

Working with Input

In this chapter we explore:

- The nature of input, a necessary ingredient for successful language acquisition
- The ways in which speakers simplify their speech to make their input comprehensible to both first and second language learners
- The ways in which speakers modify their input through interaction and negotiation of meaning with language learners
- Meaning-bearing input, that is, language that contains a message to which a learner needs to attend
- Ways to provide input in language classrooms

WHAT IS GOOD INPUT?

A useful way to conceive of input is to consider that input is to language acquisition what gas is to a car. An engine needs gas to run; without gas, the car would not move an inch. Likewise, *input* in language learning is what gets the “engine” of acquisition going. Without it, acquisition simply doesn’t happen.

Gas itself is a refined and filtered petroleum product; you cannot simply put crude oil into your gas tank and expect the car to run. And because gas is a refined petroleum product, some gas is better than others. High-octane gas makes many cars run more smoothly and efficiently than does low-octane gas. Likewise, some input is better than others, and the kind of input that is best for language learners is a kind of refined language.

There are several general characteristics of input that make it potentially useful to the learner. First, it has to be *comprehensible*. This is perhaps the most important characteristic of input from the learner’s point of view. It is also the characteristic that has received the most attention in second language acquisition theory and research. *The learner must be able to understand most of what the speaker (or writer) is saying if acquisition is to happen.* In other words, the learner must be able to figure out what the speaker is saying if he is to attach meaning

to the speech stream coming at him. Why is this? Acquisition consists in large part of the building up of form-meaning connections in the learner’s head. For example, the learner of French hears the word *chien* in various contexts and eventually attaches it to a particular meaning: a four-legged canine. As another example, a learner of Italian might hear *-ato* in various contexts and eventually attach it to a particular meaning: past-time reference. Features of language, be they grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, or something else, can only make their way into the learner’s mental representation of the language system if they have been linked to some kind of real-world meaning.

Second, input has to be *meaning bearing*. Stated another way, the language that the learner is listening to (or reading, if we are talking about written language) *must contain some message to which the learner is supposed to attend*. Thus, meaning-bearing input has some communicative intent; the purpose of the speaker is to communicate a message to a listener. When someone says to a learner, “I went out last night. And, boy! Did I have a good time!” the speaker is attempting to communicate a message about last night’s events, and both speaker and listener understand that the learner-listener is supposed to focus on the message.

If the input is incomprehensible or if it is not meaning bearing, then these form-meaning connections just don’t happen. Imagine the beginning second language learner finding herself in the middle of a café in a country where the language is spoken. What would she understand? What use would the language environment be to this beginner?

Input with Children

Return for a moment to the gas-car metaphor. What makes input “high octane”? And, given that we are concerned with getting learners *started* in acquisition, what kind of input is good for beginners? It is clear that learners cannot be spoken to in the way native-speaking adults talk to each other. Language learners—especially beginners—need input that is simplified compared to the free-flowing language that native speakers may use with each other (or what might appear on television or radio broadcasts, for instance). Most children get some kind of simplified input when learning their first language. They get this simplified input from parents, caretakers, siblings, and story books. Note, for example, the following interchange between a parent and a one-and-a-half-year-old child that is typical of interchanges during diaper changing or crib play. (Intonation and rhythm are not indicated in the interchange. You should try to imagine what this interchange would sound like.)

PARENT: Where’s your nose?

CHILD: (Touches nose.)

PARENT: Where’s your mouth?

CHILD: (Grabs for parent’s face.)

PARENT: Come on. Show me your mouth. Your mouth. Where is it?

CHILD: (Giggles and puts finger on mouth.)

PARENT: That’s it. That’s your mouth! Oh! You’re so smart! How’d I get such a smart baby, huh? Are you smart? Yes you are, aren’t you? Aren’t you?

Now contrast the preceding speech with the following conversation between the same parent and a friend.

Input

PARENT: I'm pretty fed up with my job these days. I mean, I can't believe that the company thinks we will take a cut in pay and not say anything. I mean, it's just—I don't know.

FRIEND: But it's like that everywhere! Last week I read in *Newsweek*—at least I think it was *Newsweek*. We get both *Newsweek* and *Time*—but anyway I read where IBM is cutting another 500 jobs this next week. I bet those people wouldn't mind a cut in pay just to keep food on the table.

PARENT: Come on! It's not that easy and you know it. . . .

As you can see, the speech the infant heard and the speech used by that infant's parent with a friend are different in a number of ways: breadth of vocabulary, length of utterance, repetition, and clarity. And even though we have not included indications of intonation, articulation, rhythm, and pitch, these too would vary in the two communicative situations. Work on child language acquisition in the 1960s and 1970s revealed that the speech addressed to first language acquirers was generally simpler and more redundant than speech addressed to older children and adults. In arguing against many linguists' position that children receive degenerate input—input full of false starts, incomplete sentences, and even grammar mistakes—Snow (1978) summarizes her research findings by stating that

children such as those included in [this] study do not learn language on the basis of a confusing corpus full of mistakes, garbles, and complexities. They hear, in fact, a relatively consistent, organized, simplified, and redundant set of utterances which in many ways seems quite well designed as a set of "language lessons."

(Snow, 1978, p. 498)

Another important aspect of speech directed to children is that adults often rephrase what children say to them, thus providing the children with target models of what the children intend to say. Focusing on the child's message, an adult often expands the child's utterances as illustrated in the following example. [Note: Peter is the child; all others are adults.]

PATSY: What happened to it [the truck]?

PETER: (*looking under his chair*) Lose it. Dump truck! Dump truck! Fall! Fall!

LOIS: Yes, the dump truck fell down.

(Lightbown & Spada, 1999, p. 10)

In the example given, Lois expands Peter's child utterance "Fall! Fall!" to its full adult form, "The dump truck fell down." Researchers have suggested that these *expansions* provide input data that the child's internal mechanisms may use to compare the current state of his language with what a full-fledged grammatical utterance might sound like. What is important about Lois's expansions—and most expansions in adult-child interchanges—is that the adult is *not* correcting the speech of the child; the adult is merely confirming what the child says. The adult echoes the child's utterance to let him know that she understands the

message. A final point to make is that adults naturally modify their speech when interacting with children. We want children to understand us.

Input with Second Language Learners

The research on input addressed to children prompted second language researchers to examine second language input in the same way. Several characteristics of simplified—or better yet, modified—second language input have been enumerated by various researchers. Larsen-Freeman (1985) summarizes the research in this way:

Input to [nonnative speakers] is shorter and less complicated and is produced at a slower rate than speech between adult [native speakers]. This input tends to be more regular, canonical [that is, typical] word order is adhered to, and there is a high proportion of unmarked patterns. There are fewer false starts and there is less repair. High-frequency vocabulary is used. . . . There is a limited use of pronouns. . . . There are more questions. Question tags and alternative questions occur more frequently. There is less pre-verb modification, presumably so new information can be highlighted at the end of the utterance, where it is more salient. The input is higher-pitched, it shows more intonation variation in pitch, and it is louder in volume. It contains fewer reduced vowels and fewer contractions.

(Larsen-Freeman, 1985, p. 436)

Pause to consider . . .

Larsen-Freeman's description of typical simplified second language input. Look at her description and then compare it to the adult-child exchanges quoted. Would you say that the input directed to child language acquirers and the input directed to second language acquirers (as described by Larsen-Freeman) undergo some of the same modifications as native-to-native adult language does?

Perhaps the most comprehensive list of the characteristics of simplified input in second language situations was made by Hatch (1983), who examines simplified input in terms of five general categories: (1) rate of speech, (2) vocabulary, (3) syntax, (4) discourse, and (5) speech setting. With these characteristics, she also suggests possible *benefits* derived from each characteristic. That is, each characteristic presumably has some impact on how the language is perceived and/or processed by the language learner. In Table 2.1 we reproduce Hatch's list. From Hatch's point of view, it is clear that simplified input provides learners with language that is, overall, easier to process. The ability to make form-meaning connections is enhanced because the language is structured in such a way as to make certain features of language *acoustically more salient*. The forms and structure of the language are more easily perceived, and the learner has a greater chance to hear

TABLE 2.1 Characteristics of Input Simplified for Second Language Learners

General Characteristic	Examples
Slower rate	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fewer reduced vowels and fewer contractions 2. Longer pauses 3. Extra stress on nouns; half-beat pauses following topic noun
Vocabulary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. High-frequency vocabulary, less slang, fewer idioms 2. Fewer pronoun forms of all kinds; high use of names for "one," "they," "we" 3. Definitions are marked (e.g., "This is an X," "It's a kind of X") 4. Lexical information in definitions that provide extra information related to derivational morphology (e.g., "miracle—anything that's miraculous"), form class (e.g., "funds or money"), or semantic features (e.g., "a cathedral usually means a church that has very high ceilings") 5. Use of gestures and/or pictures (drawings)
Syntax	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Simple propositional syntax, short sentences 2. Repetition and restatement 3. Less pre-verb modification; more modification after the verb 4. Expansion of learner's utterance
Discourse	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Speaker gives the learner a choice of responses within a posed question (e.g., "Where did you go? Did you go to the beach or to the mountains?") 2. Speaker uses tag questions (e.g., "What did he want? A book?") 3. Speaker offers correction (e.g., "You mean he left?") 1. Repetition of scenarios (e.g., daily encounters in a particular place)

Source: Adapted from Hatch (1983)

and process the form-meaning connections that are contained in the input. For example, speech with fewer contractions results in the learner being able to hear whether the language has a copular verb or not or what the auxiliary verbs are. Simpler syntax reduces the burden on processing and increases the chances that the learner will hear certain forms and structures. Some modifications of input aid the acquisition of related words and their morphology (form). When someone defines a word using another word with the same root, for example, the learner receives evidence about word endings related to nouns, verbs, and adjectives.

Pause to consider . . .

some of Hatch's descriptions of input modifications. Reread and consider the examples related to syntax. Can you give concrete examples of each? Can you think of a specific benefit for each type of modification? What might be the specific benefit of repetition and restatement?

The idea of processing input and linguistic data has led researchers and theorists to posit another construct: *intake*. Whereas input is the language the learner is exposed to, intake is the *language that the learner actually attends to and that gets processed in working memory in some way*. Thus, not all input—no matter how comprehensible or meaningful—automatically makes its way into the learner's head. Intake, then, can be considered a subset, or a filtered version, of the input. Recall from Chapter 1 that learners possess certain internal mechanisms that operate on input and that just because a learner hears something in the input does not mean that she will automatically acquire it. Acquisition is not instantaneous! Although the source of the input is external to the learner, what happens to the input is largely in the learner's hands—or brain, to be precise. In Chapter 6 we examine in some detail the processes that learners use to derive intake from input. For now, it is sufficient to understand that comprehensible, meaning-bearing input is necessary for successful second language acquisition but that not all input becomes intake.

Modifying Input Through Interaction and Negotiation

We have been discussing input as though the learner's interlocutor is in complete charge of the language that the learner hears. The speaker makes adjustments or modifications and thus simplifies the input that the learner receives. This picture is, however, a bit one-sided. Although it is true that speakers generally modify their speech to make themselves more comprehensible to language learners, it is equally true that language learners often get the speakers to *make* specific modifications. In other words, language learners often *negotiate* the flow and quality of input directed to them when they are engaged in some kind of conversational *interaction* (Gass, 1997). Learners may ask for repetitions and clarifications, or they may use some other device to signal that comprehension is problematic. These signals cause the other interlocutors to modify their speech in an attempt to facilitate the learner's comprehension. This negotiation is clearly illustrated in the following four examples taken from another investigation by Hatch (1978a):

Example 1

NATIVE SPEAKER: Did you have a nice weekend?
 RICARDO: Huh?
 NATIVE SPEAKER: Friday, Saturday . . . did you have fun?

Example 2

NATIVE SPEAKER: Did you ride the mules?
 RICARDO: Mules?
 NATIVE SPEAKER: The horses around. The pack mules.
 RICARDO: Pack mules?

Example 3

NATIVE SPEAKER: Do you wear them every day?
 RICARDO: Huh?
 NATIVE SPEAKER: Do you put them on every day?
 RICARDO: Wear?

NATIVE SPEAKER: Yeah, do you (*Adds gesture here*) put them on every day?
RICARDO: Ah! No!

Example 4

NATIVE SPEAKER: I see. Well, is it typed?

LEARNER: Type? Yes . . . uh . . . for the . . . I don't . . . I don't type.

NATIVE SPEAKER: Is it handwritten?

LEARNER: Uh. Pardon me? Excuse me?

NATIVE SPEAKER: Is your thesis now handwritten?
(later)

NATIVE SPEAKER: Is your thesis now typewritten or did you write it by hand?

LEARNER: Ah, yes, by hand.

NATIVE SPEAKER: By hand.

In each interchange, the learner caused the speaker to modify utterances. *Interaction*, then, may enhance the availability of comprehensible input, because interaction pushes the learner to indicate what he does and does not understand. This, in turn, can cause the interlocutor to modify her input in the ways suggested by Hatch in Table 2.1. Comprehensible input derived from interaction, then, may be quite different from, say, input from the radio or the TV, where the speaker is in absolute and complete control of both what is said and how it is said, and the learner has no opportunity to negotiate comprehension.

Pause to consider . . .

how the speaker modified her speech in the four examples given. Use Hatch's list of the characteristics of simplified input (Table 2.1) to analyze what the speaker did each time. Also, reflect on how the learner actually signaled a comprehension problem. Did all learners use the same devices to get the speakers to modify their language? What kinds of devices or phrases might you teach learners early on to help them negotiate comprehension and thus the input they receive? Make a list of at least five phrases that your learners would find useful.

INPUT AND THE CLASSROOM

Many beginning instructors (and even some experienced instructors!) who have not been in communicative classes frequently ask, "But how can you use the language with beginning learners? They can't understand anything!" Indeed, this belief is reflected in some of the research on foreign language classrooms in the United States. In one study, for example, Wing (1987) found that the average instructor used the second language about 50 percent of the time in a second-year high school class. Of that 50 percent only about half of the language was communicative in nature. That is, only about a quarter of *teacher talk* (the

specialized input that instructors often use with beginners) could be considered meaning-bearing input. And much of this was language used to solicit or confirm the speech of learners in the class ("Enrique, do number 3, please." "Good." "Excellent!"). In short, it was language used to manage the classroom exercises. To the extent that Wing's subjects represent instructors in general, learners may not be getting much comprehensible meaning-bearing input during class time in the early stages. If the class period is forty minutes long, then learners are at best getting approximately ten minutes of comprehensible input a day. And given the restricted range of language functions exhibited by the instructors in Wing's study, the input may not be very broad in terms of the linguistic data it contains—not an optimal condition for language acquisition to take place.

The belief that beginning learners cannot understand anything is simply that—a belief. Imagine what life would be like if parents believed the same thing about their one-year-olds: No one would ever acquire language! There are, however, instructors for whom talking to beginning language learners is as natural as talking to a baby. These instructors may or may not be consciously aware of Hatch's and Larsen-Freeman's descriptions of simplified input; they simplify their language as a natural part of trying to make themselves understood. How do they do this? These instructors first make use of as many *non-linguistic means* as possible to make themselves understood. They use drawings, photos, diagrams, objects, gestures, and other visual aids to accompany their speech. These nonlinguistic means serve to anchor the input in the "here and now"; that is, they provide a mechanism for making the subject of conversation *concrete rather than abstract*.

In the following example, a first-semester language instructor points, uses gestures, and draws on the blackboard. All these actions (indicated with all-capital letters) facilitate learner comprehension. Not indicated are the pauses, use of stress, slower articulation, and other strategies that would also form an important part of the spoken version of what you are about to read. As you read it over, consider what you would sound like if you were the instructor. What words would you emphasize with added stress? How long would your pauses be?

Instructor: Let's draw a face. This is a face. [POINTS TO HER OWN FACE AND MAKES A CIRCLE AROUND IT WITH FINGER.] Let's draw a face, O.K.? [DRAWS AN OVAL ON THE BLACKBOARD.] You draw a face on your paper, too. Go ahead. Draw an oval to begin the face. [POINTS TO PAPERS AND MAKES AN OVAL MOTION WITH FINGERS.] Good. That's the first part of the face. The most important features on a face are the eyes. The eyes. [POINTS TO HER OWN EYES.] Eyes are very important. With eyes we see the world. Eyes are also the first thing someone sees on your face. What kind of eyes shall we put on this face? Big eyes? [MOTIONS BIG WITH HANDS.] Or little eyes? [GESTURES WITH HANDS.] Let's give this face two big eyes. [DRAWS EYES ON THE BOARD.] You draw two big eyes on your paper, too.

In addition to nonlinguistic means, language instructors who use a good deal of the second language in the classroom exhibit another trait: They tend to focus on topics that the learners already know something about. Such "high-input-giving" instructors tend to put learners into *familiar situations* (drawing a face, playing a

card game) so that learners can make use of what they know about the real world in order to comprehend better. For example, an instructor might talk about his dog, drawing on the fact that learners already know certain things about dogs and dog behavior: They bark, wag their tails, have four feet, and so on. This instructor expects that learners' background knowledge will help them anticipate vocabulary and topics that he, the instructor, is talking about. In hearing about dogs, for example, learners would not expect the instructor to talk about milking, feeding them hay, or riding them. The instructor knows that learners will rule out a whole set of possible topics and words because of what they know about dogs. Using familiar themes and situations, good instructors allow their learners to process for language alone and do not push them to struggle with the topic itself. Imagine a first-semester Japanese course in which the instructor talked about particle physics! Just what background knowledge would the nonphysics student be able to draw on in order to comprehend the message? (In Chapter 11 we explore making use of learners' background knowledge in further detail as it relates to reading comprehension.)

In short, good high-input-giving instructors follow the advice that Brown (1977) has given to parents:

Believe that your child can understand more than he or she can say, and seek, above all, to communicate. . . . There is no set of rules of how to talk to a child that can even approach what you unconsciously know. If you concentrate on communicating, everything else will follow. (Brown, 1977, as cited in Krashen, 1982, p. 65)

Let's turn to another example of teacher input, from an introductory Spanish lesson on vocabulary related to family. In introducing the new vocabulary, the instructor chose to tell the class about his own family. The instructor's purpose was both *didactic* and *communicative*. It was didactic because the instructor was actually presenting vocabulary related to the family, and it was communicative because he was also attempting to have his class understand as much about his own family as possible. As you read the description, note what the instructor does to make himself comprehensible. Also ask yourself at what point in the course of study this presentation might have occurred. As in the case of the face-drawing episode presented earlier, the following example is a sterilized presentation of input. False starts, stops, learner clarification requests, and other interruptions are omitted for presentation here. Note that providing learners with a lot of input is not equivalent to talking *at* them. The instructor in the following example is talking *to* and *with* the learners. First, the real-world information helps the input be meaning bearing. Second, his use of comprehension checks helps keep the learners attending to the message and, hence, processing the input. (We give an English translation here; the original teacher input was, of course, in Spanish.)

Today we are going to talk about my family. I have a most interesting family. (*Displays "My Family" chart on board or overhead.*) Here is me. These are my parents. This is my father and this is my mother. Father . . . mother. My father's name is Bill. My mother's name is

Juanita. They are divorced. This is my stepfather, Joe. My stepfather. And this is my sister . . . my only sister. Her name is Gloria. (*Turns off the overhead or covers visual.*)

Let's see what kind of memory you have. What is my father's name—Joe or Bill? (*responses*) What is my mother's name—Juanita or Gloria? (*responses*) Right. Gloria is my sister, not my mother. And do I have any brothers? (*responses*) No. (*Shows visual again.*) All right, to summarize, my family consists of my father, Bill, my mother, Juanita, and my sister, Gloria. I have no brothers. Oh, I also have a stepfather, Joe. My parents have been divorced since 1972. (*Writes date on board.*) Now, that was easy, but here are some other family members. (*Now reveals grandparents.*)

These are my grandparents. My grandparents. These are my maternal grandparents and these are my paternal grandparents. This man here, Dick, is my paternal grandfather. And this woman, Bridgette, is my paternal grandmother. Grandfather . . . grandmother. But Bridgette passed away many years ago; Bridgette is dead. (*Points to tombstone.*) These are my maternal grandparents. Domingo is my maternal grandfather . . . and Concepción is my maternal grandmother. Domingo passed away in 1985; Domingo is dead. Just to review, Dick and Bridgette are my paternal grandparents, and Domingo and Concepción are my maternal grandparents. Grandfather . . . grandfather . . . grandmother . . . grandmother. Both Bridgette and Domingo are dead. By the way, Dick lives in Indiana and Concepción lives in California. (*Removes or covers visual.*)

Ready for a real memory test? (*Shows new overhead, or distributes photocopy.*) In the left column are names; in the right column are relationships. You have two minutes to match the name to a relationship. (*After two minutes, teacher calls time and quiz is reviewed with original drawing exposed; teacher engages in some light conversation in which students answer with one word, "yes/no," responses, such as, "Did you know that I was half Mexican? How does your family compare to mine—do you have more brothers and sisters?"*)

Now, here is the real interesting part. (*Reveals visual of extended family with aunts and uncles, some cousins, and so on. Instructor continues presentation using same format as before.*)

(VanPatten, 1991, pp. 59–60)

Many beginning instructors think that this scene must have taken place in the second semester or late in the year. Actually, this lesson on family occurred during the first week of instruction! What makes the input comprehensible? The visual display of the family tree establishes the topic, and learners then know that the instructor is talking about family. This instructor thus draws on the background knowledge of the class in order to facilitate comprehension. By locating himself first in the family tree, learners know that the other people are his relatives. Learners are thus engaged in matching names to relationships: Juanita = mother, Gloria = sister. Thus, they are engaged in the didactic aspect of the lesson as mentioned earlier, that is, vocabulary acquisition. But note at the same time that they are processing far

more than vocabulary related to family. As part of their attempt to comprehend, they may be picking up certain phrases, such as "name is," "my _____," "I have _____," and they may be starting the process of acquiring gender markings on nouns and adjectives. Instructors who use the second language to teach vocabulary expose the learner to much more language—and provide richer input—than merely the vocabulary of the lesson.

Pause to consider . . .

the nature of the simplified input in this interchange. After reviewing Larsen-Freeman's and Hatch's descriptions of simplified input to language learners, determine which aspects of simplification this instructor seemed to do naturally. See if you can find the following:

1. Lack of contractions
2. Repetitions
3. Reformulations of an utterance (i.e., saying one thing in various ways)
4. Simple syntax (i.e., sentence structure)
5. Frequent and/or "concrete" vocabulary
6. Comprehension checks (e.g., "Do you follow?" "Are you with me?")

To be sure, the second language learners in the two examples given may not be understanding every word their instructors utter. It would be surprising if they were! Instead, learners are most likely catching bits and pieces of the language. In the very beginning stages, they may catch only content words and repeated chunks or formulas ("I have _____," "name is," "Draw a _____," "Who is _____?"). Most likely the learners are not attending to certain grammatical features of the language, such as articles and case endings, as they concentrate on getting the message. Some learners, however, may notice verb endings, noun endings, and other features early on, but these are the exceptional learners. Or, these learners might notice that endings vary, but they are unable to pick up on the systematic nature of the variation. With time, however, learners are able to comprehend the input with greater ease. Ease of comprehension brings with it a greater likelihood that learners will attend to grammatical features in the input that they missed previously, a topic that we discuss in Chapter 6.

Pause to consider . . .

the culture-specific dimensions of presenting a family tree. What culturally specific information is encoded in the presentation? Does this information need to be made explicit? If so, what needs to be explicit? How would you make the language you use to express the information comprehensible to the learners?

INPUT AND VOCABULARY

We have presented comprehensible input as it relates to language acquisition in general. That is, we have not referred to specific aspects or features of a language that learners acquire through input and interaction. In Chapters 6 and 7, we describe how learners acquire grammar through input and interaction. But to prepare the stage for those concepts, we turn now to the acquisition of vocabulary through input and interaction. Can you cite specific instances in your own language development when you acquired words from the contexts in which they were used?

Vocabulary Lists and Visuals

In at least one of your beginning language classes, you probably had a textbook with vocabulary lists. The vocabulary may have been presented in bilingual lists, as in the following example from a French book:

<i>la maison</i>	the house
<i>la pièce</i>	the room
<i>la cuisine</i>	the kitchen
<i>la chambre</i>	the bedroom
<i>la salle de bain</i>	the bathroom
<i>les meubles</i>	furniture
<i>la chaise</i>	the chair
<i>le lit</i>	the bed

Very often such lists suggest to learners that vocabulary acquisition is a matter of memorizing second language equivalents of first language words. Some textbooks even have study hints for learning vocabulary and recommend that learners make flashcards with the second language word on one side and the first language word on the other. Other study hints include covering the first language side of the list with a piece of paper and giving the first language equivalent of each second language word. Or, it is suggested that one cover the second language side of the list and give the second language equivalent of each first language word. Although these study hints can be helpful for the specific purpose of studying for a test in which one may have to give first or second language equivalencies, these types of practice are no substitute for meaning-bearing comprehensible input in learning vocabulary.

We saw in the previous section a vocabulary lesson that was built around an attempt to communicate about one person's family. The vocabulary was initially presented and practiced with significant comprehensible input. Learners actively attended to the teacher's input for its meaning and were learning words during the process. Many professionals advocate the introduction and learning of vocabulary via comprehensible input whether they call it "vocabulary learning" or not. Krashen and Terrell (1983), for example, advocate the use of topics around which input activities can be developed. The following list of

selected topics form natural vocabulary groups; you can think of others as you read the list:

- description of students
- clothing
- colors
- objects in the classroom
- favorite activities
- sports and games
- climate and seasons
- weather
- seasonal activities
- holiday activities
- family and relatives
- physical states
- emotional states
- daily activities
- holiday and vacation activities
- pets

(Adapted from Krashen & Terrell, 1983, pp. 67-68)

Most textbooks have similar vocabulary groups. Some still make use of bilingual lists, but others have moved toward the use of visuals (drawings, photographs, cartoons) to present vocabulary. In Figure 2.1, German vocabulary words related to clothing are accompanied not by English translations but by drawings. As learners study vocabulary in this way, they are encouraged to make direct form-meaning connections similar to those that they would make if the vocabulary were presented within the context of comprehensible, meaning-bearing input. Terrell refers to the process of making direct form-meaning connections as *binding*.

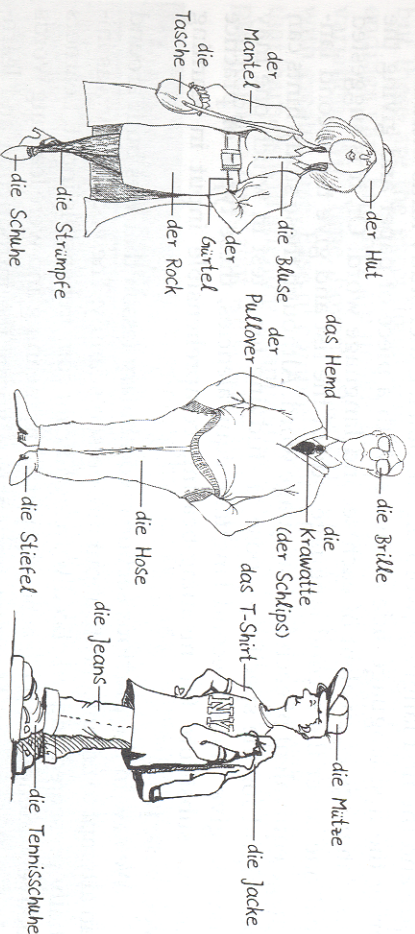


FIGURE 2.1 Presentation of German clothing vocabulary in a contemporary German textbook

Binding is the term I propose to describe the cognitive and affective mental process of linking a meaning to a form. The concept of binding is what language teachers refer to when they insist that a new word ultimately be associated directly with its meaning and not with a translation. (Terrell, 1986, p. 214)

How can we encourage binding during vocabulary acquisition? We have already explored the nature of simplified or modified input and the use of visuals as means by which instructors can make input comprehensible. These can also be used to encourage binding of vocabulary: We saw how visuals such as photos and drawings "anchor" the input in the here-and-now, making the idea and references to it more concrete. As one more example of binding new vocabulary, the instructor in the following classroom excerpt uses photos to introduce vocabulary related to clothing. Her speech is anchored in the here-and-now because both she and the learners have the concrete reference of the photo before them; this photo serves as the common ground between them. The italicized information in brackets represents the instructor's or students' actions, and the nonitalicized information represents what learners say.

Look at this picture. What do you see? A woman? [Yes.] Yes, that's right. There is a woman in the picture. [The instructor points to the hat.] What is this? [Learners shake heads, indicating they don't know.] This is a hat. This picture of the woman who is wearing the hat is for Yvonne. O.K.? Now, who has the picture of the woman who is wearing the hat? [Yvonne.] Good. Now here is another picture. Is this a man or a woman in the picture? [A man.] Right. Yvonne has a picture of a woman with a hat, but this is a picture of a man. Is he wearing a hat? [No.] Right. He's not wearing a hat. What is he wearing? Well, he's wearing a suit. [Instructor points to suit.] This is a grey suit. And he's also wearing a tie. [Instructor points to tie.] So, this man is wearing a suit and a tie. Let's give this photo to Dave. Now, who has the picture of the man in the suit and tie? [Dave.] And who has the picture of the woman with the hat? [Yvonne.] Does the man with the suit also have on a hat? [No.] Does the woman have on a tie? [No.] Here's another photo. This woman is wearing a blouse and pants. . . . (Adapted from Terrell, 1991)

But anchoring input is not limited to visuals. In the remainder of this chapter, we examine some other ways in which instructors can anchor their speech in the here-and-now to promote vocabulary acquisition.

Pause to consider . . .

including information about culturally appropriate attire. Would you include this information when you are first presenting vocabulary or would you develop an activity for later in the lesson?

Using Learners and the Classroom

The classroom is rich in resources for teaching common vocabulary. Indeed, instructors can make use of learners, their features, and their belongings to teach vocabulary. Involving learners heightens attention and adds a personal element to the class as learners become active participants in the teaching process. The following is an example of an instructor using learners in the classroom to teach the vocabulary associated with physical descriptions.

[Instructor points to a learner.] What is your name? [Barbara.] Barbara, come here please. [Gestures to Barbara to approach.] That's right, come here. [Barbara approaches.] Good. Thank you. Class, look at Barbara. She has long brown hair. [Instructor points and gestures to assist comprehension.] Her hair is long and brown. Her hair is not short. It is long. What is the name of the person with long brown hair? [Barbara.] Now, let's see. What's your name? [Sharon.] O.K. Sharon, please come here. [Sharon approaches.] Class, look at Sharon. She has short blond hair. Her hair is not long. It is short. [Gestures "long" and "short" with palms facing each other as he moves them close to each other or away from each other.] It is not brown. It is blond. What is the name of the person with short blond hair? [Sharon.] Right. And what is the name of the person with long brown hair? [Barbara.] Right again. Now, what's your name? [Steve.] Come here, please. Class, this is Steve. Look at Steve's hair. Is it blond? [No.] Is it brown? [Yes.] Then Steve has hair like Barbara's. But is it long? [No.] Is it short? [Yes.] Then Steve has hair like Sharon's. He has the same color hair as Barbara. But he has the same length [gestures in an up and down motion with palms facing each other] of hair as Sharon. The color is brown. The length is short.

(Adapted and expanded from Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 76)

Pause to consider . . .

the roles of instructor and learners in the classroom during these initial input activities. At first glance, the presentations may seem Atlas-like since the teacher is shouldering the burden of communication and is doing all the work. But is this so? Are the learners mere receptacles? What are the instructors doing to keep the learners active and attentive during the lesson? What distinguishes what learners are doing during these activities from what they would do during a drill?

Total Physical Response

Another technique for providing input that has been formalized as a method is *Total Physical Response*, generally referred to by practitioners as TPR. Although no longer used as a method, many instructors find TPR a useful instructional technique or activity, especially in early stages of language development, when

learners can comprehend much more than they can say. Developed by James Asher of San Jose (California) State University, TPR in its simplest terms refers to learners carrying out the actions commanded by the instructor. The instructor first performs the actions while learners listen and watch. Then the learners perform the same actions with the instructor. The instructor subsequently "tests" the binding of the commands by stopping her simultaneous performance of the command and allowing learners to do it as a group on their own. For example, on the very first day of class an instructor might begin with the following. (Italicized words are in the second language; nonitalicized words are in the native language. The information in parentheses indicates the physical actions occurring.)

In this class, you are going to learn language by performing actions based on my commands. To help you learn the commands, I will say them and demonstrate each one. You will then act out the action with me. Ready?

Stand up. (Instructor stands up.)
Sit down. (Instructor sits down.)
Stand up. (Instructor stands up.)
Sit down. (Instructor sits down.)
Now do it with me. *Stand up.* (Instructor and class stand up.)
Sit down. (Instructor and class sit down.)
Stand up. (Instructor and class stand up.)
Sit down. (Instructor and class sit down.)
Watch and listen again.
Stand up. Walk to the blackboard. Walk to your seat. Sit down. (Instructor acts each out as she says it.)
Stand up. Walk to the blackboard. Walk to your seat. Sit down. (Instructor acts each out as she says it.)
Now do it with me. *Stand up. Walk to the blackboard. Walk to your seat. Sit down.* (Instructor and learners act each out as she says it.)
Stand up. Walk to the blackboard. Walk to your seat. Sit down. (Instructor and learners act each out as she says it.)
Robert, you try it. *Stand up.* (Robert stands up while teacher simply stands to the side.) *Sit down.* (Robert sits down.) *Stand up.* (Robert stands up.) *Walk to the blackboard.* (Robert walks to the blackboard.) *Walk to your seat.* (Robert walks to his seat.)
Sit down. (Robert sits down.)
Excellent. Who else wants to try? (Instructor does this again with another learner.)
Now, watch and listen again. *Stand up. Walk to the blackboard. Touch the blackboard. Walk to your seat. Touch your seat. Sit down.* (Instructor acts each out as she says it.)
[The activity may continue.]

Correct performance of the actions demonstrates learners' comprehension. If a learner makes an error (performs the wrong action) or hesitates, the instructor simply repeats the command, acts it out again, or gives some other clue to

the learner. Note that TPR qualifies as both meaning bearing and comprehensible. It is meaning bearing because the input contains a message and comprehensible because the instructor demonstrates the actions. The instructor's own actions, then, serve a similar function to the drawings, photos, and other visual aids mentioned previously. Very quickly, learners begin to make the connections between what is said and what they are supposed to do. Note, too, that TPR contains many of the characteristics of simplified input discussed earlier in this chapter: shorter sentences, pauses, concrete vocabulary. Many instructors find TPR an ideal way to introduce vocabulary once learners know the commands "show," "take," "touch," "hide," "draw," "give," and "pick up." A great deal of vocabulary can be introduced during the course of thirty minutes! As instructors introduce vocabulary with objects and/or visuals, they can instruct learners to carry out the following actions:

Hide the picture of the house.

Walk to the drawing of an apartment.

Give the brown dog to Emily.

Draw a tree on the board.

Pick up the history book and give it to Robert.

Pick up the math book and show it to the class.

In a lesson on body parts, an instructor might ask learners to manipulate photos of various body parts. With the photos arranged in the chalktray and on his desk, he could call learners to the front of the class and give them commands such as these:

Put the photo of the nose on top of the photo of the mouth.

Take the two ears and put them on top of the eyebrows.

The instructor might subsequently have the class "build a face" on the blackboard. With tape added to the back of the visuals, he might tell learners:

Robert, put a nose on the board.

Now, Jane, put a mouth on the board.

Stan, select an ear and place it on the board.

and so on until the class completed a Picasso-like face and head.

Pause to consider . . .

the importance of visuals in language instruction. Why is it a good idea for beginning instructors to start a "picture file"? (A picture file is a file of photos from magazines that have been cut and mounted onto construction paper.) What are the qualities of "good" visuals for the language classroom? How large should a picture be? Should it be simple and straightforward or contain a complex scene? Why do some consider the overhead projector to be a language instructor's best friend?

Inexperienced instructors often see TPR as consisting of only simple commands. But as learners progress, the instructor can combine commands and declarative statements, thus increasing the quality of the input that learners receive. For example, after several days of TPR, instructors can push their learners into comprehending "if-then" statements by simply giving the second language equivalents for *if*, *but*, and *then* and giving commands of the following type: "If Susan walks to the blackboard, then stand up. But if she walks to the door, just raise your hand."

Vocabulary Activities

Specific input-oriented activities and quizzes can be developed once vocabulary is introduced. One activity type that serves as both a classroom activity and a quizzing activity is to have learners mark up a photocopied visual according to what their instructor says. Once again using body parts, imagine that the learners have at their desks a photocopied line drawing of a human being. The instructor uses already known vocabulary (shapes, numbers, letters) to test the learner's comprehension of body parts in context.

1. Draw a circle around the nose.
2. Write the number 15 on the left eye and the number 14 on the right eye.
3. Place an X over the mouth.

If learners already know colors, then they could be given crayons or colored pencils and told to

1. Color the eyes red.
2. Color the left ear blue and the right ear green.

Learners could play games such as Bingo, using cards with body parts rather than numbers (each card would be slightly different). The instructor would reach into a bag and pull out the name of a body part and read it. Students would place a marker on each body part, and the first learner to obtain a row of body parts vertically, horizontally, or diagonally would win.

Another type of input activity requires visualization. Learners are given crayons and colored pencils for drawing. They then close their eyes and listen to a brief description that uses current vocabulary. As they listen, they should develop a mental picture of what is described. Once the description is complete, they open their eyes and draw. Visualization activities could be used for vocabulary such as physical descriptions, clothing, weather, family members and relatives, physical states, and emotional states. Following is an example of one such visualizing activity used as an end-of-class quiz. It uses vocabulary related to rooms and furniture.

I am going to describe a room in a house. I want you to close your eyes and listen. Try to picture the house in your mind. Visualize it as I describe it. After I complete the description, you will draw it! Ready? O.K., close your eyes. Now listen carefully—and visualize the room. (The instructor lowers her voice and speaks slowly and dramatically, using many pauses.) This is a living room. Not a kitchen, not a bedroom, and

not a dining room, but a living room. This room has two large windows. Through the windows you can see some trees. Between the two windows is a small green sofa. Above the small green sofa is a painting. It is a painting of a woman. To the left of the sofa is a chair. It is a large chair. The chair is blue and green. Next to the chair is a small round table. The small round table is made of wood.

Some textbooks have begun to incorporate input-oriented work as part of the initial vocabulary presentation, making the first-time instructor's task a bit easier if her goal is to provide as much input as possible. Activities include matching (vocabulary-visuals, vocabulary-statements, vocabulary-definitions), true/false (likely/unlikely, possible/impossible), and others. As an example, the following textbook activity uses vocabulary related to moods and feelings (*happy, sad, bored, tired*). Learners first glance over the expressions in their textbooks as the instructor pronounces them. Then they complete the subsequent matching activity.

Following is a list of thoughts that Claudia [the person in the visual display of emotions and feelings] had during the three days previously described. Match each feeling your instructor mentions to one of Claudia's thoughts.

MODEL: INSTRUCTOR: She's nervous.

CLASS: That goes with number 2.

1. "I would like to sleep ten hours tonight!"
2. "Gee whiz! I only have four hours left to study. I'm gonna fail!"
3. "They are going to think I'm dumb."
4. "Didn't this prof learn about public speaking? How monotonous."
5. "Yippe! I got an A! I got an A!"

[Instructor reads:

She's very happy.
 She feels embarrassed.
 She's nervous.
 She's tired.
 She's bored.]

A related input-oriented activity would be the following, in which the instructor states a mood or emotion about typical students and the learners select the reason for that mood.

Your instructor will read some moods that are common among students. Choose the activity that might cause that mood in the typical student.

1. a. He is studying in the library.
 b. He has three exams today.
 c. He slept fine last night.
2. a. She has to study but a roommate is playing the stereo loud.
 b. She received a letter from a good friend this morning.
 c. She is going shopping after class.
3. a. He is attending classes.
 b. He is going to the cafeteria to eat.
 c. He won \$1,000,000 in the lottery.

4. a. She is going to a party with some friends.
 b. She ate in a great restaurant last night.
 c. She got an F on a test.

[Instructor reads: 1. The student is very tense. 2. The student is upset. 3. The student is happy. 4. The student is depressed.]

Pause to consider . . .

using the previous examples of activities as tasks on a short vocabulary quiz. Are they equal in difficulty? For example, how does the task of coloring body parts compare in difficulty to the activity in which a learner has to visualize and then draw a room? How do both compare, say, to the activity about students' moods and their possible causes? If these tasks are not equal in difficulty, how would you determine point value and assign a grade to each?

SUMMARY

We have explored a number of issues related to input and second language teaching. First, we saw that the necessary characteristics of good input are that it be (1) comprehensible and (2) meaning bearing (it carries a message that the learner attends to).

In both first and second language acquisition, people who speak to learners modify their speech in certain ways to facilitate learner comprehension. Learners, when actively engaged in attempting to comprehend, can get their interlocutors to make modifications in what they said. These modifications include simplification of vocabulary and syntax, reduction of speed, increased use of pauses, shorter sentences, repetition and rephrasing, and others. These modifications enable learners to attend to form-meaning connections in the input, which in turn translates into better acquisition. In short, it is not native-like discourse that fuels acquisition in the early stages but rather discourse that is tailored to the learner. This tailoring may adjust over time as the learner builds up a linguistic system and becomes increasingly skilled in comprehension.

We also explored examples of teacher talk in classrooms, showing how some instructors provide comprehensible input in large doses to their learners. Focusing on the here-and-now, anchoring the input in topics with which learners are familiar, using visuals, and drawing on the board, these instructors provide classroom learners with the kind of high-octane input their internal mechanisms need in order to succeed in language acquisition. These instructors are providing opportunities for binding to take place.

Finally, we examined some specific uses of comprehensible, meaning-bearing input in the teaching of vocabulary: visuals, Total Physical Response, visualization techniques, and matching activities. These activities are also easily

adaptable for quizzing in an input format, thus linking instructional techniques with testing techniques.

Remember that vocabulary acquisition is not the only critical use of input. In this chapter, we have seen various examples of input useful for vocabulary acquisition, and it would be easy to infer that input provision equals vocabulary acquisition. But it should be clear that comprehensible, meaning-bearing input is crucial for *all* domains of language: syntax, verbal morphology, nominal morphology, pronunciation, and semantics, in addition to vocabulary. In Chapters 6 and 7, we explore in detail the relationship of input to the acquisition of grammar. For now, you should understand that, although learners are reaping the benefits of vocabulary acquisition from the input they are exposed to, they are also acquiring grammar.

KEY TERMS, CONCEPTS, AND ISSUES

input	familiar topics
comprehensible	familiar situations
meaning bearing	binding in vocabulary acquisition
simplified	form-meaning connections
modified	direct versus indirect
expansions in adult-child	bilingual lists
interactions	visuals
simplified input in second language	TPR
acquisition	activities and quizzes
linguistic characteristics	drawing
intake	games
learner negotiation of input	visualization
interaction	matching
how to make input comprehensible	
in the classroom	
nonlinguistic aids	
concrete versus abstract	
referent	

THINKING MORE ABOUT IT: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Imagine that you are the native-speaking instructor participating in the following interchanges. What would your natural expansions of the learner's utterances be like? What would you say next? (NS = Native Speaker, L = Learner)

(1) NS: Do you ride a bike to school?

L: No bike.

NS: _____

(2) L: (who is telling how he turned down an invitation to go out with friends last night): So, I stay. No go. Stay and study.

NS: _____

Now recast these interchanges into the language you teach. How would you expand on the learner's utterances in the L2?

2. As mentioned in the chapter, learners may often signal a lack of comprehension, thereby causing a modification in the native speaker's speech. How would you modify the question or statement in each of the following situations? (As in the interchanges in the preceding activity, do this first in English and then in the language you teach.)

(1) NS: At what time did you get home?

L: Sorry?

NS: _____

(2) NS: And so they lived happily ever after.

L: After?

NS: _____

(3) NS: With lobsters I only eat the tails and claws.

L: Cl-d . . .

NS: _____

3. Review the following conversation between two adults (presented earlier in the chapter). Then modify the second person's (the friend's) speech, so that a beginning learner could more easily understand it.

PARENT: I'm pretty fed up with my job these days. I mean, I can't believe that the company thinks we will take a cut in pay and not say anything. I mean, it's just—I don't know.

FRIEND: But it's like that everywhere! Last week I read in *Newsweek*—at least I think it was *Newsweek*. We get both *Newsweek* and *Time*—but anyway I read where IBM is cutting another 500 jobs this next week. I bet those people wouldn't mind a cut in pay just to keep food on the table.

PARENT: Come on! It's not that easy and you know it. . . .

GETTING A CLOSER LOOK: RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Record on either audio- or videotape two language instructors who are native speakers of the language they teach. First, record them talking to each other. Transcribe ten minutes of their speech. Then observe and record one or both of these instructors teaching, and transcribe ten minutes of that recording.

Prepare a report detailing the most outstanding differences between how they speak to each other and how they speak to language learners. Be sure to provide specific examples of techniques they use to make themselves understood.

MAKING COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING HAPPEN: PORTFOLIO ACTIVITIES

Using the family tree presentation as a guide, make a visual of your weekly (Monday–Friday) schedule and write a detailed script for how you would present it to your class. Remember: Your goal is to have your learners know what your schedule is. Keep in mind the kinds of true/false or other questions you might “quiz” them with that do not require production on their part. Prepare a quiz to give them as a final task. Imagine that you would present this in the second or third week of instruction.

Communicating in the Classroom

In this chapter we explore:

- The process of learning to communicate in a second language
- The nature of communication—defined as the expression, interpretation and negotiation of meaning—and communicative language ability
- The informational-cognitive purpose of communication as suited to classroom communication
- The characteristics of the discourse that results from using communicative drills, teacher-fronted activities, and paired or group interactive tasks
- Suggestions for developing information-exchange tasks
- Non-Atlas roles for instructors that result from using information-exchange tasks for communicating in classrooms

LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE

Studies of the acquisition of grammar were not the only research to underlie theories of habit formation and ALM. According to these theories, communicating with the language was something that would happen as a result of normalizing grammatical habits. The learner had to learn habits before using them. In 1972, Savignon published a study that would have a major impact on the way in which professionals perceived the ALM classroom and its effect on developing communicative language abilities. In her study, she compared three groups of French in a first-semester college classroom. The first group received classical ALM training with four classroom days and one lab day per week; the second received the same ALM training, but on the fifth day lab practice was replaced by cultural studies. Students saw films and slide shows, had discussions about their impressions of France, and participated in informal discussions with French students studying in the United States, among other activities. The third group received ALM training, but lab day was devoted to training in communication. Students first discussed what it meant to communicate and nonverbal communication played a role in face-to-face interactions. They