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A Role for Production in the Beginning Level Language Class

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I will discuss the role of production in foreign and second language teaching. First, I will introduce the controversy surrounding production and its use in the classroom. Along with arguments against production as a means to acquisition, I will discuss arguments supporting delayed production and then arguments supporting early production and finish with a suggested role for production in the language class.

Several important questions need to be addressed in this discussion:

(1) Does production aid acquisition, or in other words, is any emphasis on production in the classroom justified?
(2) If so, how great should this emphasis be?
(3) What kinds of production best aid acquisition?
(4) How do we encourage worthwhile production in the classroom?

These questions are obviously overlapping in nature, but I feel it important to separate them in order to concentrate on specific areas of the production question. This paper will attempt to bring together literature relevant to the topic and to suggest a possible role. This paper will not be a discussion of teaching procedures or techniques, although methodological implications will be discussed.

In any discussion on production, it is important to distinguish between written production and oral production. Although both are certainly relevant to the topic at hand, my main focus will be oral production.

THE ARGUMENT AGAINST PRODUCTION

The most influential argument against production comes from the works of Stephen Krashen (1981, 1985; Krashen and Terrell, 1983). The important implications of Krashen’s input/intake theory are that speaking and writing do not aid acquisition. Krashen’s well known claim, stated briefly, is that language acquisition is an entirely receptive process. Rather than go into detail on Krashen’s theory I will assume his position to be well known and understood. Perhaps the essence of his argument as it pertains to this paper can be captured in a quote by Robert Blair in his book Innovative Approaches to Language Teaching (1982):

If the monitor model and its assumptions about language acquisition are valid, then the main thrust of most academic language teaching today, together with the means used, is misguided, for its main thrust is toward the earliest possible development of proper oral communication skills, and the means used to promote these include modelling and imitation, teaching of grammar, drilling of simulated pieces of conversations, correction of errors, and the other practices that characterize audio-lingual classrooms. (Blair, 1982, 191)

Explicit in the input model of language acquisition is the belief that comprehension precedes production, as well as the belief that production is nothing more than evidence of acquisition. If this theory is accepted as a true model of language acquisition, then any emphasis on production, except in an effort to assess level of acquisition, is unjustified.

ARGUMENTS FOR DELAYED PRODUCTION

In Children

While the belief that production as a whole plays no active role in language acquisition is not accepted without controversy, the belief that comprehension precedes production is a subject of little argument (yet enough to be discussed later on in this paper). Much research has been dedicated to this idea, and the results have been, in general, positive. Lenneberg has done two important studies to this
effect (1962,1967). He found that children demonstrate comprehension at least six months before speaking and that children with physical disabilities that prevent speech are never deficient in their understanding of their mother tongue (Lenneberg, 1962, 1967; Marton, 1988). A recent study of English-speaking children acquiring Hebrew in day care immersion found that following a period of silence came a rapid onset of L2 production (Karniol, 1990).

In Adults

Whether or not this process holds true for adults as well has also been a subject of study. In his study of English-speaking adult learners of Russian, Postovsky (1970) found that a delay in oral practice for one group of learners did not hinder that group's acquisition in comparison to another group where oral practice was emphasized, with both groups receiving the same amount of input. In fact, Postovsky's experimental group performed slightly better in oral proficiency tests six weeks into the program.

There is also the well known account of multilingual Indian tribes in the Amazon where each individual was found to speak at least three languages, and languages beyond the L1 were acquired in an entirely receptive way. Production came only after a relatively high degree of competence in comprehension (Sorenson, 1967). Thiele and Scheinber-Herzig (1983) found that learners who were not required to produce early on in the L2 actually did better in communicative activities than the learners required to produce from the beginning. Marton, in his book on English language teaching (1988), summarizes several of these and other empirical studies that support an argument for delayed production in second and foreign language teaching.

Burling (1978) reasons on the problems that arise when learners are required to produce early in the learning process:

In a conventional course, when the students are expected to speak from the start, the very first lesson must touch upon everything. It must include something about pronunciation; it must introduce words of several grammatical categories; it must at least hint at a few rules of grammar so that the words can be joined together into meaningful phrases and sentences. When so many topics must be touched upon, no one of them can be dealt with in any depth. (in Blair, 1982, 82)

Burling continues by saying that when active production is required it is much more difficult for the student to learn linguistic processes, and learning them takes much more time. But he believes that if the principles of any language system are made clear (and are not required to be actively produced), any irregularities will eventually fall into place (in Blair, 1982, 82).

Emphasis on Listening

A significant amount of literature thus supports this argument for delayed production. The emphasis in language learning is placed on developing listening comprehension in the early stages. Several studies discuss the benefits to students in such an approach, including reduced intimidation, higher degree of individualization, greater progress, and freedom from the burden to perform (Teschner, 1980). Research has found that focusing on listening comprehension is also the means to teaching and acquiring form and morphology. T. Pica (1985) found that the crucial factor in acquiring a particular morpheme was that morpheme's frequency of occurrence in the learner's input. Marton (1988) discusses this topic as it relates to the transfer of linguistic items in a listening task to a productive task. He gathers evidence similar to Pica's that frequency of an item in the learner's input has a direct relationship to that learner's ability to use that item in production (Brown and Hanlon, 1970; Hatch, 1983; Hamayan and Tucker, 1980). Marton uses this evidence to support the idea of a pre-speaking period in language teaching (1988, 8). While he suggests that frequency in listening allows a more passive learning, he admits (even in the face of these several studies) that the relationship (between frequency and acquisition) is uncertain. Ellis (1986), also, in his book on second language acquisition questions the evidence that frequency in input is the prime factor in the acquisition of morphemes. But he also quotes Larsen-Freeman (1976), whose words probably best express the general feeling about this hypothesis:
Thus, the tentative conclusion is that morpheme frequency of occurrence in native-speaker speech is the principal determinant for the oral production morpheme accuracy order of ESL learners. (1976, 378-9, qtd in Ellis 1986, 156)

The general consensus among linguists appears to be that language acquisition is best aided by a focus on listening comprehension rather than on production (even at the expense of production) and that any production at all should be at least delayed until the learner has developed some level of listening competence.

Assessment

In addition to the arguments against production's importance in acquisition, there are also data that question the use of production in an assessment role. J. Williams (1988) found that spontaneous production of a particular form cannot be assumed to reveal the level of acquisition, nor can non-production be assumed as evidence of non-acquisition, and Faerch and Kasper (1987) stress the problems that abound when attempting to gather “authentic” production data.

SUMMARY

At this point the evidence (and trends) moves toward placing no emphasis on production, except as an evidence or assessment of acquisition—and even that role is problematic according to some research. With this belief that comprehension precedes production, any role for production is at least delayed and by no means crucial.

In answering our first question this way (Is any role for production justified?), the other questions become irrelevant. Production, in any form, does not aid acquisition, and there is no need to discover ways of encouraging it in the classroom.

A DIFFERENT VIEW

I am certainly not the first to question this approach to defining (or eliminating, rather) a role for production, but I will present here a collection of research that I find helpful (and convincing) in defining a more important role for production, even early production, in foreign and second language teaching and learning.

A CHALLENGE TO “COMPREHENSION PRECEDES PRODUCTION”

Gulce and Vincent (1986) discuss a group of studies that challenge (1) Krashen’s monitor model and input hypothesis and (2) the belief that “comprehension precedes production.” They discuss the popular appeal of these theories and suggest reasons for their wide acceptance. They argue primarily that support for a delayed production model in language teaching is a result of “borrowing too many concepts from first language acquisition” (Gule and Vincent, 1986, 45). They suggest that the metaphors used in these theories (particularly Krashen’s theory) to describe functions of the brain—monitor, black box, filter, etc.—serve only to disguise the fact that we really don’t know what is happening there. In their paper they also present the empirical data of several studies that challenge these two assumptions about second language learning. They challenge other beliefs including the dichotomy between learning and acquisition, the affective filter hypothesis, order of acquisition, etc. Their most vigorous attack is against the “input hypothesis.” A rigorous discussion of their arguments against Krashen’s “Extended Monitor Model” and especially the “silent period” would take much more space than can be dedicated here, but I simply wish to emphasize that such theories have been seriously and empirically questioned, including evidence that some children and adults (including those in Sorenson’s 1972 study) experience no silent period (Gulce and Vincent, 1986; see also Gregg, 1984 and 1986; Spolsky, 1985; Bialystok, 1978 and 1982; Ervin-Tripp, 1974; Gibbons, 1985).

Other studies done that challenge the comprehension precedes production assumption include one by C. Tchalo (1987) where she questions not only the application of L1 data to L2 learning, but especially the application of L2 data to the foreign language classroom:

Without proven validity, researchers have surreptitiously assumed the nature of FL learning to be identical to that of L2 acquisition. It is little wonder then that many methods for FL instruction have met with little or disappointing success. Their success should never have been predicted based on L2 acquisition theory. (Tchalo, 1987: 15)
Though she questions the use of L1 data in L2 acquisition and then the use of L2 data in FL teaching, Tchalo offers no real alternatives and concludes by saying simply that there is a problem and more research needs to be done.

Tchalo seems to be suggesting a differentiation between formal and informal learning contexts, posing the question, “Can we organize a formal learning situation (a classroom) according to our knowledge about learning in an informal setting?” R. Blair poses a similar question, and seems to imply an answer:

An obvious question is whether in a classroom an informal approach modeled on supposed natural language acquisition strategies is sufficient by itself to lead efficiently to communicative competence. Or whether the results might not be enhanced by the injection of elements of formal learning into the artificially created informal learning environment, tapping the powers of both and accommodating the preferences, strengths, and learning styles of different learners? (Blair, 1982: 192)

The question, Blair says, is not one of choosing between the two, but whether “both combined may not be superior to either alone” (Blair, 1982: 192). Indeed, it is a probing question and one very relevant to such a discussion as this on the role of production in the classroom.

As to the question of comprehension preceding production, V. Gathercole (1988) presents a more interesting challenge to the assumption as she reviews various studies that suggest that the relationship between comprehension and production is not unidirectional, but rather that “progress in either may lead to progress in the other” (Gathercole, 1988: 426). One example of this comes in studies done on child acquisition of wh-questions. Children have been found to produce these questions, correctly differentiating between who, where, and what, but not always able to comprehend them, often confusing one for the other (see Bloom, Merkin, and Wootten, 1982; Ervin-Tripp, 1970; Tyack and Ingram, 1977). There is also evidence that the frequent production of why questions by children helps them to work out its complex semantics (Blank, 1974; see also Bloom et al., 1982; Tyack and Ingram, 1977). Gathercole reviews other studies that demonstrate this same phenomenon with the acquisition of passives, word order, and relative clauses (see her article, Gathercole 1988, for a list of those studies). The relationship between comprehension and production, Gathercole argues, is a very complex one and not as well understood as we would like to think, especially as regards the question, “which comes when?”

ARGUMENTS FOR PRODUCTION

As well as evidence to suggest a re-evaluation of our assumptions about child language acquisition and their application to L2 acquisition (as well as to FL learning) there are arguments directly in support of a greater role for production in second/foreign language acquisition. In a study of 40 Japanese students in an intensive English class, Chaudron and Parker (1990) found a direct relation between the frequency of production and the acquisition of structurally marked forms. The forms studied were discourse context, anaphora, and noun phrase structure. (An important question, I think, in the reviewing of all these studies—those claiming acquisition and non-acquisition in various contexts—is just what is meant by the word “acquisition.”)

Marton dedicates an entire chapter of his book on teaching (Marton, 1988, 57-85) to what he calls “the Reconstructive Strategy of Language Teaching,” simply a strategy based upon production. While he argues both reasonably and intuitively for this approach, he offers little in the way of empirical support. To be sure, the intuitive support for production in language teaching is far from lacking among researchers, and among teachers especially, but the empirical support for a purely (or even heavily) productive approach certainly is.

Formulaic Speech

Perhaps the best support for production in and of itself as a means to acquisition can be found in the studies of formulaic speech. Fillmore’s (1976) well-known study of Spanish-speaking children learning English as a second language describes in detail their use of formulaic speech both as a social strategy and as a means to acquisition. The argument is that L2
learners can profit from the use of memorized chunks of language as they use them socially to get more input and also as they begin to analyze those chunks and thus break them down into their constituent parts, thereby gaining a productive use of the forms present. At least part of the justification for the use of formulaic speech in language teaching is the hope that the dichotomy set up in Krashen’s model, where learning and acquisition are forever separated, may not be entirely sound. There is the expectation that monitored speech and the analyzing of the formula will allow some kind of transfer from “learning” to “acquisition.” It would perhaps be appropriate here to also refer back to Chaudron and Parker’s (1990) study and suggest that formulaic speech may be able to play a part in increasing the frequency of production of certain marked forms, thus aiding acquisition. (But the less than firm ground this proposal stands on, must still be admitted.)

Bley-Vroman’s (1986) paper on hypothesis testing in L2 acquisition could be offered here as possible support for the use of formulaic speech. He posits two kinds of hypotheses formed by L2 learners. One kind requires “negative evidence” and the other requires “positive.” Although his discussion of these two kinds of hypotheses is much more complex than I admit here, it is sufficient to say in this context that the learning of formulas by an L2 learner may offer an excellent opportunity to form and test “positive” as well as “negative” hypotheses, or rather hypotheses that require either positive or negative evidence in order to be productive.

Ellis (1986) reviews some of the prominent literature on the subject of formulaic speech, including studies where it has been prominent both in naturalistic settings as well as in the classroom (Ellis, 1986: 167-70). Ellis discusses various issues surrounding the topic of formulaic speech, including Krashen’s (1982) argument that it is evidence of premature production, as well as the issue of lateralization and the movement from memorized speech to productive, creative speech. Ellis sums up his review:

Formulaic speech is an important factor in SLA, but is probably only a major factor in early SLA. The strategies of pattern memorization, pattern imitation, and (more controversially) pattern analysis are to be seen as minor learning strategies in comparison with those contributing directly to the creative rule system. (Ellis, 1986: 170)

That Ellis would allow formulaic speech a major role in early SLA is an important point in this paper. Though the exact role of formulas is uncertain, it cannot as yet be denied an important part in early acquisition—nor in the beginning level classroom.

Challenges to Formulaic Speech

There is an interesting study by Bohn (1986) where he claims that the belief in formulaic speech as an important factor in L1 and L2 acquisition is simply a left-over from bad data collection. He draws from a large data sample (records which document the acquisition of English, Hungarian, German, and French in several contexts) collected and organized by members of the Kiel Project on Language Acquisition. Using these data he specifically contends with Fillmore’s conclusions throughout the paper. Yet he allows the possibility that formulas may help in the acquisition of more complex structures. I share Bohn’s arguments here only to illustrate the uncertain acceptance of formulaic speech as a major factor in acquisition, and thus its uncertain acceptance as a major player in a defense for production’s role in language learning.

Output as Input

Another possible support for production’s active role in acquisition is the proposal that production is a source of comprehensible input for the learner. This is an attempt to modify Krashen’s (1982) model by allowing interlanguage output a more central role (or a role at all) in the acquisition process. M. Smith (1981) reasons this position and provides a theoretical model but offers little empirical evidence to support it. Ellis (1985) provides a more detailed model which he calls the Variable Competence Model, taking into account many factors left unattended in Smith’s model, but still focusing on developing an “explanatory model” rather than offering empirical evidence. Swain (1985) created the label comprehensible output, a theory that was tested empirically (Pica, Holliday, Lewis, and Morgenthaler, 1989) and found to be well-grounded. This study by Pica et. al. arranged oppor-
opportunities for native-speakers of English (NS) to negotiate meaning with Japanese nonnative-speakers (NNS) in a communicative discourse context. The outcomes of linguistic demands placed on the NNS by the NS in the course of their negotiated interaction were measured. NNS were required to modify their output so as to communicate effectively. In this interactive context the production of more and more comprehensible output was determined to be a key player in second language acquisition.

THE COMMUNICATIVE FACTOR

This topic of communicative interaction leads to what I believe to be the convincing argument for an important role for production in foreign/second language learning—the communicative nature and function of language. Regardless of the doubts about production's purely theoretical role in acquisition, the effects of frequency, the role of formulas, the question of applying L1 theories to L2, or even the role of production as comprehensible output, no one can seriously doubt the communicative nature and function of language. That language is a social phenomenon has been a topic at least of philosophy for some time, and is more recently a primary theme in the scientific study of language. As social interaction is the nature and function of language, it ought also to be the nature and function of language teaching (and I am certainly not among the first to say so). And how does a language learner interact without producing language? This, I think, is the final justification needed to define an important role for production.

But, of course, the solution is not so simple. I will review a small selection of the literature on the communicative role of language and the implementing of communicative production tasks in language teaching.

In one study (Kessler and Quinn, 1984) a nonnative speaker was required to use English in a science class where the students worked together in groups. He moved quickly from what the author calls a "pre-production stage" to a process of systematically and extensively acquiring forms that he could use both inter-personally and in his technical writing—without any teacher supervision. Kessler and Quinn suggest that lab-based science activities would serve as an excellent context for language teaching.

Pennington and Richards (1986) challenge the practice of teaching even pronunciation outside of the discourse context:

From the perspective of contemporary research in discourse analysis...pronunciation is seen not only as part of the system for expressing referential meaning, but also as an important part of the interactional dynamics of the communication process. According to this view, it is artificial to divorce pronunciation from communication and from other aspects of language use...(Pennington and Richards, 1986: 208)

Thus, every aspect of language teaching ought to be, in some way, tied to the communicative act. Pica (1987), in a study of the effects of various communicative activities on L2 acquisition, supports and emphasizes the crucial role of communication in L2 acquisition. She finds that among the most important factors are the presence of confirmation and comprehension checks and requests for clarification. Negotiating meaning emerges as a major element in L2 acquisition. And the role of production, as it becomes comprehensible output, becomes a necessary one.

Stevens (1982) gives a summary of research in psycholinguistics demonstrating the necessity of experiences with language in its communicative function for L2 acquisition. Four benefits of interaction as shown in her review of the literature are (1) the providing of opportunities necessary to create language for the expression of thoughts, wishes, and needs; (2) repetition (Stevens accepts this to be a necessary part of acquisition) occurs naturally; (3) learners interact with their peers and teachers in a natural way; and (4) the language "is a tool for cognitive growth, which in turn requires the learning of more language" (Stevens, 1982: 9). She stresses that a communicative approach to teaching and learning more fully places the responsibility of learning with the student, where it belongs. Stevens also provides a practical collection of "activity-centered approaches to second language learning" designed to provide "communicative pressure." (see her article for a detailed description of those activities, Stevens, 1982, 10-19)
Pica (1987) concludes her study by commenting on the traditional classroom approach to language learning (where the program is designed around what “teachers want students to say and do with the second language”) in light of the current research:

What research has revealed, however, is that languages are learned not through memorization of their rules and structures, but through internalizing these rules from input made comprehensible within a context of social interaction. (Pica, 1987: 17)

She claims that current trends in teaching, and especially in the selection of activities, lead to an “unequal status relationship” among students and teachers and thus hinder acquisition by denying any significant opportunity for the authentic social interaction that seems to be necessary in second-language acquisition (Pica, 1987: 17).

Marton (1988) describes well the point I think Pica and others are trying to make when he says the “traditional attitude could be described as the belief that we learn and teach languages in order to be able to communicate, while the new approach assumes that in order to learn a language we have to try to communicate in it” (Marton, 1988: 36, italics added). One of the early suggestions for such a communicative approach comes from Spolsky (1968) where he voiced the opinion that this was the only way to achieve any significant level of acquisition. Hatch (1978 and 1983), Ellis (1984), Littlewood (1984) and Widdowson (1978) have also produced influential studies and models in the movement away from language teaching for communication toward language teaching as communication. When language learning is thus seen as “learning how to communicate” (Hatch, 1978: 63) then the necessary role of production in language learning and teaching becomes undeniable.

PROBLEMS WITH THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

It would be unfair in this discussion to leave out the several objections to the approach discussed above. Marton (1988: 49-55) dedicates considerable space to defining his problems with a strictly communicative approach to teaching. The most obvious problem, he claims, is that the lack of direct correction espoused by this method will bring early fossilization of learner errors. He discusses the role of hypothesis forming and testing in L1 acquisition and its supposed application to L2 acquisition, stating (as we have seen in other studies quoted in this paper) that the actual relationship of L1 acquisition processes to L2 acquisition is unclear, but that the evidence supporting fossilization in L2 acquisition is indisputable (Marton 1988: 50; see Selinker, 1974; Brown, 1981; Vigil and Oller, 1976). The danger of fossilization, he says, is especially present in classroom learning, where a strong desire for integration with the L2 community—the most consistent factor in predicting that fossilization will not occur—is not a realistic possibility (Marton 1988: 51; see Schumann, 1978). Marton also cautions that communicative activities may compel learners to out-perform their level, forcing ungrammatical production and bringing frustration (Marton 1988: 54).

In another study on the effects of communicative group activities Pica and Doughty (1985) found that the nature of the communicative task was more important than whether it was teacher-centered or student-centered. They concluded that for a task to be effective it must compel individuals to negotiate meaning, rather than simply “invite” them to participate in a conversation (Pica and Doughty, 1985: 246). Their results do show, however, that student-centered communicative activities even when they do not compel a negotiation of meaning, when compared to teacher-centered activities, result in an increase in both learner input and production. While this non-negotiated input and output may not be as effective in causing acquisition in light of the comprehensible output model it is better than less of the same, and, of course, better than none at all. Pica and Doughty express their concern for communicative language learning and teaching:

In light of the findings regarding ungrammaticality of student input, caution must be exercised in the use of group work as a means of promoting linguistic competence in the classroom. (Pica and Doughty, 1985: 247)

But group work can yet be “heartily endorsed” they say, as it allows so much more time for language
practice and thus for the forming and testing of hypotheses about the target language (Pica and Doughty, 1985: 247). Pica and Doughty's primary concern is that the communicative approach to teaching must not be allowed to become (or remain, rather) nothing more than a time to talk. The negotiating of meaning, gaining "access to each other's views," is the essential factor in acquisition (Pica and Doughty, 1985: 246).

**CONCLUSION**

In light of all the claims presented here, and support for those claims, as they affect a role for production, a clear-cut, non-controversial answer to any of the problems posed originally is out of the question. But I do think, however, that a statement of position is in order.

**Delayed Production**

As regarding Krashen's monitor model, and particularly his input hypothesis, evidence suggests a role for production in providing comprehensible output that in turn becomes comprehensible input and thus aids acquisition. That frequency of production may influence the rate and level of acquisition of marked forms seems plausible also. The question about which comes first, comprehension or production, seems to be settled in most minds, but with an increasing amount of dissension. In any case, forcing immediate learner production of the L2 does not seem to be justified, at least not within the traditional parameters of direct correction. There seems to be some solid support for the practice of delayed production, allowing a so-called "silent period" but that support is under attack. There are apparently no studies, though, that compare a delayed production approach to one in which students are allowed to communicate voluntarily (where students may choose when to speak as well as what to speak about) from day one, be it in the L1 or the L2. In light of the evidence that is presented such an approach to production would appear favorable.

**Formulaic Speech**

The discussion of formulaic speech points to its possible use in (1) providing beginning students with material to be analyzed and worked into a productive interlanguage; (3) providing students with opportunities to form and test both negative and positive hypotheses; and (4) providing frequent exposure, both receptive and productive, to linguistically marked forms. While the role of formulaic speech in both L1 and L2 acquisition is uncertain, those who question its importance carry the burden of proof.

**The Communicative Function**

The most compelling idea in this discussion is that language teaching should not separate language from its communicative function. Let production be forced, with a concentration on teacher selected forms or topics, or let there be a period of non-production with an emphasis on listening comprehension, the communicative nature—and especially the interactive nature—of language is being denied, or at least controlled and, in effect, suppressed. The evidence is strong for student-centered classrooms where activities provide opportunity for large amounts of student-directed input and production. A teacher's role, as suggested by Stevens (1982) is more one of ensuring a language-rich environment where students are encouraged to communicate in the target language than one of ensuring grammatically correct production of selected forms.

But even while advocating a communicative justification for early production, the warnings of Marton (1988) and Pica (1985) are well taken. There is still the problem of fossilization when students are allowed to converse freely without correction and some method must be worked out to combat this particular classroom phenomenon. At least part of a solution is found in Pica's argument against communicative activities that allow learners simply to converse, without compelling them to "negotiate meaning." A presentation and discussion of methods and activities that encourage this "negotiating of meaning" would be very useful (but a topic for another paper). Perhaps formulas, as well, (particularly as students are encouraged to form and test hypotheses in relation to them) could play a role in avoiding early fossilization of errors.
ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS

Returning to the original questions posed in this paper, and drawing from the conclusions reached, I would answer those questions like this:

1. Does production aid acquisition? While wholly controversial, I feel there is enough evidence to suggest a “yes” answer. The extent to which it helps is very unclear, but the belief that production serves no purpose beyond evidence of acquisition is likely to be untrue. Hence, at least some justification for a greater role for production.

2. How great should this emphasis be? The communicative function and nature of language necessitates an important role for production. There is no such thing as “one-way interaction.” When production is suppressed, all that is left is “reaction.” If Pica’s claims about the importance of negotiating meaning are true, then the importance of production, as comprehensible output, is secured.

3. What kinds of production best aid acquisition? Production that is communicative in nature. Rote production with a focus on form (choral production, etc.) probably does not significantly aid acquisition. In fact, it may hinder acquisition as time spent in these mechanical activities is precious time (especially in a classroom setting) spent away from authentically communicating in the target language. Activities must provide “communicative pressure” but at the same time without causing debilitating frustration in learners. Yet, communicative activities must compel learners to struggle with gaps in their ability to share meaning.

4. How do we encourage worthwhile production in the classroom? As a natural continuation of this discussion on production, this question remains to be answered. Much of the research presented in this paper carries implications for teaching methodologies and the development of teaching techniques and learning activities, and there are certainly many language teachers with intuitive and valuable answers to this question. But a thorough discussion of these implications and answers is left for a future time.

It is important to say at this point that there is a role for production in the beginning level language class. And that role is defined by the communicative essence of language.

Brad Wahlquist is a student in anthropology at Brigham Young University. He is planning to do graduate work in linguistics and in development education.