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第二语言习得

王志云 著

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**THE ROLE OF INPUT AND
THE SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION:
A Study of English Majors in Guizhou, China**

BY

ZHIYUN WANG

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PREFACE

Professor Zhiyun Wang is both a theoretician and a practitioner: he is interested in English Language Teaching research not just in the abstract but in its application to concrete problems of language learners. In the present work, he uses his international experience to point up the contrast between learners in different circumstances and from different communities, and angles this experience towards a diagnosis of problems among students learning English at his home university in Guizhou, China. They are, he notes, oriented towards grammatical analysis and translation to the detriment of social communication; moreover, their productive skills do not correspond to their receptive skills. In order to help remedy the lack of communicative ability, literary works from an Anglophone canon are being used as a basis for work with the students, yet this corpus of material is remote from the reality of their everyday lives, and hence not very motivational. There are difficulties, therefore, with both methodology and with input.

To investigate the optimum role for grammar within the ELT curriculum he undertakes an empirical comparison of three teaching approaches: form-focussed, meaning-focussed and a combination of the two, and concludes that the combined method is superior. This finding clearly has methodological implications for language teaching and learning in China. He also addresses the sociocultural issue by examining the relative merits of Anglophone and Chinese-based literary input for Chinese students and concludes that unless their literary competence is highly developed, Anglo-American input is of no great benefit. He demonstrates that his research is acceptable, even congenial, to his colleagues by inviting a number of them to try out his new approaches and documenting the results. Their success in using the combined approach in classroom-teaching and in delivering a new module based on Chinese-oriented cultural input demonstrates the soundness of his conclusions and their relevance to the needs of China as a whole (since Guizhou is fairly representative of the national scenario).

Professor Wang's findings make a contribution to theory in the field of English Language Teaching by going beyond carefully-controlled situations, and grounding research in more naturalistic circumstances (his colleagues sustained the modified methodological approach over a substantial period); they are also progressive in their linkage of input with interaction and with sociocultural factors. His methodology is sophisticated and elaborate,

consisting of an intricate intermingling of the qualitative and the quantitative. Above all, it is relevant to the real world of China, and is of importance for all ELT professionals both at home and abroad.

It is a pleasure to me to write this brief preface to Professor Wang's book. He designed his research under my guidance in Northern Ireland, and during the period when he worked at the University of Ulster, I became firm friends with him and his wife. His interest in the sociocultural dimension of interaction is not just an academic one, but reaches into his human relationships and behaviour. He is one of the modern generation of Chinese scholars who move confidently between theory and practice, and between one international scholarly community and another. He is missed here, though from the beginning of his stay his commitment to his country and to the improvement of Chinese English Language Teaching was evident. I wish him every success with this book and hope that it will have the resonance which it undoubtedly deserves in his beloved home country and beyond.

Professor RMO Pritchard, University of Ulster at Coleraine

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Finally, I am grateful to Mr Colin Todd at the University of Ulster computer center for his instruction on SPSS programmes, and to Mr William Norris for his support in having the thesis printed.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS BOOK

- EFL: English as a Foreign Language
EPT: English Proficiency Test
ESL: English as a Second Language
IPA: International Phonetic Alphabet
NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
SD: Standard Deviation
SES: Social and Economic Status
SL: Second Language
SLA: Second Language Acquisition
SPSS: Superior Performance Software Systems
TCSL: Teaching Chinese as a Second Language
TEFL: Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TEM: Test for English Majors
TNEM: Test for Non-English Majors
TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language
UN: United Nations
WFP: World Food Programme (of the Food and Agriculture
Organisation of the United Nations)

ABSTRACT

The present study attempted to investigate and analyse the role of methodological and semantic input in acquisition of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) for English majors in Guizhou, China. The most problematic phenomena for these students were: their habitual dependence on grammatical analysis and mental translation for comprehension and production (though they had studied EFL for six years in the middle school and about two years in the university), their undercultivated skills in social communication, and the unbalanced development of their language receptivity and productivity. The study set out to investigate three main issues: (i) whether a modification of teaching methodology would help students to achieve more balanced linguistic development; (ii) whether their comprehension and use of English would be effectively stimulated by Anglophone cultural input at the beginning of university study; and (iii) whether enhancing the comprehensibility and applicability of linguistic input would accelerate L2 acquisition and increase the likelihood of target language use. Since no previous comparable research had been conducted in this field of enquiry in Guizhou (or probably even in China), the purpose of this programme was to upgrade English teaching in this place.

The project consisted of two Phases. Phase I explored the effectiveness of teaching methodology by comparing three different approaches: grammar-based, meaning-based and combined pedagogies. In addition, it compared the relative effectiveness of Anglophone- and Home-based literary cultural input to the Chinese EFL students. Phase II set out to establish whether the optimal methodology, as indicated by the outcome of Phase I, could be applied on a wider scale by teaching practitioners other than the present researcher. The effectiveness of Home-based cultural input was also trialled in formal classroom teaching. Phase II thus focused on the generalisability of the Phase I findings.

Throughout the two Phases, quantitative and qualitative research instruments were employed for data generation and analysis. The main findings were as follows:

For Methodological Input: Phase I

(1) In Guizhou, China, the traditional grammar-based approach and the Natural Method both demonstrated weaknesses in relation to students' EFL

acquisition.

(2) Compared with either of the two above-mentioned strategies used in isolation, the combined approach displayed its superiority for Chinese students.

(3) The results of the experimental data threw doubt on the validity of Krashen's learning-acquisition and input hypotheses.

For Semantic Input: Phase I

(4) Anglo-American literary input did not benefit the Chinese EFL students in terms of SLA unless their linguistic competence was appropriately developed.

(5) Input related to learners' own cultural and social environment reduced obstacles in learners' comprehension and created a greater potential for L2 application in their lives.

Generalisability of the Findings: Phase II

(6) Based on the quasi-experiment in Phase II, research findings indicated that, despite some psychological reservations, mainstream university teachers could become competent in using the combined method. This resulted in quicker processing of linguistic input, more rapid generation of linguistic output, and a more balanced command of the English language across the four major skills. Home cultural input was more effective than Anglophone cultural input in stimulating learners' English acquisition in the early stage of university study.

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