

Individual Paper Session 23
Classroom
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Noticing the gap and second language acquisition: A role for output in uptake and subsequent incorporation

Chris Sheppard
Waseda University
kurisunz@hotmail.com

One of the roles for output in SLA is that it enables learners to ‘notice the gap’ (Swain, 1995). First, learners notice problems in their linguistic knowledge, orientating them to related information in subsequent input. This increases the chance of uptake. Finally, these items are incorporated into production. This paper examines these issues.

Japanese university EFL learners were placed at random into two groups of twenty. The participants were first asked to complete a narrative production task, after which stimulated recall was conducted. The number of times participants noticed gaps in their knowledge, and tested language hypotheses were counted.

Following this, participants were provided with either a native speaker version of the task they had just completed (the input group), or their output was repaired when the participant indicated they had noticed a gap, or tested a hypothesis during the stimulated recall session. Uptake was measured with note-taking in the input condition, or repetition in the repair condition.

Finally, the participants were asked to repeat the task, where the words incorporated were counted.

The results demonstrated that first, the participants did notice gaps (0.30 per t-unit), and test hypotheses (0.31 per t-unit). The participants in the input group uptook 35.9% of the words related to gaps and 27.1% of the information related to hypotheses. Participants in the repair group uptook 45.9% and 59.5% of the words respectively. Finally, Input group participants incorporated 37.3% of the words available to fill gaps, and 23.5% of the words available to respond to hypotheses. The repair group incorporated 62.4%, and 66.4% of the available words respectively in subsequent output.

Overall the results provide support for a role for spoken output in second language acquisition. Learners notice problems in their linguistic knowledge systems, and are oriented to uptaking and incorporating subsequent related input.