

Book Review

Input, Interaction, and the Second Language Learner by Susan M. Gass, New York, NY: Routledge, 2018 (pp.xxiv-189).

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Susan M. Gass wrote the first edition of the book, "Input, Interaction, and the Second Language Learner," twenty years ago. This edition is Routledge Linguistics Classics Edition. The content presents a combination of the original texts and views of the author and other experts in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). The book content shows the correlation between input, interaction, and SLA related to second and foreign language acquisition from a pedagogical perspective. It presents that acquisition is dynamic and interactive. Definition of "interaction" and its goals are presented to highlight the knowledge gained by the language learners, especially second language learners, regarding input, interaction framework, information-processing, and learnability. The preface of this book was written to the 20th anniversary Routledge Linguistics Classics Edition. It is fascinating and entirely different from other books' prefaces. Instead of explaining purposes or directly thanking people who helped the author, the preface is used to give honor to the author's consultants, Alison Mackey, Rod Ellis, and Mike Long, experts in SLA research, who helped to prepare this preface. Therefore, it shows the conversation and email conversations between the author and the three consultants.

The conversation between the author and Alison Mackey mentions the rationale of interaction study. The author talked about two main starting points for studying interaction. These two starting points are the interest towards the way people talk to one another and second and doubts towards the context of language learning. However, Alison Mackey presented different starting points that are the interest of conversation and discourse and developmental outcomes of interaction. After reviewing the literature, Mackey found that the interaction affects the structure of communication and understanding, not language learning. They also talked about their works, similarities, and differences between their practices and other researchers such as Mike Long, Litsa Varonis, Rod Ellis, Charlie Sato, Geoff Jordan, and Pauline Foster. The author's work in 1994 revealed the impact of communicative tasks on production and comprehension. Mackey, therefore, thought further about the measurement of interaction outcomes that are beneficial for linguistic development. The tasks facilitate learning and are the tools to collect data; however, some teachers who do not see the importance of tasks might not see the usefulness of interaction or relevance to the classroom context. Finally, they talked about the next project that should be conducted. It should aim at examining a theory to see the components of interaction theory. In addition, email conversation with Rod Ellis shown in the preface presents the personal ideas of Ellis toward the study of interaction. Two most effective strands of research relevant to task-based language teaching (TBLT) are interactionist and CALF (complexity, accuracy, lexis, and fluency); nevertheless, the researchers of these two strands ignore each other. Ellis believes that they have to do research together soon collaboratively. Since teacher-class interaction plays an essential part in the classroom, it should be highlighted rather than small-group work study as the interaction has impacts on the acquisition.

Each chapter of the books elaborately presents details of several views towards input, interaction, and SLA; therefore, they are linked regarding content but separated aspects. Chapter 1

presents main interactive stages of language acquisition using the model of SLA from input (what the learner exposes orally or visually) to output (acquisition), including attention, awareness, and consciousness, for example, language transfer (a part of the prior knowledge of input) plays filtering roles from input to apperceived input and a processing role at the intake level. While Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 elaborate details and related principles and concepts towards SLA expanding from what mentioned in the learning stages in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2 shows additional part of language acquisition but focuses on first language (L1) acquisition that different from SLA context, namely, the L1 acquisition emphasizes the development of communicative skills, but the SLA likely aims at achieving native-like competence. Universal Grammar (UG) is stressed in this chapter as the author stated that it is a well-developed linguistic theory with clear input role, and it is the most profoundly and broadly researched approach to SLA. Moreover, the author referred to the definition of UG generated by Chomsky (1975: 29), “UG is the system of principles, conditions, and rules that are elements or properties of all human languages,” to support the importance of UG in language acquisition process. However, there are many arguments expressing that there is no mechanism designed for language learning, and its learning principles do not focus on language learning (Eckman, 1996, p. 398).

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 confirm the belief that interaction is a form of input that fluctuates based on the learner’s proficiency level or understanding, and language acquisition is dynamic depending on culture and context. Young children might learn language from their mothers, while in other culture children probably spend more time with people other than parents. Unfortunately, principles and hypotheses for L1 learning do not operate in an L2 context. Moreover, Chapter 6 adds another consideration towards language learning. Language a language does not focus only on the importance of learning structure and grammar but also the real use of it, including politeness and social factors.

The content presented in Chapters 1-6 is the framework and details of L1 and L2 acquisition, including its connection. The author helps clarify linguistic issues and dyadic conversations using examples from the studies, which makes the points clear and understandable. Moreover, Chapter 7 presents the link between SLA and language teaching classroom. Task-based learning is selected to be as an example of teaching language that focuses on both form and meaning. However, the author suggests that best practices occur based on research, so doing research on language learning enables the teachers get best ideas for classroom teaching. The conclusion of input, interaction and SLA was drawn in the last part of Chapter 7 that interaction with feedback guides language acquisition of individual learners, and the SLA is shaped by input and interaction, the learner receives input among engaged interaction.

This book is an excellent book for language teachers, educators, researchers, or even learners to get ideas mainly about SLA and its related factors, including the framework of learning. It also presents stages of learning from entire picture to details like steps of stair to walk up to the place and even implication and application in classroom teaching. The reader without scientific background knowledge can understand the issues and gradually learns and gains knowledge from the beginning to the ending point of SLA in real life. Explicitly, it is useful for many people who have different purposes for using and learning a language. The given practical examples of research data and findings make the points mentioned in the book clearer and comprehensible for everyone who is interested in SLA.

References

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