Native speaker/non-native speaker conversation in the second language classroom [1]

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Introduction

Several recent studies of second language acquisition (SLA) and use have focused on native speaker/non-native speaker (NS-NNS) conversation and its role in the acquisition process. Much of that work has been concerned with ways in which samples of the target language are made comprehensible to the learner. This interest has been motivated by claims that it is primarily comprehensible input which feeds the acquisition process, language heard but not understood generally being thought to be of little or no use for this purpose. Other similarly motivated research has been conducted on talk by teachers and students. More recently, some explicit comparisons have been made of NS-NNS conversation inside and outside the SL classroom.

The purpose of this paper is briefly to review what has been learned by the research so far, and to suggest implications for SL teaching. The paper is in five sections. First, I summarize the evidence in support of what has become known as "the input hypothesis". Second, I describe ways in which input is made comprehensible to the SL learner. Third, I present some research findings which suggest a crucial characteristic of NS-NNS conversation whose product for the learner is comprehensible input. Fourth, I report some work on ESL teaching which looks at how successful classroom discourse is at providing learners with comprehensible input. Fifth, and last, I suggest some ways in which teaching might be improved in this respect.

The Input hypothesis

To paraphrase Krashen (1980), the fundamental question for SLA research is how a learner at some stage, 'i', of interlanguage development moves to the next stage, 'i + 1'. In other words, how does he or she acquire? Part of Krashen's answer is as follows :

"a necessary condition to move from stage i to stage i + 1 is that the acquirer understand input that contains i + 1, where 'understand' means that the acquirer is focused on the meaning and not the form of the utterance." (op. cit. p. 170)

Krashen goes on to claim that this seemingly impossible task is achieved through use of the learner's current grammar, that which underlies 'i', plus use of context, or extralinguistic information, i.e. knowledge of the world. The task is seemingly impossible because the learner by definition does not know language at 'i + 1'. Interlanguage development is achieved, in other words, through obtaining input which contains the structures of 'i + 1', and yet is comprehensible. Understanding precedes growth.

In support of his version of the input hypothesis, Krashen offers four pieces of evidence, which, for the sake of brevity, I merely summarize here (for further details, see Krashen, 1978, 1980).

1. Caretaker speech is modified, not in a deliberate attempt to teach young children the language, but in order to aid comprehension. Further, and crucially, it is only roughly tuned to the child's current linguistic capabilities. It therefore contains structures below, at and a little beyond the child's level. Its frequent focus on the "here and now" is one way the new structures are made comprehensible.

2. Speech by NSs is modified for use with NNSs in much the same way as caretaker speech. It, too, is only roughly tuned, more advanced learners getting more complex input, with the focus again on communication rather than on

teaching the language per se. The modified code, 'foreigner talk' also
contains structures below, at, and a little beyond the learner's current
proficiency level, with the same potential advantages to the acquirer
(built-in "review" and opportunities for further development).

3. The "silent period" observed in some young children is due to the SL
acquirer building up competence via listening, by understanding language,
prior to speaking. Denial of the option of a silent period to the learner,
e.g. through the pressure to speak (performance without competence) on most
adults and formally instructed learners, is what leads to their having to
fall back on their L1, resulting in first language transfer.

4. Research on relative effectiveness of teaching methods suggests that
there is little difference among various methods which provide learners with
insufficient comprehensible input. On the other hand, methods which do provide
such input, such as TPR and the Natural Approach, tend to do well when compared
with those in the former group.

　　　　While the evidence Krashen adduces is indeed consistent with his
claim, it is not very strong evidence. The data on caretaker speech and foreigner
talk, as he is aware, merely show co-occurring phenomena. The silent period is
by no means always found, even in child acquirers, and is open to various other
interpretations (e.g. personality differences, language shock, culture shock).
The "comparative methods" studies have often suffered from lack of control over
potentially confounding variables (see Long, 1980a).

　　　　There is, however, additional evidence for the input hypothesis.
The following is again only a brief summary (for further details, see Long 1981a).

5. While few direct comparisons are available, studies have generally found
immersion programs superior to foreign or second language programs (for review,
see Genesee, 1979; Swain, 1974; Tucker, 1980). Indeed, so successful is immersion

that comparison groups are typically monolingual speakers of the immersion language, something nearly unthinkable for most foreign or SL program evaluation. While clearly not a monolithic concept, immersion may fairly be characterized, according to one authority (Swain, 1981a), as focusing initially on the development of target language comprehension rather than production skills, content rather than form, and as attempting to teach content through the SL in language the children can understand. Modern language teaching, on the other hand, generally focuses on formal accuracy, is structurally graded and sentence-bound, and demands early (even immediate) production of nearly all material presented to the learner.

6. For students in immersion programs, additional exposure to the target language outside the school does not seem to facilitate acquisition. Swain (1981b) found no difference in the French skills of French immersion students in Canadian towns where little or no French was spoken and those in towns where, as in the case of Montreal, as much as 65% of language on the street was French. This is presumably because the French of native speakers of French in the wider environment was not addressed to non-native speakers but to other native speakers, and was, therefore, incomprehensible to the immersion children.

7. Lastly, and the strongest evidence to date, acquisition is either severely delayed or does not occur at all if comprehensible input is unavailable. This is true for first and second language acquisition by both adults and children. Thus, hearing children of deaf adults have been severely language delayed when their only input was adult-adult speech on television, yet have caught up with other children when normal adult-child conversation was made available to them (Bard and Sachs, 1977; Jones and Quigley, 1979; Sachs, Bard and Johnson, 1981; Sachs and Johnson, 1976). The hearing children of deaf adults who made normal progress, as reported by Schiff (1979), are not counter-examples since each child in that study had between 10 and 25 hours per week of conversation with hearing adults. Analogous

cases exist in the SLA literature. Thus, young Dutch children who watched German television programs have been noted not to acquire German through so doing (Snow, Arlman-Rupp, Hassing, Jobse, Joosten and Vorster, 1976). Three motivated English-speaking adults, two of whom were linguistically sophisticated, were found to have acquired no more than some 50 stock vocabulary items and a few conversational formulae in Mandarin and Cantonese after seven months in a Chinese-speaking environment (see Long, 1981a, for further details). A single counter-example, reported by Larsen-Freeman (1979), of a German adult who claimed to have acquired Dutch only by listening to Dutch radio broadcasts can be explained by the similarities between the two languages allowing native fluency in one to serve as basic competence in the other.

In general, therefore, it seems that all the available evidence is consistent with the idea that a <u>beginning</u> learner, at least, must have comprehensible input if he or she is to acquire either a first or a second language :

1. Access to comprehensible input is a characteristic of all cases of successful acquisition, first and second (cases 1, 2, 3 and 5, above).

2. Greater quantities of comprehensible input seem to result in better (or at least faster) acquisition (case 4).

And crucially,

3. Lack of access to comprehensible input (as distinct from <u>in</u>comprehensible, not any, input) results in little or no acquisition (cases 6 and 7).

Like any genuine hypothesis, the input hypothesis has not been proven. There has been no direct test of it to date. Currently, however, it is sustained because the predictions it makes are consistent with the available data. It has yet to be disconfirmed.

How input is made comprehensible

Having established a <u>prima facie</u> case for the important role of

comprehensible input in all forms of language acquisition, including SLA, the next question that arises is how input becomes comprehensible. It is widely believed that one way is through the hundred and one speech modifications NSs are supposed to make when talking to foreigners, e.g. use of shorter, syntactically less complex utterances, high frequency vocabulary and low type-token ratios (for review, see Hatch, 1979; Long, 1980b, 1981a). In other words, NSs are supposed to make input to NNSs comprehensible by modifying the input itself. There are, however, several problems with this position.

First, many of the input modifications often claimed to characterize foreigner talk have no empirical basis. They are the product of assertions by researchers after examining only speech by NSs to non-natives. For example, an impressionistic judgement is made that a NS is using short utterances or high frequency lexical items, and it is then claimed that foreigner talk is characterizedby shorter utterances and higher frequency lexical items than speech to other NSs. For such a claim to be justified, comparison of speech to non-natives and natives is required. Further, when comparisons are made, the two corpora must be based on equivalent (preferably identical) speech situations, or else any differences observed may be due to differences in task, age, familiarity of speakers, etc. rather than or as well as the status of the interlocutor as a native or non-native speaker. A review of the foreigner talk literature (Long, 1980b, 1981b) found many studies to have used no NS baseline data at all, and almost none of those that had to have used data comparable in these ways. Further, findings had frequently not been quantified, and when quantified, often not tested for statistical significance of the claimed differences. Findings both within and across studies had also been very variable.

Second, there seems to be no evidence that input modifications made by NSs for the supposed benefit of NNSs actually have this effect. One study (Chaudron, in press) explicitly deals with this issue in the area of lexical

changes, and concludes that many modifications may actually cause the learner greater problems of comprehension. "Simplification" is an interactional phenomenom. As Meisel (1977) and Larsen-Freeman (1979) have pointed out, what may be easier to produce from the speaker's perspective may be more difficult to decode from the perspective of the hearer. A shorter utterance, for example, will usually exhibit less redundancy.

Third, there is a logical problem with the idea that changing the input will aid acquisition. If removal from the input of structures and lexical items the learner does not understand is what is involved in making speech comprehensible, how does the learner ever advance? Where is the input at $i + 1$ that is to appear in the learner's competence at the next stage of development?

Clearly, there must be other ways in which input is made comprehensible than modifying the input itself. One way, as Krashen, Hatch and others have argued, is by use of the linguistic and extralinguistic context to fill in the gaps, just as NSs have been shown to do when the incoming speech signal is inadequate (Warren and Warren, 1970). Another way, as in caretaker speech, is through orienting even adult-adult NS-NNS conversation to the "here and now" (Gaies, 1981; Long, 1980b, 1981c). A third, more consistently used method is modifying not the input itself, but the interactional structure of conversation through such devices as self- and other-repetition, confirmation and comprehension checks and clarification requests (Long, 1980b, 1981a, in press).

Two pieces of evidence suggest that this third way of making input comprehensible is the most important and most widely used of all. First, all studies which have looked at this dimension of NS-NNS conversation have found statistically significant modifications from NS-NS norms. Interactional modifications, in other words, are pervasive. Second, interactional modifications are found in NS-NNS conversation even when input modifications are not or are few and minor. Thus, in one study (Long, 1980b), the structure of NS-NNS

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conversation in 16 dyads on six different tasks was significantly different from that of conversation in 16 NS-NS control dyads on the same tasks on 10 out of 11 measures (see Table 1). There were no statistically significant differences, on the other hand, on four out of five measures of input modification in the same conversations (see Table 1).

Table 1 about here

Similar results have since been obtained in several other studies (e.g. Gaies, 1981; Sperry, 1981; Yorinks, 1981; Weinberger, 1981).

In summary, there are probably several ways in which input is made comprehensible. (1) Use of structures and lexis with which the interlocutor is already familiar is certainly one way, but this kind of modification of the input itself may not be as widespread or as great as is often assumed. It can, in any case, serve only the immediate needs of communication, not the future interlanguage development of the learner, for by definition it denies him or her access to new linguistic material. (2) A "here and now" orientation in conversation and the use of linguistic and extralinguistic (contextual) information and general knowledge also play a role. So, more importantly, does (3) modification of the interactional structure of the conversation, i.e. change at the level of discourse. While all three methods may aid communication, (2) and (3) are those likely to aid acquisition, for each allows communication to proceed while exposing the learner to linguistic material which he or she cannot yet handle without their help. (2) and (3) serve to make that unfamiliar linguistic input comprehensible.

Information exchange and comprehensible input

As indicated above, the results reported in Table 1 were for performance by the 32 dyads across all six tasks in the study. One of the general research hypotheses, however, was that there would be differential performance on the tasks. Specifically, it was predicted that modifications of both kinds (of input and of the interactional structure of conversation) in NS-NNS conversation would be greater on those tasks whose completion required a two-way exchange of information.

Work in both first and second language research has suggested that it is in part verbal feedback from the language learner that enables the caretaker or NS to adjust his or her speech to the interlocutor, child or adult, (Berko Gleason, 1977; Gaies, in press). Thus, Snow (1972) found that mothers, who were already familiar with their young children's linguistic abilities, nevertheless made few adjustments in their speech when preparing tape-recordings for them in their absence. The same mothers modified their speech significantly in face-to-face conversation with the children. Similarly, Stayaert (1977) found no statistically significant modifications in the speech of NSs telling stories to ESL classes, a result which could be explained by the lack of feedback in the story-telling task.

In both these studies, the tasks which did not produce significant changes in the competent speakers' speech involved participants with information communicating it to others who lacked it, herafter "one-way" tasks. Tasks of this type in the Long (1980b) study were (in the order of their presentation) : (2) vicarious narrative, (3) giving instructions, and (6) discussing the supposed purpose of the research (i.e. expressing an opinion). Three other tasks in that study were "two-way", in that each member of a dyad started with information which the other lacked but needed if the task were to be completed. These tasks were : (1) conversation, (4) and (5) playing two communication games, e.g. with

visual contact prevented by a screen, finding differences between two nearly identical pictures. The tasks were performed by all dyads in the order indicated above.

The results are presented in Table 2. Performance by the NS-NNS dyads

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Table 2 about here

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was statistically significantly different from that by NS-NS dyads on the three tasks requiring a two-way information exchange for their completion, but not so on the three one-way tasks, those not requiring this exchange.

The model that is suggested by the findings reported above, together with the literature reviewed in the two previous sections of this paper, is shown in Figure 1. The need to obtain information from (not simply transmit information to) the less competent speaker means that the competent speaker cannot press ahead (in largely unmodified speech) without attending to the feedback (verbal and non-

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Figure 1

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verbal) he or she is receiving. The option to provide feedback allows the less competent speaker to negotiate the conversation, to force the competent speaker to adjust his or her performance, via modifications of the kinds discussed earlier, until what he or she is saying is comprehensible. Comprehensible input, it has already been argued, feeds acquisition.

The model is presumably applicable to all conversations between those who control a code to a higher degree of proficiency than those with whom they are attempting to communicate, including NSs in conversation with NNSs, caretakers with young children, and normal adults and children with the mentally retarded. The model predicts, among other things, that communication involving a two-way exchange of information will provide more comprehensible input than communication

which does not. Two-way communication tasks should also promote acquisition better than one-way tasks, for one-way tasks cannot guarantee the kinds of modifications needed to make input comprehensible.

Classroom NS-NNS conversation

The data and discussion thus far have centered around NS-NNS conversation outside the classroom setting. This section reviews some recent empirical work on the same issues in classroom English as a second language (ESL).

Many traditional analyses of classroom discourse have emphasized its instructional purpose. The focus has been the language of participants in the roles of 'teacher' and 'student' rather than the conversation of native and non-native speakers. Thus, descriptive categories have included such items as 'lecturing', 'praising', 'correction', 'drill', 'teacher question' and 'student response', 'presentation' and 'practice', where the pedagogic function of classroom language is clearly uppermost in the researcher's mind. Direct reference to target language skills or subject matter has also been frequent, as shown by the use of such behavioral categories as 'speaking', 'reading', 'oral reading', 'writing', 'grammar' and 'vocabulary'.

Research of this kind has also emphasized language use in the classroom rather than language acquisition. Comparisons are made between two or more "methods" of instruction (e.g. audio-lingual and grammar translation) or two or more types of instruction (e.g. SL teaching and immersion education). If non-instructional language is introduced as baseline data, it tends to be NS-NS conversation, e.g. that in a specialized occupational setting for which the learners are supposedly being prepared by their language instruction. The agenda for such research involves an effort to make classroom discourse (either spoken or written) approximate target language use for these situations.

It is not my intention to criticize such work in any way. It is obviously extremely valuable for a variety of concerns in applied linguistics, such as syllabus design, materials development, teacher education, and the improvement

of classroom instruction. I wish to suggest, however, that when the focus is SL _acquisition_ in a classroom setting, both the categories and the baseline data need to change.

Assuming that some version of the input hypothesis is correct, indeed to test that hypothesis, the analysis will need to include the same kinds of categories as the work on NS-NNS conversation outside classrooms. NS-NNS (not NS-NS) conversation will also become the source of baseline data. NS-NNS conversation, after all, is one context known to be capable of producing fluent sequential bilinguals. Witness its success in this regard in many multilingual societies where indigenous languages, in which no instruction is available, are routinely acquired with near native proficiency by large groups of people, often illiterate or poorly educated.[1]

These considerations motivated a recent study of talk in ESL class-rooms, and a comparison of this discourse with NS-NNS conversation in an informal, non-instructional setting. The findings from this research permit some initial generalizations to be made concerning the success of SL instruction in providing classroom learners with comprehensible input.

Long and Sato (in press) compared the classroom conversation of six ESL teachers and their elementary level students with 36 informal NS-NNS

[1] Such high levels of success are not guaranteed. A simple diet of conversation with NSs can also result in the development of "pidginized" speech, as happened with Alberto (Schumann, 1978), or in fluent but deviant SL performance, as in the case of Wes (Schmidt, in press). Nevertheless, given modifications of the kind outlined earlier in this paper, NS-NNS conversation is known at least to facilitate SLA. It is, therefore, a relevant source of baseline data with which to compare discourse in SL classrooms. NS-NS conversation is relevant when target language use is at issue, but less so when the focus is acquisition.

conversations outside classrooms in which the NNSs were at the same (elementary) level of ESL proficiency. The six ESL teachers were all professionally experienced. They were audio-taped teaching their regular students, mostly young adults, from a variety of first language backgrounds, a lesson of approximately 50 minutes not especially prepared for the research, the purpose of which was unknown to teachers or students. There was an average of about 20 students per class. The researchers were not present in the classroom during the recordings in order to make the data-collection as unobtrusive as possible. The six lessons, two in Honolulu, three in Los Angeles, and one in Philadelphia, varied in the type of material covered, but were all predominantly oral-aural and teacher-fronted. Impressionistically, they seemed to the researchers typical of much adult ESL teaching in the USA. None of the teachers adhered to any of the recent unconventional language teaching methods, such as Silent Way or Counseling-Learning. They based most of their oral work on textbook exercises, prepared dialogs and other teacher-made material of the sort common in audio-lingual, audio-visual and structural-situational classrooms.

The conversational data outside classrooms were obtained from an earlier study (Long, 1981c). The 36 NS subjects consisted of three groups, 12 experienced ESL teachers, 12 teachers of other subjects (literature, linguistics, music, etc.) and 12 NSs who were not teachers of any kind (university administrators, lawyers, counselors, etc.). All were college educated speakers of a standard variety of American English. The 36 NNSs were all young Japanese adults enrolled in the elementary level of a special ESL program at UCLA in the summer of 1979. Controlling for sex of speaker and interlocutor and for the years of prior foreigner talk experience of the NSs, dyads were formed by random assignment such that there were an equal number of same-sex and cross-sex pairings. All subjects were meeting for the first time for the purpose of the study, which was unknown to them. Conversations took place in the researcher's office on the UCLA campus. Subjects were introduced by first name and asked to have a conversation of five minutes about anything they liked. The investigator then left the room.

Subjects knew that their conversations were being tape-recorded.

Long and Sato (in press) coded transcripts of the ESL lessons and the 36 informal NS-NNS conversations for nine measures of input and interaction modifications. They then compared these results for statistically significant differences between the two corpora. For the purposes of this paper, measures were also obtained on three additional features of conversational structure: comprehension checks, clarification requests and confirmation checks. All statistical analyses for these 12 measures were performed using simple or contingency chi-square tests, with Yates' correction for a two-way chi-square design with one degree of freedom where needed, with the exception of those for the morphology data, for which Spearman rank order correlation coefficients were calculated ($\alpha = .05$ in all cases). For reasons of space, the results are merely summarized here. (For further details, see Long, 1981c and Long and Sato, in press.)

As had been predicted in the original study, NS speech and the interactional structure of NS-NNS conversation in the two corpora differed greatly.

1. ESL teachers used significantly more display than referential questions ($\chi^2 = 199.35$, $p < .0005$).

2. ESL teachers used significantly more display questions than did NSs addressing NNSs outside classrooms ($\chi^2 = 1,859,131.70$, $p < .0005$) In fact, display questions were virtually unknown in the informal NS-NNS conversations (2 out of a total of 1567 questions in T-units)

3. ESL teachers used significantly fewer referential questions than did NSs addressing NNSs outside classrooms ($\chi^2 = 844.01$, $p < .0005$).

4. In T-units in the two corpora, the frequencies of questions, statements and imperatives differed significantly ($x^2 = 308.10$, $p < .0005$), with ESL teachers using fewer questions than the NSs outside classrooms (35% compared with 66%), more statements (54% compared with 33%) and more imperatives (11% compared with 1%).

5. ESL teachers' speech was significantly more oriented to the "here and now", as measured by the relative frequencies of verbs marked temporally for present and non-present reference ($x^2 = 109.87$, $p < .0005$).

6. ESL teachers' speech was significantly more oriented to the "here and now" than was the speech of the NSs in the informal NS-NNS conversations ($x^2 = 25.58$, $p < .001$).

7. The rank order of nine grammatical morphemes in the six ESL teachers' speech correlated positively with the order of the same items in the speech of the 36 NSs addressing NNSs outside classrooms ($rho = .77$, $p < .005$).

8. The rank order of the nine morphemes in teachers' speech was not significantly related to Krashen's (1977) "average order" for the accurate appearance of those items in the speech of ESL acquirers ($rho = .46$, $p > .05$, NS).

9. The relationship between the orders for the nine morphemes in the ESL teachers' speech and Krashen's "average order" for accurate production (.46) was weaker than the relationship between the orders for the nine morphemes in the NS speech to NNSs outside classrooms and Krashen's order (.77).

10. ESL teachers used a significantly greater number of comprehension checks than did NSs addressing NNSs outside classrooms ($x^2 = 102.88$, $p < .001$).

11. ESL teachers used fewer clarification requests than did NSs addressing NNSs outside classrooms, but the difference was not statistically significant ($x^2 = 0.89$, $p > .50$, NS).

12. ESL teachers used significantly fewer confirmation checks than did NSs addressing NNSs outside classrooms ($x^2 = 27.79$, $p < .001$).

Much could be said about these results, but again for reasons of space, I will confine myself to a few general points. (The interested reader is referred to Long and Sato, in press, for more detailed discussion.)

Perhaps the most obvious conclusion to be drawn from the findings from this study is that, insofaras they are representative of at least elementary level ESL instruction, the SL classroom offers very little opportunity to the learner to communicate in the target language or to hear it used for communicative purposes by others. In these ESL lessons, at least, the main source of communicative language use for the students was the teachers' use of 224 imperatives, chiefly for classroom management, e.g.

T : Give me the present perfect

and for disciplinary matters, e.g.

T : Sit down, Maria

As the other results show, most of what the teachers said was, in Paulston's (1974) terms, "meaningful", i.e. contextually relevant, but not "communicative", i.e. bearing information unknown to the hearer.

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Display, or what Mehan (1979) calls "known information" questions, predominate. Thus, the six teachers asked 476 questions of the following kind :

   T : Are you a student?

and

   T : Is the clock on the wall?

Only 128 questions were referential, i.e. asked the student to provide unknown information, e.g.

   T : What's the matter?

or

   T : Why didn't she come to class?

In NS-NNS conversation outside the classroom, on the other hand, there were only two instances of display questions, both uttered by one NS at the beginning of an encounter when she wished to be sure the NNS had heard her name correctly when the investigator had introduced them. In contrast, there were 999 referential questions.

     Display questions are a good indication that we are dealing with what Barnes (1976) calls the "transmission model" of education, in which a "knower" imparts knowledge to those who do not know. The students are asked to display knowledge that the teacher already possesses, and often remarkably trivial knowledge at that. In other words, there is little two-way exchange of information.

     The data on comprehension checks and confirmation checks tell the same story. A speaker uses a comprehension check to find out if the interlocutor understands something, e.g.

   T : Do you understand?

Confirmation checks, on the other hand, are used to ascertain whether the speaker has heard or understood something the interlocutor has said, e.g.

S : I went /ɲyɔ/

    T : You went to New York?

or

                                                          S : I wan one job

    T : You're looking for work?

Comprehension checks, therefore, will be more frequent when the
major flow of information is from teacher to student, from NS to
NNS; confirmation checks will be more frequent when information is
also passing in the other direction. In this study, the six ESL
teachers used significantly more comprehension checks and significantly
fewer confirmation checks than the NSs in informal NS-NNS conversations.

         The data on clarification requests show the same general
pattern. Clarification requests are used when the speaker (teacher
or NS) wants help in understanding something the interlocutor (student
or NNS) has said, e.g.

    T : What do you mean?

Since ESL students, as has been shown, are seldom telling the teacher
something unknown to him or her, we would expect there to be fewer
clarification requests in the ESL corpus. This is indeed what was
found, although the difference was not statistically significant.
The lack of a statistically significant difference is presumably
due to the fact that confirmation checks were preferred when the
need arose to remove ambiguity from the NNSs' speech, both inside
and outside the classroom. As noted earlier, teachers did use
significantly fewer of these than the NSs in the informal NS-NNS
conversations.

         The examples of typical display questions given earlier
(Are you a student? and Is the clock on the wall?) reflect another
feature of ESL classroom discourse in this study, namely its "here

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and now" orientation. Long (1980b) found the 16 NS-NNS dyads to
employ significantly more verbs marked temporally for present and
significantly fewer for non-present during informal conversation
than the 16 NS-NS dyads (χ^2 = 11.58, p<.001), a finding confirmed
by Gaies (1981) in a replication of the Long (1981c) study. In
Long (1981c), which provided the informal NS-NNS corpus being
considered here, the 36 NS-NNS conversations were found to be more
oriented to the here and now, again as measured by present and non-
present tense marking, than the baseline NS-NS conversational data.
The difference on that occasion, however, just failed to make the
required level of significance (χ^2 = 3.33, p>.05, NS). Now, in the
study by Long and Sato (in press), the six ESL lessons were found
to be even more present-oriented than the 36 NS-NNS conversations
(χ^2 = 25.58, p<.001). The here and now orientation of the teachers'
classroom speech, therefore, is far greater than that in informal
NS-NS conversation.

Teachers appear to rely on this here and now orientation
as an important way in which to make their speech comprehensible to
classroom learners. The relatively high frequencies of present tense
morphology (third person s) and low frequencies of past tense
morphology (regular and irregular past) that this brings was the main
cause of the disturbed input frequency order for the nine grammatical
morphemes in Krashen's (1977) "average order", and, hence, for the
non-significant correlation between the two orders.

In summary, despite the lip service paid to the importance
of communication in the classroom by much recent writing in the
"methods" literature, to the extent that these lessons are typical
at least of teaching at the elementary level, little seems to have
changed. The data suggest that the emphasis is still on usage, not

use (Widdowson, 1972), and that, in Paulston's terms, "meaningful", not "communicative" use of the target language is the norm. As shown, among other ways, by the data on display and referential questions. ESL classroom discourse in this study reflected something approaching a pure transmission model of education. Within quite tightly controlled structural limits, the focus is on the accuracy of students' speech rather than its truth value.

Some implications for classroom teaching

Contrary to claims made by some researchers (e.g. Hale and Budar, 1970), there is a considerable amount of evidence to the effect that ESL instruction makes a positive contribution to SLA, both quantitatively and qualitatively. (For review, see Long, 1982, and Pica, 1982.) As argued in the early sections of this paper, however, there is also an increasing amount of evidence consistent with the input hypothesis. This stresses the importance for SLA of target language input made comprehensible to the learner chiefly through the negotiation for meaning involved in its use for communicative purposes. A concern arising from the data on NS-NNS conversation inside and outside classrooms must be that, at least at the elementary level, instruction in the SL per se is proceeding at the expense of SL communication and the provision of comprehensible input.

Now it might be argued that most of what the learners in these classes heard was comprehensible, as shown by their ability to respond appropriately. This was indeed the case. However, that the teachers' speech was comprehensible was due largely to the fact that the input itself was "impoverished" in various ways. In qualitative terms, what the ESL students heard consisted primarily of predigested sentences, structurally and lexically controlled, repetitious in the extreme, and with little or

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no communicative value. Input was comprehensible, in other words, mainly because it contained few linguistic surprises. Yet, it has been argued, it is these surprises that must occur if acquisition of new structures is to proceed. The input was limited quantitatively, too, in that relatively little was said. The drill-like nature of much of the instruction meant that short exchanges of a routine kind were repeated at the expense of extended discourse ranging over a wide variety of topics, as was found in the non-instructional conversations. As has been documented in a number of classroom studies, a common pattern consists of a teacher question (Where's the clock?), a student response (It's on the wall), and a teacher reaction/ evaluation, often in the form of a repetition of the correct response (The clock is on the wall). The same exchange is then repeated, with minor variations, as the sentence patterns are "drilled" with other students. These three sentences are the total input for the class while this procedure is carried out.

Once again, it should be stressed that I am not advocating that we abandon our attempts to teach the language, including grammatical accuracy. Rather, it is a question of the relative emphasis given to accuracy over communicative effect that is at issue. I hope to have made a case for more attention and more class time being devoted to the latter, and close with a few suggestions for implementing such a change for those with the inclination to do so.

One basic difference between NS-NNS conversation in and out of classrooms indicated by the studies reported here is that classroom discourse is rarely motivated by a two-way exchange of information. However "phatic" much of the non-instructional conversation may be when the NNSs are beginners, NSs do not know the answer to questions like 'Where are you from?' or 'Where do you live?' when they ask them. And they ask each question only once.

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The same is not true of questions like 'Are you a student?' or 'Is the clock on the wall?', especially at the fifth time of asking. An easy way to remedy this is by ensuring that students enter classroom exchanges as informational equals. This can be achieved by use of tasks whose solution requires that students convey information that only they possess when the conversation begins.

A wide variety of such tasks exists in published form, although they are more often to be found in books not originally intended for language teaching (Plaister, 1982). Materials designed to improve the reader's IQ and/or problem-solving skills are a particularly rich source, as are many games whose sole purpose is entertainment. Many of these can easily be altered by a teacher to suit the age, cultural background and interests of specific groups of learners, and often give rise to ideas for new versions. Some care must be taken in their selection, however. It is not enough that one person has information the other lacks. Rather, both must have information that is unknown to but needed by the other. Thus, while both are simple and useful, there is a difference between having one person describe a picture so that a second (or a whole class) can reproduce it, on the one hand, and on the other, having two people discover differences between two versions of a nearly identical picture that each has when each version contains features the other version lacks.

Changes in the kind of tasks carried out, such as these, basically the introduction of "two-way" tasks, but also, e.g. having students describe personal photographs rather than pictures in textbooks (suggested by Charlene Sato), can lead to changes in the quality of classroom discourse. Principally, the need to convey and obtain unknown information will result in the negotiation for meaning characterized by modifications in the interactional structure of conversation as participants seek to make incoming speech comprehensible. That is, tasks of these kinds can bring about qualitative changes in classroom

discourse.

Another concern expressed earlier was that the quantity of input needed to increase, too. Here, two suggestions can be made. First, teachers might like to consider using a wider variety of tasks rather than more frequent use of the same tasks, thus promoting a wider range of input. Second, having the tasks carried out by the students in small groups will multiply the amount of talk each student engages in individually. While the partial reduction in NS speech (or more native-like speech by a NNS teacher) this brings may yet turn out to be a problem, it is conceivable that this loss may be offset by the fact that what language the student hears is at least being negotiated (through his or her active participation in the small group conversation) to the appropriate level for his or her current SL competence. This is often not the case in "lockstep" conversation between teacher and whole class, where what the teacher says may be too easy for some, right for some, and too difficult for others. The use of potentially "communicative" language teaching materials in a lockstep (teacher to whole class) format may also be less guaranteed to achieve the qualitative changes of interest than their use in small groups of students. In one study, the number and variety of rhetorical acts, pedagogic moves and social skills engaged in by students using such materials was found to be greater for students working in pairs than in a larger group with the teacher (Long, Adams, McLean and Castaños, 1976).

Summary

This paper began with a brief review of empirical evidence consistent with the input hypothesis, which states that progress in SLA involves understanding linguistic input containing lexis and structures not in the acquirer's current repertoire. Various ways in which this understanding is achieved were then outlined, with special importance being attributed to the modification, not of

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the input per se, but of the interactional structure of conversation between NSs and NNSs. Research findings were then presented which suggest that modifications of this kind are only assured when the conversation involves a two-way exchange of information.

An explicit comparison of NS-NNS conversation in ESL instruction and in informal, non-instructional talk then isolated several basic differences between them. Greatest significance was attributed to the relative lack of modification of the interactional structure of conversation in classroom discourse, with a concomitant poverty, both quantitative and qualitative, in the input available to students. The use of "two-way" tasks in small group work was suggested as one way of introducing more communicative language use in the SL classroom, and in this way, more comprehensible input. While preserving the benefits to be obtained from a focus on formal accuracy in some phases of teaching, these changes are designed to make other phases approximate NS-NNS conversation outside classrooms, and thereby, if the input hypothesis is correct, to facilitate SLA in a classroom setting.

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