

Role of Comprehension Ability and Production Ability in Task Selection in the Second Language Classroom

Ali Shehadeh

*Assistant Professor, Department of European Languages and Translation,
College of Languages and Translation,
King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia*

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Abstract. It is well-documented in the literature that the use of communication tasks in the second language (L2) classroom is of primary importance. However, until very recently, it has been strongly suggested that second language acquisition (SLA) is possible only by the exposition to and the provision of comprehensible input. The role of production has been given a secondary role in SLA. The aim of this paper is threefold: (1) It argues that opportunities for both the provision of comprehensible input and the production of comprehensible output are necessary for SLA. (2) It provides a theoretical rationale and an SLA model for the choice of communication tasks in the L2 classroom, and (3) it provides a typology of these tasks and their possible contribution to SLA through the opportunities which they create for the provision of comprehensible input and the production of comprehensible output.

Introduction

Until recently most previous theoretical positions and empirical findings have maintained, in one way or another, that second language acquisition (SLA) is the result of exposure to comprehensible input [1; 2; 3; 4]. Some of these researchers have looked at second language (L2) learners' comprehension ability and performance ability and concluded that learning and communication strategies, exchange of information strategies, interaction, input, simplified input, output and feedback facilitate SLA by providing comprehensible input. Krashen [1, p. 57], for example, argues that comprehensible input is the only "causative factor" for SLA. Krashen and others [5; 6] have argued that the role of output is only to provide opportunities for generating more comprehensible input, for instance, via feedback.

Krashen, in particular, argues that SLA can theoretically take place without the need to produce acquired/learned L2 knowledge. He claims that the role of L2 learners' output (production) plays in SLA is only to provide a further source of comprehensible input indirectly by inviting more input from speech partners [7]. Based on these assumptions, Krashen [7, p. 61] proposes the following model

(Figure 1) that shows how SLA takes place and how output contributes to it. The model illustrates the *indirect* contribution output can make to language acquisition: Krashen [7, p. 61] explains this contribution of second language learners' output as follows: "Comprehensible *input* is responsible for progress in language acquisition. *Output* is possible as a result of acquired competence. When performers *speak*, they encourage *input* (people speak to them). This is *conversation*." Krashen [2, p. 36] rejects the idea of comprehensible output (see Swain below), claiming that language learners subconsciously perform operations of hypothesis-testing: "This hypothesis-testing, however, according to the Input Hypothesis, takes place on a subconscious level. In addition, it does not require production, nor does it involve communicative success." According to Krashen [7, p. 60], speaking itself is not necessary for acquiring a second language: "It is, in fact, theoretically possible to 'acquire' language without ever talking."

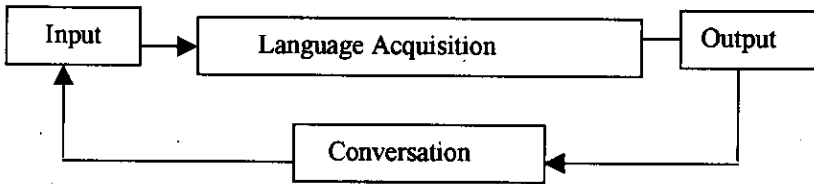


Figure 1. The indirect contribution of output to second language acquisition

Long [4] also proposes a model for SLA similar to that of Krashen. He argues that verbal exchange of information gives non-native speakers (NNSs) the opportunity to provide feedback on their comprehension which results in negotiated modification of conversation and this, in turn, leads to the provision of comprehensible input. And it is only by the provision of comprehensible input that SLA is possible. Figure 2 summarizes Long's model, which shows how interactional adjustments promote SLA [4, p. 214].

A Proposed Model for SLA

Several SLA researchers have pointed out that input studies have favoured the role of comprehension (input) while de-emphasizing at the same time the importance of production or learners' output [8; 9; 10; 11]. Swain in particular argued that understanding new forms is not enough and that learners must also be given the opportunity to produce them. She doubts that interactions and comprehensible input on their own are sufficient for SLA. She claims: [8, p. 252] "Conversational exchanges...are not themselves the source of acquisition derived from comprehensible input. Rather they are the source of acquisition derived from comprehensible output: output that extends the linguistic repertoire of the learner as he or she attempts to create precisely and appropriately the meaning desired."

Swain [8, p. 252] acknowledges the role of comprehensible input in SLA, but argues that comprehensible output is also a necessary mechanism which aids

SLA in many ways: "Its role is, at minimum, to provide opportunities for contextualized, meaningful use, to test out hypotheses about the target language, and to move the learner from a purely semantic analysis of the language to a syntactic analysis of it."

Moreover, it has recently been demonstrated that when non-native speakers (NNSs) are asked by native speakers (NSs) to clarify their output, they do so by modifying their interlanguage (IL) utterances to achieve native-like production in the process of producing comprehensible output which serves as comprehensible input to NSs [12; 13]. In other words, when a NS indicates a difficulty in understanding a NNS, the latter responds by modifying IL phonology, morphosyntax and lexical choice and, in doing so, achieves/supplies more target-like utterances.

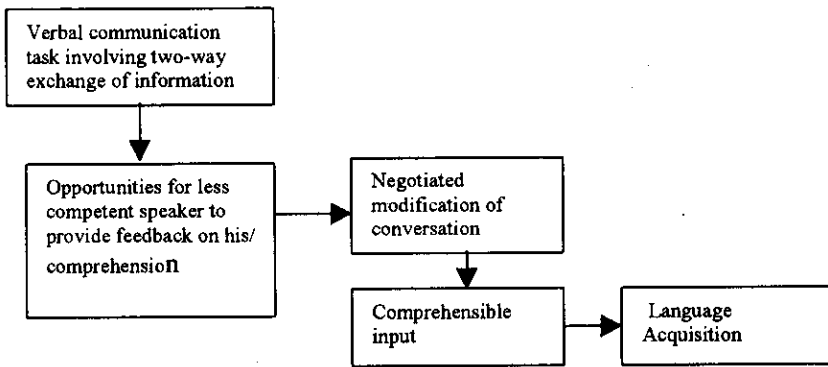


Figure 2. Model of the relationship between types of conversational task and language acquisition

Based on the findings of recent empirical studies, several SLA researchers have argued that NNSs' production of the target language (TL) might prove to be an important factor in promoting second language learning [14; 15; 16; 17]. Some of these researchers have shown that, irrespective of the input, NNSs were able to modify their IL phonological, morphosyntactic and lexical utterances in the direction of comprehensible output in response to self-initiated clarification attempts and other-initiated clarification requests in both NS/NNS and NNS/NNS interactions. This may imply that successful SLA depends not only on ways of comprehending input, but also on the L2 learners' ability to modify their IL utterances and use the skills and strategies which will enable them to produce comprehensible output.

For example, in specifically designed study for this purpose, Shehadeh [16] investigated NNSs' ability to produce modified comprehensible output (MCO). The study looked at the opportunities which NNSs have to adjust their IL utterances (phonology, morphosyntax and lexis) to make them more comprehensible both when they are asked by their speech partners to make themselves understood with regard to an utterance or part of an utterance and when they realize that their current or previous utterance or part of it is/was not completely comprehensible to their speech

partners. These modifications of output were examined in NS/NNS, NNS/NNS dyadic and group interactions. Specifically, the study examined (i) the role of other-initiated clarification requests, (ii) the role of self-initiated clarification attempts, (iii) the role of the speech partner (NS or NNS), (iv) the role of task-type and (v) the role of the type of interaction (dyadic or group) in affecting NNSs' production of MCO.

The population of the study consisted of 35 (16 male, 19 female) adult subjects: 8 NSs and 27 NNS subjects of mid-intermediate and high-intermediate proficiency levels. The NNSs represented 13 different first language backgrounds. Three communication tasks were used to collect data: a picture-dictation task, an opinion-exchange task and a decision-making task. The first two tasks were performed in pairs (NS/NNS and NNS/NNS) and the third in groups of NNSs. Dyadic interactions were audio-taped and group interactions were both audio- and video-taped.

The findings of the study showed that NNSs modify their utterances in the direction of comprehensible output when they are asked by their speech partners to make themselves understood with regard to an utterance or part of it or when they realize that their current or previous utterance is/was not completely comprehensible to their speech partners. They do so in NS/NNS and NNS/NNS dyadic encounters and in group interactions. However, the findings also revealed that self-initiated clarification attempts result in a significantly higher proportion of MCO than other-initiated clarification requests. It was also found that NNS/NNS encounters provide NNSs with significantly greater proportions of extended negotiation of meaning routines than NS/NNS encounters. It was further revealed that a picture-dictation task offers significantly greater opportunities for the production of MCO than an opinion-exchange task. Furthermore, the results revealed that group interaction provides a slightly higher rate of conversion between initiation and MCO and a significantly higher frequency of extended negotiation of meaning than dyadic encounters.

Additional observations which relate to the effect of gender were also reported. It was found that same-sex dyadic encounters provided females with more opportunities to modify their output than males, and that mixed gender group interactions provided males with more opportunities to modify their output than females.

The findings of the study validate theoretical claims by Swain [8], Hatch *et al.* [12] and Sato [13], and confirm the empirical findings of Pica [18], Pica *et al.* [14] and Pica *et al.* [19] which demonstrate that when NNSs are asked by NSs to clarify their output, they will do so by modifying their IL utterances thereby producing comprehensible output. The findings show that NNSs were able to modify their IL performance in the direction of comprehensible output in response to other-initiated clarification requests and the markedly more frequent occurrences of self-initiated clarification attempts. These output modifications occurred in both NS/NNS and NNS/NNS dyadic interactions and in interactions involving groups of NNSs. The findings further validate close observations by Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks [20]

and Kasper [21] which demonstrate that conversations favour self-initiated self-completed repair over other-initiated other-completed repair. The findings revealed that self-initiated clarification attempts resulted in a significantly higher proportion of MCO than other-initiated clarification requests.

The results of this study and the other relevant studies may be taken to support the underlying assumption that the role of L2 learners' production is not only to give feedback in order to generate more comprehensible input as claimed by Krashen [1, 2, 3], but also to facilitate SLA and development by offering NNSs opportunities to modify their IL utterances in the direction of comprehensible output. If this assumption is valid, it would be possible to argue, then, that comprehensible output - like comprehensible input - is indeed a mechanism that plays a role in promoting SLA. For instance, Pica [18] and Pica *et al.* [14] maintain that NNSs' ability to accomplish self-adjusted comprehensible output (i.e., NNS-based MCO) rather than other-adjusted comprehensible output (i.e., interlocutor-based MCO) is evidence which supports Swain's [8] claim that the comprehensible output moves the learner from semantic analysis of the TL to a syntactic analysis of it. Indeed, Shehadeh's [16] study revealed that in 81% of other-initiated clarification requests, NNSs produced NNS-based MCO, and in 93% of self-initiated clarification attempts, they produced NNS-based MCO.

Looking at the various theoretical positions and empirical findings relating to comprehensible output together, it seems that L2 learners' production serves three functions. (1) It indirectly generates more comprehensible input, as claimed by Krashen, Long and many others. (2) It facilitates second language development by providing L2 learners with opportunities to produce comprehensible output which is achieved by modifying and approximating their production towards successful use of the target language, as claimed by the present researcher and others [8; 9; 10]. (3) It may provide us with a better understanding of the processes of SLA. Hatch [22] reports that there are SLA researchers working in the artificial intelligence modelling, such as Gazden, who suggest that it is only through careful modelling of production that we will understand the possible types of mental processes involved in the use and production of the TL.

Similarly, the significance of *negotiated interactions* and the negotiation of meaning for SLA have until recently been taken to be the basis for the provision of comprehensible input only [2; 4; 23]. It is only latterly that SLA researchers have drawn attention to the importance of these categories not only for the provision of comprehensible input but also for the production of comprehensible output [9; 10; 14]. Pica *et al.* [14, p. 65], for instance, point out that "Although...research has focused mainly on the ways in which negotiated interaction with an interlocutor helps the learner to *understand* unfamiliar L2 input, we believe that it is also through negotiation that learners gain opportunities to attempt *production* of new L2 words and grammatical structures as well." Pica *et al.* further maintain that through the negotiation of meaning both learners and their interlocutors work together to produce comprehensible input and comprehensible output [14, p. 84].

In support of these arguments, the findings of Shehadeh's [16] study shows that interactions in which the negotiation of meaning is prevalent are important for the production of comprehensible output. It is possible to suggest therefore that negotiated interactions are important not only because they provide NNSs with an opportunity to receive input which they have made comprehensible through negotiation [24, p. 87], but also because they provide them with opportunities for negotiated interaction so as to produce comprehensible output.

In the light of the findings of Shehadeh's [16] study as well as the different arguments which relate to NNSs' comprehension and production and their relevance for SLA discussed above, it is possible to conclude that opportunities for comprehensible input and opportunities for comprehensible output which arise through the negotiation of meaning are both important to SLA [25]. Based on these arguments, the following proposed model (Figure 3) shows how the negotiation of meaning, comprehensible input and comprehensible output relate to second language learning:

Unlike Krashen's model [7] or Long's model [4] presented above, this model suggests that SLA is aided by providing opportunities for *both* the provision of comprehensible input and the production of comprehensible output.

Task Selection and Design in L2 Research and Classroom

Criteria for task selection and design in L2 research and the second/foreign language classroom have been approached from different perspectives. Some SLA researchers [26, p.127] have pointed out that in selecting communication tasks, it is important to make the linguistic features of the language (phonological, syntactic, pragmatic, etc.), medium (phonic, graphic), skills (listening, reading, writing, speaking, translating, imitating) and format of the tasks consistent with the objectives of the study and/or the use in the second/foreign language classroom interaction. Lynch [27] also argues that the selection of task-focused discourse in which both the NS and the NNS are actively engaged in a real and concrete task rather than merely listening to each other in a passive way is essential for the purpose of collecting data as well as for use in the second/foreign language classroom. Lynch [27, p. 322] also points out that NS/NNS interaction research has shown that "...conversations with a tangible outcome are more likely to result in an increased degree of linguistic and conversational adjustment than those with no clear concrete goal, since they require active two-way negotiation of meaning."

Further, Bialystok [28, p. 103] summarizes the criteria and features of a communication task along the following lines: a communication task must (i) stimulate real communicative exchange, (ii) provide incentive for the L2 speaker/learner to convey information, (iii) provide control for the information items required for investigation and (iv) fulfil the needs to be used for the goals of the experiment. In fact these are the criteria which most SLA researchers take into account when they construct tasks. For instance, Pica [29] argues that tasks should be developed in such a way as to "meet criteria for information control, information

flow and goals of the study." Furthermore, communicatively-oriented tasks should be structured in such a way "that learners will talk, not for the sake of producing language as an end in itself, but as a means of sharing ideas and opinions, collaborating toward a single goal, or competing to achieve individual goals" [15, p. 10].

In addition to these criteria of task selection and design, a number of definitions and descriptions of communication tasks have also been proposed by several L2 researchers [30, 31, 32]. The most accurate description of a communication task was proposed by Nunan [32, p. 10] who defines a communication task as "...a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form."

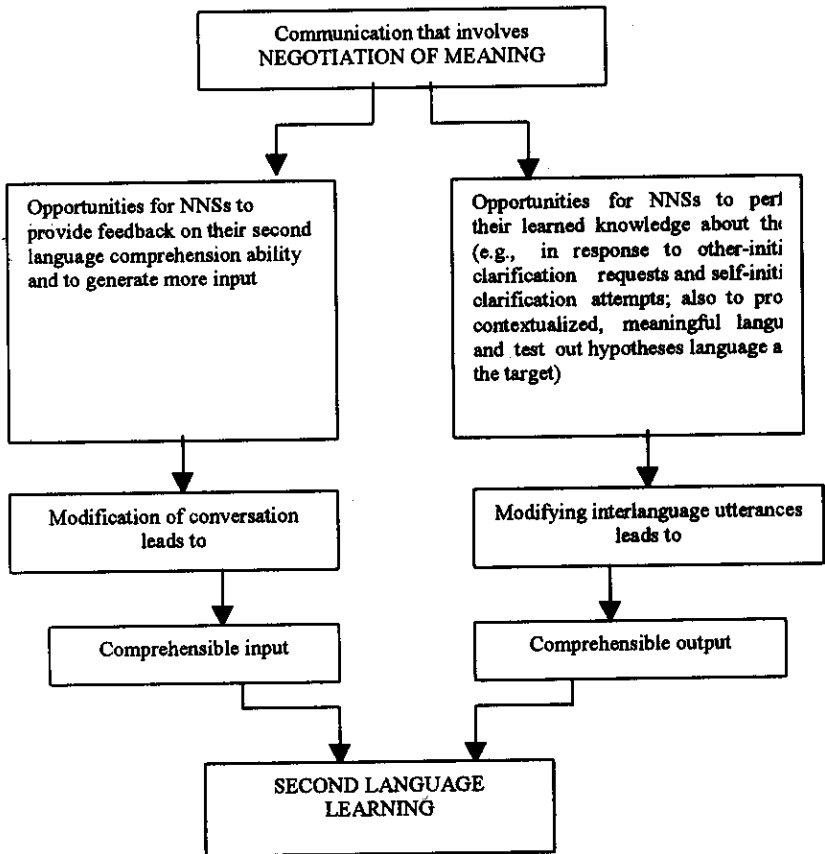


Figure 3. A proposed model for second language learning which involves both comprehension ability and production ability.

However, in order for this definition to be adequate, "manipulating, producing and interacting in the target language" should not be taken to mean that they only provide feedback to generate more comprehensible input but also to produce more comprehensible output. In other words, a communication task must be seen to contribute to SLA in two ways: (1) by assisting L2 learners' comprehension ability, for example, by providing feedback on their proficiency in the TL in order to generate more comprehensible input, and (2) by assisting their production ability by giving them the opportunity to produce (modified) comprehensible output.

Given the proposed model of second language learning (Figure 3) as well as the above argument, criteria for the selection and design of communication tasks in the second/foreign language classroom should further include the tasks' possible contributions to SLA by the provision of comprehensible input and the production of comprehensible output. That is, communication tasks should enhance L2 learners' comprehension ability and production ability, both abilities seen to promote SLA.

Altogether, selection of communication tasks for data collection and classroom interaction should include the following criteria: (1) A communication task should be one that learners themselves would like to do and participate (get involved) in. (2) It should stimulate real communicative exchange. Conversations with a tangible outcome require more effective and active engagement in the negotiation of meaning and therefore they are more likely to result in the provision of comprehensible input and the production of MCO than those tasks with no clear, concrete goal (i.e., those tasks in which learners listen to each other in a passive way). (3) It should provide incentive for the L2 learners to convey information. Learners will talk, not for the sake of producing language as an end in itself, but as a means of sharing ideas and opinions, collaborating towards a single goal, or competing to achieve individual goals. And (4) it should possibly have tangible contributions for the provision of comprehensible input and the production of comprehensible output.

A Typology of Communication Tasks

Pica, Kanagy and Falodun [15] identify five main types of communication tasks used in L2 research and pedagogy: jigsaw, information-gap (picture-dictation), problem-solving, decision-making and opinion-exchange. Task types are often characterized in the literature in terms of the following categories: *one-way* vs. *two-way* [33], *optional* exchange of information type vs. *required* exchange of information type [34], *convergent* vs. *divergent* [35]. The following table (Table 1) displays a classification of the main communication tasks used in L2 research and pedagogy.

The table shows that there are differences between the five task-types with respect to the flow of information (1 way vs. 2 way), goal orientation (+ convergent vs. - convergent) and who holds, requests and conveys the information necessary to carry out the task. The table also shows that there are differences in relation to the information necessary (+ required vs. - required) for task completion and/or the

number of task outcome possibilities (1, 1+, 1-). In the light of these differences, the five-task types are likely to place a wide range of communication demands on the interactants as illustrated below.

The jig-saw task

This is a two-way flow of information task, since no one interactant is given all the information needed to the completion of the task. Interactants should, therefore, be engaged in a relationship of mutual request and supplience of information. A jig-saw task is classified as + convergent task because participants should reach one mutually acceptable outcome only.

Table 1. Interactant roles, relationships and requirements in communicating information (INF) to achieve task goals [15].

Communication Task	INF holder	INF requester	INF supplier	INF requester-to-supplier relationship	Interaction requirements goals	Goal orientation	TOP
JS*	X + Y	X + Y	X + Y	2 way (X to Y & Y to X)	+required	+convergent	1
PD	X or Y	Y or X	X or Y	1 way= (X to Y or Y to X)	+required	+convergent	1
PS	X = Y	X = Y	X = Y	2 way (X to Y & Y to X)	-required	+convergent	1
DM	X = Y	X = Y	X = Y	2 way (X to Y & Y to X)	-required	+convergent	1 +
OE	X = Y	X = Y	X = Y	2 way (X to Y & Y to X)	-required	-convergent	1 -

TOP: Task outcome possibilities, JS: Jig-saw, PD: Picture-Dictation, PS: Problem-Solving, DM: Decision-Making, OE: Opinion-Exchange.

The picture-dictation task

In this one-way flow of information task, one interactant holds all the information and supplies it in response to the other's request. Gass and Varonis [33, p. 153] noted that picture-dictation "is not exclusively one-way, as a lecture would be, but information flows *primarily* in one direction." Picture-dictation is classified as a + convergent task since the participants have shared goals, to reach mutually acceptable outcomes [35, p. 150]. In Shehadeh's [16] study, for example, each NNS informant had to describe the contents of a postcard to a NS or to a NNS partner who had to reproduce the picture as precisely as possible solely on the basis of the NNS's description. This means that successful completion of the task depends in the first

place on the NNS's ability to supply (produce) a clear and accurate description of the picture he/she holds.

The problem-solving task

This is a two-way flow of information task. In this task, unlike the picture-dictation and jig-saw tasks, each interactant has access to all the information needed and supplies it in response to the other's request. Interactants are expected to request and supply information because problem-solving tasks are oriented toward a single outcome, and this forces interactants to try to make themselves mutually understood. Problem-solving is a + convergent task since only a mutually acceptable outcome should be reached.

The decision-making task

In this task each interactant has access to all the information and supplies it in response to the request of others. Each informant is required to request and supply information because only unanimous decisions must be reached. Interactants are expected to work for a single goal, but, unlike the problem-solving tasks, they have a number of outcome-types available to them. Decision-making tasks are + convergent tasks since only mutually acceptable decision(s) must be reached. In Shehadeh's [16] study, interactants had to make decisions and reach unanimity with regard to every decision they made on the specific task they were performing.

The opinion-exchange task

As was in the case of a decision-making task, in this task each interactant also has access to all the information needed and supplies it in response to the other's request. However, unlike the decision-making task, here each interactant is expected to request and supply information, but is not required to do so because interactants are not required to reach unanimous decisions. Also unlike the decision-making task, opinion-exchange tasks are divergent (i.e., convergent tasks) in that it is not necessary for the interactants to reach any agreement. Interactants have the right to refute their partners' arguments with as many arguments as possible, should they wished to do so [35, p. 150]. This means that although the decision-making task and the opinion-exchange task are similar with regard to information holder, information requester, information supplier, the information requester-to-supplier relationship and the interaction requirements, their goal orientations (+ convergent vs. - convergent) and the outcome possibilities (1+ vs. 1) differ substantially. The opinion-exchange task employed in Shehadeh's [16] study was a discussion in which the interactants were required to exchange opinions about a short newspaper article. The task was open-ended and did not require any of the speech partners to use only the precise information available to them or adhere to any specific aspect(s) of the theme of the article.

Pica *et al.* [14, p. 72] remark that "there is a great deal of consensus regarding the value of these tasks in providing data on interaction in general and

negotiated interaction in particular." They further point out that negotiated interaction is an important source of research data because it helps "to identify ways in which learners and their interlocutors work together in producing comprehensible input and comprehensible output" [14, p. 84]. More importantly, Pica *et al.* [15, p. 15] speculate that these communication task-types have impact on L2 learners' comprehension of input, feedback on their production, and their ability to produce comprehensible output as shown in Table 2.

In the light of the information in Table 1 and the illustration that followed, Table 2 shows that jig-saw tasks provide the greatest opportunities for L2 learners to receive comprehensible input, provide feedback on their comprehension and produce modified comprehensible output (MCO). Hence, the opportunities for the comprehension of input, feedback on production, and the production of MCO are *highly expected*. Picture-dictation tasks, like jig-saw tasks, also provide opportunities for comprehension of input, feedback on production and the production of MCO if they are repeated with the roles reversed. Hence, the opportunities for the comprehension of input, feedback on production and the production of MCO are *expected*.

Table 2. Impact of tasks on opportunities for L2 learners' comprehension of input, feedback on production, and production of MCO.

Task-type	Comprehension of input	Feedback on Production	Production of MCO
Jig-saw	Expected	Expected	Expected
Information-gap (Picture-dictation)	Expected	Expected	Expected
	(if repeated, with roles reversed)		
Problem-solving	Possible	Possible	Possible
Decision-making	Possible	Possible	Possible
Opinion-exchange	Possible	Possible	Possible

Problem-solving, decision-making and opinion-exchange tasks provide fewer opportunities for the production of comprehensible input, feedback on production, and the production of MCO because there is less demand on interactants to negotiate meaning toward mutual comprehension since each interactant/participant has access to all information needed for the completion of the task. Hence, the opportunities for the comprehension of input, feedback on production and the production of MCO are *possible* rather than expected.

Irrespective of the kind of opportunity (expected, possible) of each task-type, however, it is clear that communication tasks have a great deal of impact on opportunities for L2 learners' comprehension of input, feedback on production and production of MCO. It should be taken into consideration, therefore, that

communication tasks are likely to promote SLA not only by the opportunities which they create for the provision of comprehensible input but also for the production of modified comprehensible output.

Summary and Conclusions

Until very recently, the use of communication tasks for data collection and classroom instruction has been largely taken to assist SLA by providing NNSs or L2 learners with opportunities to receive comprehensible input. The impact of these tasks on NNSs'/L2 learners' production ability has been largely neglected or assigned a secondary role: to provide feedback on NNSs' production ability in order to generate more comprehensible input. Based on close observations and findings of recent empirical studies, this paper suggests that L2 learners' production ability plays a role in SLA independent of that of their comprehension ability. It follows, then, that a communication task should be seen to promote SLA by the opportunities it provides for (1) the provision of more comprehensible input and (2) the production of (modified) comprehensible output. Therefore, a classroom task or activity should be selected/structured on the basis of the extent to which (1) it satisfies/meets L2 learners' personal motivation/need, (2) it enables them to play an active role in communication and interaction, (3) it has specified objective(s), and most importantly (4) it enhances learner's comprehension ability and production ability.

Pedagogically, the importance of communication tasks that encourage the negotiation of meaning in NS/NNS and/or NNS/NNS dyadic and group interactions has been gathering momentum in recent years. For instance, the pedagogical implication of negotiated interaction studies matches methods such as communicative language teaching which emphasize learner/learner (or NNS/NNS) interaction. The communicative language teaching approach emphasizes interactions which involve problem-solving, decision-making and opinion-exchange, with picture-dictation and jig-saw tasks as standard communicative exercises for developing fluency in the TL [36; 37; 38]. The main pedagogical conclusion derived from this paper is that learner-learner interaction should be viewed to aid SLA by creating opportunities for the provision of comprehensible input as well as the production of modified comprehensible output, output which is assumed to be successful (and by implication, native-like) language behaviour. And therefore, in successfully accomplishing these tasks, L2 learners should be considered to have demonstrated the type of communicative competence which is assumed to develop fluency in the target language.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss all the pedagogical implications in detail. However, pedagogical research in this area may look at the types of tasks that might be used in the second/foreign language classroom, their distinguishing cognitive characteristics, how they might be graded to match the proficiency level of learners, and most importantly the extent to which they promote SLA by providing opportunities for the provision of comprehensible input and the production of comprehensible output.

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دور القدرة الاستيعابية والقدرة الأدائية في اختيار المهام اللغوية التواصلية في تعليم اللغة الأجنبية

علي شحادة

أستاذ مساعد، قسم اللغات الأوروبية والترجمة،

كلية اللغات والترجمة، جامعة الملك سعود

الرياض، المملكة العربية السعودية

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ملخص البحث. توثيق الأبيات اللغوية المختصة بشكل جيد في استخدام المهام اللغوية (Communication Tasks) في تدريس اللغة الأجنبية يعتبر ذا أهمية كبرى، ولكن حتى الأونة الأخيرة كان الاعتقاد السائد أن اكتساب اللغة الأجنبية يتم فقط بواسطة تقديم المادة المفهومة للمتعلم. أما المقدرة الأدائية للمتعلم فقد أعطيت دورا ثانويا في اكتساب اللغة الأجنبية.

لهذا البحث ثلاث أهداف رئيسية، وهي: (١) يجادل البحث بأن الفرص التي تتاح للمتعلم من أجل تعزيز قدرته الاستيعابية وكذلك قدرته الأدائية كلها مهمة لاكتساب اللغة الأجنبية. (٢) يقدم البحث قاعدة نظرية ونموذج (شكل) لكيفية اكتساب اللغة الأجنبية يأخذ بعين الاعتبار دور كل من القدرتين الاستيعابية والأدائية في تعليم اللغة. (٣) يعرض البحث تصنيفا لهذه المهام اللغوية وما يمكن أن تقدمه من فرص تزود المتعلم بالمادة اللغوية المفهومة (وهذا ما يعزز قدرته الاستيعابية). وفي نفس الوقت تمكنه من تحقيق أداء لغوي مفهوم (وهذا يعزز قدرته الأدائية).