

# Sufficient Exposure to New L2 Input Produces More Acquisition than Comprehensibility in Discourse with EFLs: Hybrid of “Macro-Social Factors”, and “Interactional Input Modifications” with Exposure to New L2 Input

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**Abstract:** The study aims at examining the role of frequency of L2 exposure combined with interactional input modifications and macro-social factors in achieving more real bilingual acquisition than sole comprehensibility in the setting of Second Language Acquisition. As EFLs speaking Mandarin as the first language are mostly programmed with a settled system of traditional rote learning from school in China, the limited flexibility separates them from ELLs or L1 learners on aspects like being responsive to more linguistic variations in bilingual experience. It causes the linguistic ambiguity among the mainland EFLs community—being capable of comprehending some higher-order input from the books but unable to recognize the new simpler input that bears the same meaning and contexts as what they have already known due to 1) more modifications catering to them and meanwhile 2) lack of sufficient L2 exposure per unit. This study involved some typical text analysis based on EFLs in the college classroom setting, and executed theory of input modification and macro-social factors, together with sufficient L2 exposure, to prove that the first two methodologies stimulate comprehensibility but only certain frequencies of L2 exposure promotes real acquisition for communicative purposes.

## 1. Introduction

Context-based theories from both sociology and psycholinguistics were perfectly blended by Muriel into a newborn system unique to SLA, forming what Muriel called “Communicative Contexts” (Saville-Troike, 2008), categorically divided into some contextual dimensions--linguistic context, psychological context, micro-social contexts and macro-social contexts, among which the first three variables are more inclined to be related to individual differences, except for the last one—macro-social context. Taking Macro-social factors into cautious consideration, by and large, promotes the efficiency and quality of L2 instruction for EFLs, because when linguistic interaction happens, a typical social norm that complies with what the macro-environment regulates the entire discourse to conform to would be obeyed by both sides consciously; making sense of the various cultural backgrounds the EFL community comes from harmonize the interaction with fewer communicational barriers encountered; differences of age, gender or educational background in the designated setting affect discourse in different ways as well.

Macro-social factors deals primarily with the content of input while the linguistic form of input requires more professional revision linguistically for speech. Speech addressed by L1 or advanced L2 speakers to beginner or intermediate L2 learners changes in the form of linguistic forms, grammatical regulations, metaphorical uses, and lexical selection, caused positive comprehensible input (Steven Krashen, 1980) to happen in language learning setting. The modified variety in speech, featuring utilization of high-frequency vocabulary, relatively slower rate of speech with long pauses, simplified grammatical structures, topicalization, etc., has been technically defined as “foreigner talk”(Long, 1996), creating a variety of linguistic variations for SLA (Second Language Acquisition)

However, despite the fact that adaptations of written and oral input for EFLs (English as a Foreign Language Learners) share some similarities with those for ELLs (English-Language Learners),

input modifications for both target audiences have to be in accord with, or at least be based on the macro-social contexts associated with L2 community, apart from the cautious selections of elements such as grammar, syntax, vocabulary and scaffolding. Such comprehensible input would serve to facilitate the comprehensibility as many researches have proved, but to some degree give rise to a comparatively slower speed of real acquisition without sufficient exposure to the target language, namely, the frequencies of using new input of L2. Therefore, the organic fusion of “Interactional Oral and Writing Input Modifications”, “macro-social contexts in linguistics” with which target learners are associated, together with certain amount of frequencies of using target language elements in new language setting makes possible the achievement of not only the comprehensible input, but of real acquisitional input for EFLs to enhance, thus forming a new special linguistic mechanism for L2 learners to cross from previous repertoire to the unknown.

## **2. Literature Review**

Muriel Saville-Troike delved into the pragmatic function of “interactional modification” on “Introducing Second Language Acquisition” by surveying international students at a US university where they were interviewed on which professor they congruently had a high opinion of among the professors they knew about. Data show that faculty with extra or extensive teaching experience in L2 contexts were rated more understandable, as they were more likely to well balance in addressing classes that included both students of beginner English level and advanced L2 ELLs, or both native and limited speakers of the language. Likewise, Muriel also illustrated how both micro- (immediate surrounding circumstances) and macro-social factors (participants’ broader political, social and cultural roles, societal attitudes towards specific languages and multi-lingualism in general) would influence linguistic variation in SLA setting. (Saville-Troike, 2008)

CAT (Communication Accommodation Theory) was analyzed by Howard Giles as a communicative methodology that deals with the diverse ways to appropriately react to different communication contexts by changing the participants’ own communicative strategies, based on people’s goals for social approval, communication efficiency, and identity. (Gallois, Cindy, Giles, 2015) Coupled with CAT, Lester Loschky used Japanese as the target language to attest to the pragmatics of how Comprehensible Input Hypothesis and Interactional Modifications facilitate SLA (Loschky, 1994), echoing with recent researcher Chiang, though not targeting English as a second language but Chinese, Min-Hsun who explored the effects of raising the difficulty of texts to a slightly higher level than L1 learners’ current level, and the research reaffirmed the viability of what Comprehensible Input Hypothesis postulated, beneficial not only for L2 learners, but for L1 learners as well. (Min-Hsun, 2016)

However, relatively smaller amount of researches have been done to shed light on other variables such as age, and L2 exposure that impact the ability to control a language, until a collective research was conducted by Bonfieni, Michela, Branigan, Holly P., Pickering, Martin J. and Sorace, Antonella, showing that bilingual switch is not only modulated by L2 proficiency, but also by daily L2 exposure. (Bonfieni, Michela, Branigan, Holly P., Pickering, Martin J. and Sorace, Antonella, 2018)

## **3. Comprehensibility (Macro-social Factors & Input Modifications)**

### **3.1 Macro-social Factors**

Macro-social focus relates SLA to broader cultural, political, and educational environments. Categorically, it contains global and national status of L1 and L2, boundaries and identities, Institutional forces and constraints, social categories, circumstances of learning. (Saville-Troike, 2006) For interaction with EFL community, the appropriate modification based on the macro-social factors to a large degree improves comprehensibility among EFL community with the modified content that makes reasonable sense to them in a social way.

Macro-social factors affect SLA in terms of the content, encouraging L1 or advanced L2

speakers to make the content (input) more catering to the social norms while in discourse with L2 learners, but Macro-social factors copes chiefly with the content, not the linguistic form that require real linguistic techniques to operate.

### 3.2 Input Modifications

Language acquisition is also built on the general rule of making the most of what has been previously programmed into the learners' language neural system in the brain to make sense of what the target language literally means for them, essentially the same way as what it means for native speakers of the language. Such process underscores the significance and functions of "repertoire" and "existing knowledge" as a tool to be used to acquire more new information, and thus has motivated linguists to get involved in searching for types of language mechanisms to make L2 more accessible and comprehensible to both ELL and EFL communities (eg, "Comprehensible Input, Krashen). The process of simplifying the new language has been referred to as "process of simplification", featuring, for example, text interpreting and text modifying (for input), providing scaffoldings or sentence structures (for output) that are of questionable value in enhancing the comprehensibility of written text. (Saville-Troike, 2008). Similar to how written texts are simplified, means of oral input modifications were categorically summarized as repetition, paraphrase, expansion and elaboration, frame for substitution, vertical construction, and comprehension check and request for clarification. (Saville-Troike, 2008)

#### 3.2.1 Tables of Discourse Analyses

Table 3.1 shows how the series of the mentioned modification strategies coupled with macro-social factors both suggested by Muriel Saville-Troike were practiced in the Chinese EFL community where the target audiences are freshmen and sophomores enrolled in different academic programs in college. Note to file: the basic background information concerning EFLs in China is listed as,

- 1) the majority of students, except for those studying in international schools equipped with native English speakers as instructors, have not received much formal/informal language instruction from native English speakers since they started learning English as a second language;
- 2) in accord with what was mentioned above, although the mass EFL population do not bypass the long hours of exposure to more higher-order academic readings as they deal with from traditional Chinese English teachers, they show little sensitivity or reaction to even some lower-order input fundamental to L1 speakers or advanced L2 speakers;
- 3) what results in 2) boils down to a variety of reasons, of which the most typical one is the motivation and linguistic goals driven by traditional language tests that place grammar, low-frequency vocabulary and academic English as the highest priority while overlooks the flexibility and pragmatics of the language of English. It accounts for how "circumstances learning" as part of macro-social factors plays a role in rote learning Asian students who succeed in teaching methods that involve memorization, but fail in generic makeup. (Saville-Troike, 2008)

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#### 3.1 Interactional Modifications

Native Speaker      NNS=Non-native Speaker

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##### *Strategy 1: Paraphrase*

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NS: You guys have ....., are you sure?

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NNS: Yes

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NS: Positive?

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NNS: ...(silent)

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NS: I mean, Are you really confirmed that you guys have...?

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NNS: Yes

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##### *Strategy 2: Repetition*

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NS: Please finish your assignment by Friday night!

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NNS: Excuse me?

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NS: Please finish your assignment! (pitch on "assignment" &

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pause between words)
NNS: (...puzzled but seemingly understanding othe context "Friday Night")
NS: Guys, one more time, please finish your assignment by Friday night!

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*Analysis (paraphrase):* "Positive" VS "confirmed". A large amount of EFLs in China knowingly categorized the word "sure" and "confirmed" in one context where meanings of each could be interchangeably recognizable by them, because by translation, "confirm" as a verb generally goes by "确认" plus "sure" as an adjective points to "确定", almost the same meaning in the language of Mandarin. However, the first meaning for the translation of "positive" in the dictionary comes out as "正面的(optimistic, non-negative, etc)", though it does indicate the same meaning as "sure" and "confirmed". Limited by the mechanized code-switching between Mandarin and English, L1 speakers borrowed "confirmed" to make "positive" acceptable by EFLs in this context. Muriel also explained the fundamental difference in situational circumstances—whether L2 learning is informal versus formal, or naturalistic versus instructed and thus it shows that the EFLs in mainstream schools here have received too much forma L2 input while become less responsive to commonly used L1 informal input.

*Analysis (Repetition):* EFLs from China have been injected with the notion of "homework" for long since the beginning of formal years because by context, the word "homework" refers to the task that ought to be done at the very specific location—home, and has been normalized by the mainstream schools of all levels in China, thus making L2 learners react relatively slower in hearing "assignment" before they are able to make corresponding responses, but turn to the other element "Friday night" to roughly guess the possible connotation.

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<i>Strategy 3: Expansion and Elaboration</i>
NNS: Comments?
NS: Do you have any idea, opinion, or view about the question? Can you make some comments?

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<i>Strategy 4: Sentence Completion</i>
NNS: Humanities has different subjects, such as...
NS: History, philosophy, social studies, and art...

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*Analysis(Expansion and Elaboration):* "Comments" exists exclusively in some designated contexts such as social media, online forums or conversation settings, but to some degree contradict the frequency of being used in EFL classroom in mainland China. Students have been acquainted with the specific phrase "in my opinion/view", which according to the modification theory, was selected to shed light on the meaning of comments to make it understandable by EFLs here.

*Analysis(Sentence Completion):* This scenario happened among EFLs from minority communities in China who have experienced a different language policy for English than students from other regular areas(e.g.: no listening comprehension in the language test, no sufficient English classes, etc.), causing slower process of acquisition and less sensitivity to new input. Through learning, some of them are capable of translating directly from L1 with scaffolding provided but not able to fill in the details with the specific terms required of the discourse. In this true example, an EFL student from Tibet uttered a few words about the introduction of the given topic "Humanities", but had a hard time completing a whole sentence, so in order to modify the conversation, the L1 instructor or advanced L2 speaker would complete the rest part of what he meant to express about the examples about the "humanities".

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<i>Strategy 5: Frame for Substitution</i>
NS: What's up? How much did you just weigh?
NNS: Nothing's up. 140 pounds did I just weigh.

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<i>Strategy 6: Vertical Construction</i>
NNS: Baidu (Main Searching engine in China)
NS: What is Baidu?
NNS: Search
NS: What can we search with Baidu?
NNS: Everything.
NS: If we want to search everything, we use Baidu.

*Analysis(Frame for substitution):* The native speaker’s sentence frame provides the NNSs with words or chunks of language, so that the latter can use in subsequent turns of talk, in spite of the grammatical sense.

*Analysis (Vertical Construction):* Baidu is the main searching engine in Chinese culture and has become a fixture in the L1 language where “baidu it” refers to “look it up or search it”, as same as Google it or Bingo it, very specific cultural thing in terms of the macro-context. With the limited output from NNSs, NS built the sentence frame in a vertical way to help NNSs connect all the disjointed information they had already in mind together to produce a comprehensible sentence.

<i>Strategy 7: Comprehension Check and Request for clarification</i>
NS: Any unsolicited advice makes no sense to other people.
NNS: What is “unsolicited”?
NS: Without request, without asking
NNS: Do not give advice without request, without asking?
NS: Correct!

*Analysis(Comprehension check and request for clarification):* The word “unsolicited” does not frequently exist in the EFL conversation but once it does as the conversation above shows, the strategy works to focus NNSs’ attention on segments of sentences which are unclear, and the negotiation of meaning between NSs and NNSs can be positively and effectively achieved through constant check and request for clarification just in case of any breakdown in the conversation. So any question-raising behavior would help fix the breakdown of each part—“without request, without asking” for the confirmation of defining “unsolicited” and the question “Do not give advice if not asked to” for comprehension check.

## **4. Frequencies of L2 Exposure**

### **4.1 Limitation of Pure Interactional Modification**

As analyzed above, these modification strategies, organically combined with taking macro-social factors into full consideration, boost real comprehensibility in the context-based discourses. If NS from the text listed represents “message conveyor” while the NNS stands for the “message receive”, the modification strategies used by the “senders” have simplified the L2 input to cater to the level, or the originally programmed linguistic system of the “receivers”, producing comprehensible input as it showed. However, throughout the entire discourse analyses, comprehensible input through modification within the macro-social context, though largely simplifies the content and context for the receivers, does not necessarily equal real acquisition without sufficient frequencies of L2 exposure.

Take the previous data for example, the words “positive”, “assignment”, “comments”, specific course names, colloquial greeting sentences such as “what’s up” do not occur as frequently as those in ELL classroom setting or discourse, but the effective modification strategies based on a full consideration of the macro-social factors such as the circumstances of learning maximize the comprehensibility to the fullest. Yet the empirical experiences in real classroom setting and discourse, though having proved the validity and effectiveness of comprehensible input grounded on the modifying strategies by Muriel, do not necessarily convince modern researchers of the real



“language acquisition” it leads to, i.e., what Muriel advocated and suggested does promote “L2 comprehensibility”, whereas does not affirm the “constructive feedback” from the input receivers without “practical evidence” produced by them.

#### 4.2 A Systematic Procedure of Real Acquisition with Frequencies of L2 Exposure Highlighted

Language dominance is characterized by multiple aspects of the bilingual experience, which modulates language control. (Bonfieni, Michela, Branigan, Holly P., Pickering, Martin J. and Sorace, Antonella, 2018) The step 1 has firmly confirmed the viability of modulating language control, but to make real L2 acquisition happen effectively and efficiently, the sufficient exposures to L2, namely, the frequency of new L2 input, have to be underscored by L1 instructors or advanced L2 speakers during discourse with EFLs. Rather than simply set the target new input as the objective and turn to these modification strategies for assistance, to repeat, re-produce and re-use the new L2 input would at large stimulate the receivers’ linguistic nerve system in the brain, so that the brain gets more responsive to the new input and able to produce “logical output” with the comprehensible new input they receive over and over again.

If divided into a consecutive and consistent process of acquisition, the modification according to the macro-social context would be technically set as “Step 1”, during which the modified language has been assisting the brains with making sense of the received new input, but in that sense the target language seems one-time thing without enough frequencies of being used in real setting. Following “Step 1” comes the real step 2 of “acquisition”, requiring the new input to be used with a range of frequencies from at least twice, as many as possible to overwhelmingly used, depending on the language level of the EFLs. Once the first two steps are executed in the discourse, Step 3, namely, the output stage by the EFLs, would fact-check the validity and effectiveness of the previous 2 steps. Step 1 certainly establishes the prerequisite condition prior to Step 2, working together with both Step 2 and Step 3 to achieve the real goal or purpose of acquisition for the target L2 learners.

##### 4.2.1. An Overall Modified Text Analysis

As part IV theoretically suggests, the lack of new L2 exposure would work to inhibit the process of real L2 acquisition, though what Muriel Saville-Troike put forward about the “modification strategies” based on macro-social context is true of its validity in terms of the comprehensibility during the step 1 of the entire process. The real step 2 takes more frequencies of L2 exposure to achieve “acquisition”. Table 3.2 shows a modified version of Table 4.2 to prove how the mythology creates acquisition throughout the systematic process of step 1, step 2 and step 3 mentioned above.

4.2 Acquisition Strategies	
Ns=Native Speaker	NNS= nonnative speaker
<i>Strategy 1: Paraphrase</i>	
NS: You guys have finished your homework, are you sure?	
NNS: Yes	
NS: Positive?	
NNS: ...(silent)	
NS: I mean, Are you really confirmed that you guys have finished your homework?? ( <i>Step 1</i> )	
NNS: Yes	
NS: So I believe you! You guys look so positive! Again, what are you positive? ( <i>step 2</i> )	
NNS: We’re positive that we have finished our homework! ( <i>Step 3</i> )	
<i>Strategy 2: Repetition</i>	
NS: Please finish your assignment by Friday night!	
NNS: Excuse me?	
NS: Please finish your assignment! (pitch on “assignment”)	

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& pause between words)

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NNS: (...puzzled but seemingly understanding the context "Friday Night")

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NS: Guys, one more time, please finish your assignment by Friday night! (Step 1) And I need you to write your assignment by hand. Don't send any online assignments. (Step 2). So, what should you do?

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NNS: Finish our assignment by Friday night. (Step 3)

*Analysis(Paraphrase):*

Step 1(Comprehensibility): "Are you confirmed that..." modifies "are you positive"

Step 2(Frequencies): "Twice use of the target word "positive" for more frequencies.

Step 3(Acquisition from Output): To re-affirm the real acquisition of "positive" in output.

*Analysis(Repetition):*

Step 1(Comprehensibility): to repeat the same input as NS previously gave

Step 2(Frequencies): make diverse contexts with "assignment" used for more frequencies.

Step 3(Acquisition from Output): produce the new output by using the new input "assignment"

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*Strategy 3: Expansion and Elaboration*

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NNS: Comments?

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NS: Do you have any idea, opinion, or view about the question? Can you make some comments? (Step 1) I want to hear your comments! Not just me making comments all the time. So what your comments? (Step 2)

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NNS: My comment is, the premier of the movie is so good. (Step 3)

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*Strategy 4: Sentence Completion*

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NNS: Humanities has different subjects, such as...

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NS: History, philosophy, social studies, and art. (Step 1) History and philosophy are important 3-credit subjects in college and you study social studies now and you probably love art too. Am I right? (Step 2)

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NNS: Yes

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NS: What are you favorite ones, including history, philosophy, social studies and art?

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NNS: History and social studies, I think. (Step 3)

*Analysis (Expansion and Elaboration):*

Step 1(Comprehensibility): to elaborate "comment" with a whole sentence as expansion.

Step 2(Frequencies): create the more frequencies of using "comment" and ask question with "comment"

Step 3(Acquisition from Output): able to output "comment" by self

*Analysis(Sentence Completion):*

Step 1(Comprehensibility): "History, Philosophy, social studies and art" for illustration of "humanities" in specific.

Step 2(Frequencies): explain and repeat the new input in conversational setting.

Step 3(Acquisition from Output): assure NS the real acquisition of humanities.

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*Strategy 5: Frame for Substitution*

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NS: What's up? How much did you just weigh? (Step 1)

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NNS: Nothing's up. 140 pounds did I just weigh.

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NS: You weigh 140 lbs? Do you weigh less or more than you weighed last month? (Step 2)

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NNS: Yes. I weigh 140 and I weigh more than I weighed last month. (Step 3)

Strategy 6: Vertical Construction
NNS: Baidu (Main Searching engine in China)
NS: What is Baidu?
NNS: Search
NS: What can we search with Baidu?
NNS: Everything.
NS: If we want to search everything, we use Baidu? ( <i>Step 1</i> )
NNS: Baidu is like Google.
NS: What can we search on Google and Baidu? ( <i>Step 2</i> )
NNS: You can search everything you want on Baidu and Google. ( <i>Step 3</i> )

*Analysis (Frame for Substitution):*

Step 1(Comprehensibility): sentence frame “How much did you just weigh?”

Step 2(Frequencies): weigh, weigh, weighed

Step 3(Acquisition from Output): I weigh 140 and I weigh more than I weighed last month. (re-produce with the grammatically correct sentence frame)

*Analysis (Vertical Construction):*

Step 1(Comprehensibility): The vertical construction was built through Baidu, search, everything progressively.

Step 2(Frequencies): Baidu and Google, search

Step 3(Acquisition from Output): produce an output by making an analogy between Google and Baidu

Strategy 7: Comprehension check and request for clarification
NS: Any unsolicited advice makes no sense to other people.
NNS: What is “unsolicited”? ( <i>Step 1</i> )
NS: without request, without asking
NNS: Do not give advice if not asked to? ( <i>Step 1</i> )
NS: Correct! So any unsolicited advice, or unsolicited request, shouldn't be given at any time! Do you like unsolicited opinion when you do not request? ( <i>Step 2</i> )
NNS: No, I don't like unsolicited anything at all! ( <i>Step 3</i> )

*Analysis (Comprehension check and request for clarification):*

Step 1(Comprehensibility): Comprehension check by requesting for clarification of the definition of “unsolicited”

Step 2(Frequencies): unsolicited advice, unsolicited request, unsolicited opinion (multiple frequencies of using unsolicited to describe different objects)

Step 3(Acquisition from Output): output a whole sentence with the new input “unsolicited” to provide feedback.

Apparently, the comprehensible input by Krashen can be firmly shown in step 1 among all the analyses via professional modifications. The more than one-time exposure to the new input leads to real and better acquisition through the positive feedback, i.e, the output from learners. The real acquisition has gone through a systematical and scientific procedure, as samples show, from numb reaction to the single word “Positive” to “We are positive that...” What functions throughout the process is the multiple effective exposures to new input within the correct macro-social context where language makes sense to learners logically. It explains why the context-based terminologies could be well-matched based on different cultures, such as Baidu & Google, borrowing Alipay to illustrate the third-party payment for transaction and exams & quizzes.

During the SLA process, comprehension process that incorporates both successes and failures, provides a wider role to facilitate acquisition, which attests to the hypothesis that there is a relation



and bridge between comprehension and intake/retention of the target language for the learners. (Loschky, 1993) Through wrongly using the sentence frame provided, as strategy 5 illustrates, “140 lbs did I just weigh” grammatically does not hold up to the regular correct grammar, but it did serve the purpose of assisting with the comprehensibility, thus learners have achieved the first goal of comprehending before multiple exposures to it with correct grammatical modification by instructors during discourse and finally are capable of producing the true output.

## 5. Conclusion

Muriel Saville-Troike pioneered strategies of modification and conceptualized the macro-social factors to enable them to cooperate organically and systematically to realize what Steven Krashen defined “Comprehensible Input” in Second Language Acquisition. And accordingly as empirical experiences show, it has been modeling the advanced methodologies in different EFL or ELL settings on a global scale, making L2 input much easier to understand. But real acquisition happens when the mere modification as step 1, plus more sufficient exposure to the new target input as step 2 (as the language nerve system needs to be stimulated as much as possible to gain sensitivity and thus to get responsive to new input.), were collectively practiced in discourse with L2 learners via the feedback/output from the message receivers to reaffirm the comprehensibility of the new L2 input as step 3. This systematic way boosts not only language comprehensibility, but also real language acquisition, to the core of SLA. However, far from perfect, more endeavor could be invested on other variables by future researchers such as vocabularies especially verbs, valid scaffoldings, and the imbalance of input and output that causes twisted language development.

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