar:** principles that constrain the nature of language
- **The processors** that mediate between input and Universal Grammar

- It's really that simple, but...

But...

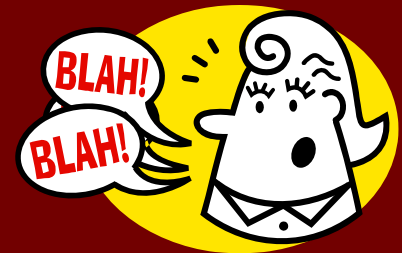
- L2 acquisition is confounded by a number of factors that affect the outcome
 - Access to input
 - Robustness of the input
 - The presence of L1 mechanisms
- So, just because the “foundation” of acquisition seems simple, doesn’t mean that acquisition is guaranteed and that acquisition is easy.

And...

- ...we know the following:
 - Acquisition is staged
 - Acquisition is not always target-like
 - Acquisition is not instantaneous; it is sloooooow...

On Communication

- Communication is the expression, interpretation and negotiation of meaning in a given context.
- Communicative competence consists minimally of grammatical competence, discourse competence and pragmatics, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence.



On Communication (cont')

- How does one learn to communicate?
- Savignon's 1972 study dealt the first "blow" to ALM, drills and an exclusive focus on *accuracy first*. "One learns to communicate by communicating."
- Some people confuse communicative ability with fluency. But they aren't the same.

Now, for the Basics

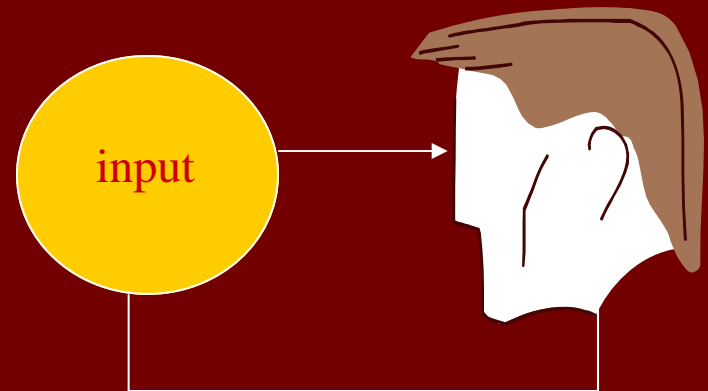
- The More Input, the Better
- The More Interaction, the Better
- All Learner Production Should be Meaning-based or Communicative
- Focus on Form (grammar) Should be Tied to Input or Meaning
- Review Your Expectations

1. The More Input. the Better (The More Meaning-based the Curriculum, the Better)

- *Input* in language learning is what gets the “engine” of acquisition going.
- Without input, acquisition simply doesn't happen (one of the three key ingredients)

The Basics about Input

- *Meaning bearing*
 - The language must contain some message to which the learner is supposed to attend.
- *Does input need to be comprehensible?*
 - Yes and no...

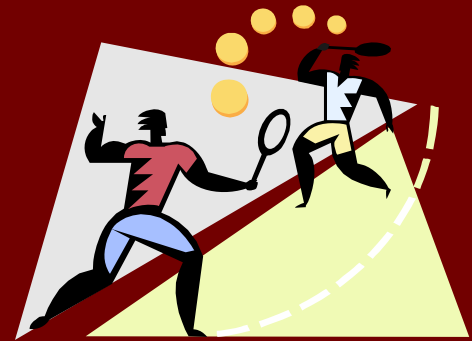


2. The More Interaction, The Better

- What happens during interaction?
- The speaker makes adjustments and thus simplifies the input that the learner receives. Input becomes more accessible.
- It is equally true that language learners often get the speakers to *make* specific modifications.
- Learners often *negotiate* the flow and quality of input directed to them.

An Example of Negotiation

- BOB: So, where's Dave?
- TOM: He vacation.
- BOB: He's on vacation?
- TOM: Yes. On vacation.
- BOB: Lucky guy.



What Interaction Does

- Interaction may enhance the quality of input.
- Interaction pushes the learner to indicate what he does and does not understand.
- Interaction provides for the development of communicative competence and fluency.



3. All Learner Production Should be Meaning-based or Communicative

- Learners not only must build an internal linguistic system, they must also develop procedural abilities to use that system.

Access of lexical and grammatical “stuff”

Production procedures: stringing accessed forms together

- Mechanical drills do not aid in the development of production strategies. Why not?

Mechanical Drills

- Mechanical drills do not involve the process of mapping meaning onto form in output.



Hablo español.
Hablas español.
Habla español.

4. Focus on Form Should be Tied to Input or Communication

- **Input enhancement**: a general way to consider focus on form.
- **Recasts**: expansions on learner utterances.
- **Text enhancement**: highlighting things in written text.
- **Processing instruction and structured input**: deliberate manipulation of input sentences to force processing.
- **Structured output**: making meaning in particular tasks.

Text enhancement

- Lise est célibataire et elle est le deuxième enfant des Pinard. Elle a 30 ans et elle est professeur de français en Angleterre. Lise aime beaucoup les langues et voyager. Lise parle français, italien, allemand et anglais. Présentement, Lise habite à Londres, mais l'an prochain, elle va aller en Chine dans le cadre d'un programme d'échange. Elle va enseigner le français dans une université à Shanghai et en même temps, elle apprendra le chinois.

Recasts

- NNS: So he go to the store.
- NS: OK. He went to the store. And then?
- NNS: He went to the store and, he, uh, he buy food.
- NS: He bought food. What else happened?

Recasts

- NNS: So he go to the store.
- NS: OK. He went to the store. And then?
- NNS: He went to the store and, he, uh, he buy food.
- NS: He bought food. What else happened?

Processing instruction and structured input

- Input is manipulated in particular ways to force processing.
 1. Lo invita Maria al cine. [OVS]
 - a. [He invites Mary to the movies.]
 - b. [Mary invites him to the movies.]
 2. Enrique los ve con frecuencia. [SOV]
 - a. [Enrique sees them frequently.]
 - b. [They see Enrique frequently.]

Structured Input (cont')

- **Affective activities:** learners respond with information about themselves, the world around them, they offer opinions, and so on.
- Ex: Which of the following are true about you and your mother?
 - La admiro.
 - La detesto.
 - La respeto.
 - La ___?___



Structured Input (cont'): Bill

- Paso 1. Cuando Bill llega a casa, ¿qué hace con las llaves?
 - Las deja en la mesa.
 - Las pone en un cajón.
 - Las cuelga.
 - Las _____? _____ .



Bill

- Paso 2. Después de la cena, ¿qué hace Bill con los platos?
 - Los lava en seguida.
 - Los deja para más tarde.
 - Los mete en el lavaplatos.
 - Los ____? _____



Bill

- Paso 3. Indica lo que hace Bill en cada situación.
 - Cuando Bill llega a casa, se quita los zapatos y los _____. Luego, se quita la ropa y la _____. Después se toma un martini...



Structured Output

- Activities that involve the exchange of previously unknown information.
- The activities require a learner to access a particular form or structure to express meaning.

5. Review your Expectations

- What can a learner know or do at point X? If I ask a learner to do Y, is that learner “psycholinguistically ready?”
- The learner’s grammar is on its own schedule.
 - Slow
 - Stage-like
- Acquisition is constrained by learner internal mechanisms.

Review Your Expectations

- Educate students about acquisition
- Educate parents about acquisition
- Educate administrators about acquisition

The Basics: A Summary

1. The More input, the Better
2. The More interaction, the Better
3. Learner Production should be Meaning-based or Communicative
4. Focus on Form should be tied to Input or Communication
5. Review Your Expectations

Conclusion



- Methods are dead.
- There is no such thing as “the communicative method” or even “the communicative approach.” But there are “communicative approaches.”
- Approaches involve principles. And the basics help us think about our principles so that we can fashion our own approaches.

Thank you!

