

The Importance of the Input in Additional Language Acquisition

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NTNU, Trondheim

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Course Description

This course will place the linguistic environment (also known as comprehensible input, positive evidence, naturalistic input) at the heart of language acquisition. For statistical learning approaches to language acquisition (such as connectionism, emergentism), input is either the only (truly linguistic) condition for language acquisition or by far the most essential. For generative approaches, it is a necessary, but crucially not an isolated sufficient condition. In this course, we will describe how input interacts with other factors, such as Universal Grammar, the social milieu, effects from previous language transfer/cross-linguistic influence and teaching, in language development. The study of bilingual children acquiring two languages simultaneously provides researchers with a natural experiment: understanding how a grammar can be acquired under (roughly) half the input that monolingual children receive. The study of naturalistic versus classroom second language learners brings in another perspective: can explicit teaching make up for input considerably lower in quantity in comparison to children acquiring their native language or, in certain respect, might it hinder as much as it helps. If so, how can this be ameliorated?

See attachment for details.

ECTS and requirements

PhD students get 5 ECTS if they complete the following requirements:

- Do readings before and during the course, as assigned by the instructors
- Attend all lectures
- Submit one research question in writing after each lecture.
- Write a 2000-word essay on an assigned topic following the lecture

The Importance of the Input in Additional Language Acquisition

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General remarks

How does language come to be in the mind/brain of its speakers? This question has been at the core of linguistic theorizing for the last sixty years. The answer provided by generative linguistics (e.g., Chomsky, 2005) is that three factors interact in this process: 1. The genetic endowment (also known as Universal Grammar); 2. The linguistic experience; and 3. Principles of computation not specific to the language faculty. In this course, we will pay special attention to the second factor; namely, the comprehensible language that surrounds the learner. It is well understood that the linguistic input is absolutely crucial for language acquisition. If a child born to Mexican parents, for example, is adopted at birth and exposed to language in Norway, she will not grow up speaking Spanish but Norwegian. The linguistic input provides the speaker with crucial evidence on how a specific language works, for instance whether it marks subject–verb agreement, or whether it has the verb-second property. However, what is not as well understood is how exactly the three factors interact in bilingualism, second, third and additional language acquisition (L2/L3/Ln). What exactly do learners require from their environment for successful L2/L3/Ln acquisition to take place? If a property is universal and easy to acquire in an additional language, does it matter whether it is frequent or rare in the input? Alternatively, are the most frequently evidenced properties easiest to acquire? If natural, comprehensible input is defined as “positive evidence” for a certain grammatical feature, is negative evidence in the form of explicit teaching really necessary for this feature to be learned? Questions of this nature are actively debated in the field of language acquisition.

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We will examine the linguistic input from two main perspectives:

- 1) LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE: Is frequency in the input important, to what degree?
- 2) INSTRUCTIONAL PERSPECTIVE: The Input Hypothesis (Krashen), The Interaction Hypothesis (Long), Processing Instruction (VanPatten)

Outcomes

The goal is for the students to learn how to work with bilinguals and L2/L3/Ln learners, how to collect new data, and how to analyze the existing data, especially keeping in mind the role that exposure to data entails in the development and ultimate attainment outcomes of various groups of language acquirers. The main end-goal is for the students to understand the importance of input in all instances of acquisition—what it can explain and crucially what input alone cannot explain—and how input is used, uptaken necessarily differently in various iterations of acquisition (L1, L2, L3, 2L1, etc.) because of the dynamic nature of grammatical acquisition.

Here are the core research issues regarding the importance of the input:

- What does the input provide (and at what level of granularity)?
- What quantity and quality of input, outside of monolingual environments, is needed for optimal acquisition?
- What is minimally sufficient input for successful acquisition: does this vary for different learner groups? How does bilingualism help us address and answer this perennial question?
- Does the role of input potentially change in the specific learning task of sequential bi-/multilingualism? That is, might input be uptaken differently in sequential bilingualism due to the presence of a previous language?
- Does the role input takes change with each additional language whereby L3 would be different from L2 as much as L2 is different, if at all, from L1?

Syllabus

A good preparatory text for this course is **Roumyana Slabakova (2016), *Second Language Acquisition*, Oxford University Press, and specifically chapters 5 and 6**. As you study the readings listed below, please keep notes on how these readings can inform the core research issues listed above.

Day 1. Bilingualism: Child L2 acquisition, 2L1 Acquisition and Heritage speakers

Readings:

- Kupisch, Tanja. (2012). Generic subjects in the Italian of early German-Italian bilinguals and German Learners of Italian as a second language. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 15(4), 736-756.
- Kupisch, Tanja. & Rothman, Jason. (2016). Terminology Matters!: Early Child Bilinguals are Heritage Speakers and Arguments Against the label Incomplete Acquisition. *International Journal of Bilingualism*. doi:10.1177/1367006916654355
- Thordardottir, Elin. 2014. The relationship between bilingual exposure and morphosyntactic development. *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* 2014 : 1-18. (doi: 10.3109/17549507.2014.923509)
- Schwartz, Bonnie D. 2004. Why child L2 acquisition? In Jacqueline van Kampen & Sergio Baauw (Eds.), *Proceedings of GALA 2003*, Vol. 1, 47-66. Utrecht: Netherlands Graduate School of Linguistics (LOT).
- Unsworth, Sharon. (2008) Age and input in the acquisition of grammatical gender in Dutch. *Second Language Research* 24: 365-396.
- Unsworth, Sharon. (2016). Early child L2 acquisition: Age or input effects? Neither, or both? *Journal of Child Language*, 43, 603-634. doi:10.1017/S030500091500080X
- Rothman, Jason. (2007), 'Heritage speaker competence differences, language change, and input type: Inflected infinitives in heritage Brazilian Portuguese', *The International Journal of Bilingualism* 11, 359–389.

Day 2. Adult L2 Acquisition in naturalistic and instructed settings

Readings:

- Krashen, Stephen. (1985). *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and implications*. Harlow: Longman. Chapter 1, pp. 1-32.
- Long, M. (1996). The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In Ritchie W.C. and Bhatia, T.K. *Handbook of second language acquisition*. San Diego: Academic Press, pp. 413-68.
- Muñoz, Carmen. (2011) Input and long-term effects of starting age in foreign language learning. *International Review of Applied Linguistics* 49, 113–133.
- Rothman, Jason (2008). Aspect Selection in Adult L2 Spanish and The Competing Systems Hypothesis: When Pedagogical and Linguistic Rules Conflict. *Languages in Contrast*, 8(1), 74-106.

- Rothman, Jason, & Guijarro-Fuentes, Pedro. (2010). Input Quality Matters: Some Comments on Input Type and Age-Effects in Adult SLA. *Applied Linguistics*, 31(2), 301-306.
- Rankin, Tom and Unsworth, Sharon. (2016). Beyond poverty: Engaging with input in generative SLA. *Second Language Research* 32, 4, 563–572.
- Pliatsikas, Christos and Marinis, Theodoros (2013). Processing empty categories in a second language: When naturalistic exposure fills the (intermediate) gap. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 16, 167–182.
- Slabakova, Roumyana (2003). Semantic evidence for functional categories in interlanguage grammars. *Second Language Research* 19, 42–75.

Day 3. L3/Ln acquisition and methodological issues

Readings:

- González Alonso, Jorge. & Rothman, Jason. (in press, 2016). Coming of Age in L3 Initial Stages Transfer Models: Deriving Developmental Predictions and Looking towards the Future. *International Journal of Bilingualism* doi: 10.1177/1367006916649265
- Hopp, Holger and Schmid, Monika (2013). Perceived foreign accent in first language attrition and second language acquisition: The impact of age of acquisition and bilingualism. *Applied Psycholinguistics* 34, 361–394.
- Rothman, Jason, & Cabrelli Amaro, Jennifer. (2010). What variables condition syntactic transfer? A look at the L3 initial state. *Second Language Research*, 26, 189–218.
- Slabakova, Roumyana. (in press, 2016). The Scalpel Model of third language acquisition. *International Journal of Bilingualism* DOI: 10.1177/1367006916655413
- Unsworth, S. (2016). Quantity and quality of language input in bilingual language development. In E. Nicoladis & S. Montanari (Eds.), *Lifespan perspectives on bilingualism* (pp. 136-196). Mouton de Gruyter/APA. [Bilingualism lifespan FINAL.pdf](#) (intended as an overview of course)