



Positive Evidence and Negative Evidence in Second Language Classroom

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Abstract Second language theories of language learning have to acknowledge the role that input plays a fundamental role in the process of second language learning (SLL) and the benefit of the interaction between participants in the classroom. As it was known, there are two major types of input: Positive Evidence (or Primary Linguistics Data) and Negative Evidence and both are available in second language acquisition. Positive evidence is a kind input that learners receive concerning the target language itself in a natural linguistic environment. It can be provided as authentic input, like what occurs in naturalistic conventions, or as modified input, like what occurs in foreigner talk discourse or teacher talk. To this end, the current paper aims to review and discuss the literature of whether or not each of these input is usable in second language acquisition.

Keywords: Classroom, authentic input, negative evidence, positive evidence, second language acquisition SLA, L2 learners.

الدليل الإيجابي والدليل السلبي في تعلم اللغة الثانية (اللغة الإنجليزية) داخل الفصل الدراسي

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المخلص اشادة نظريات تعليم اللغة كاللغة ثانية بالدور الايجابي أو الفعال الذي يلعبه *المدخل* في عملية تعليم اللغة الثانية وفائدة التفاعل والحوار بين المتعلمين للغة الثانية (اللغة الإنجليزية) في الفصل الدراسي. كما هو معروف، هناك نوعان رئيسيان من المدخلات ألا وهي: الدليل الإيجابي (بيانات اللغة الاولية)، والدليل السلبي، وكلاهما متوفران في اكتساب اللغة الثانية. الدليل الايجابي هو نوع من المدخلات حيث يتلقى الطالب معلومات عن اللغة المراد تعلمها في بيئة لغوية طبيعية. ويمكن ان تتوفر في صورة مدخلات حقيقة مثال علي ذلك ما يحدث في المحادثات الطبيعية (اليومية)، او مدخلات معدلة كما هو الامر في الحديث مع الأجنبي او حديث المعلم. الكلمات المفتاحية: الفصول الدراسية، المدخلات الطبيعية، والمعدلة، الأدلة السلبية، الأدلة الايجابية، اكتساب اللغة الثانية، متعلمين للغة الثانية.

1. Introduction

Many researchers in second language (L2) believe that 'input' has an important role in second language acquisition (e.g. White 1991), and that it has two forms: 'positive' and 'negative' evidence. According to Long (1996), there are two types of input in second language acquisition (SLA): positive evidence and negative evidence. Positive evidence, on one hand is an input that L2 learners receive concerning the target language itself in a natural linguistic environment. It can be provided as "authentic input", like what occurs in naturalistic conventions, or as modified input, like what occurs in foreigner talk

discourse or teacher talk (Chaudron 1988). Positive evidence consists of descriptive information about a form or an utterance. It comprises actually occurring sequences, i.e., sentences of the language. Numerous of options exist for positive evidence including plentiful exemplars of the target feature without any device to draw attention to it. On the other hand, negative evidence provides information about what is not possible in the target language (Gass 1988, 1990, 1991, Long, 1996; White 1990). It consists of information about the impossibility

and ungrammaticality of a form or an utterance, and includes explanation, expansion, explicit grammar teaching and correction of wrong sequences or ungrammatical sentences.

Furthermore, researchers of first language acquisition (e.g. Pinker 1989) and second language acquisition (Spada and Lightbown 1993, White 1991 and Trahey and White 1993) make a clear distinction between input which supplies 'positive evidence' on structures and linguistics features which are used in the second language (L2) or target language (TL), and input which provides 'negative evidence' of forms and features which occur in the L2. Some theorists have argued that positive evidence alone is sufficient for L2 learners to acquire a second language (Schwartz 1993:148). However, others regard it as insufficient for L2 acquisition, and claim that L2 learners need negative evidence as well as positive (Bardovi-Harlig and Sprouse 2018, Long 1996, Spada and Lightbown 1993). Furthermore, they also claim that negative input is often available, usable and used by second language learners, but not used in first language learning.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the negative and positive evidence in L2 acquisition.

In the first section, the paper provides a definition and discusses negative evidence and its role both in and outside the second language classroom. The second section gives explanations on positive or primary linguistic data (PLD) in L2.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition of Negative Evidence and Positive Evidence

Language learning theories have provided information about the language input that plays a fundamental role in the process of second language learning (SLL) and also the advantage of the interaction between learners in their classroom.

Many linguists (Bardovi-Harlig & Sprouse, 2018, Gass 1988, 1990, Gass and Varonis 1994, Long 1996) state that there are two types of input in second language learning (SLL): negative evidence and positive evidence.

According to Long (1996:413), he defines the negative evidence as what learners with direct, or indirect, information about what is ungrammatical in the target language needed.

According to Long, this information can be categorised as follows:

'Explicit (e.g., grammatical explanation or overt error correction) or implicit (e.g., failure to understand, incidental error correction in a response, such as a confirmation check, which reformulates the learners' previous utterance without interrupting the flow of the conversation-in which case, the negative feedback simultaneously provides additional positive evidence-and perhaps also the absence of items in the input).'

In contrast, Positive evidence is another kind of input that L2 learners usually receive the target language itself in a natural linguistic environment. In other words, it could be provided as authentic input, like what occurs in naturalistic conventions, or as modified input, like what occurs in foreigner talk discourse or English teachers talk (Chaudron, 1988). Positive evidence consists of descriptive information about a form or an utterance and comprises actually occurring sequences, i.e., sentences of the language. Numerous choices exist for positive evidence containing plentiful exemplars of the target instructions without any device to draw learners' attention to it (Long 1996, Long and Robinson 1998).

2.2. Type of Negative and Positive Evidence

Long and Robinson (1998:19) offer a framework that refers to different types of negative and positive evidence in relation to 'input'. Positive can be classified into 'authentic' and 'modified' (e.g. simplified and elaborated). Negative evidence can be subdivided into 'preemptive' (e.g. explanation of grammar rules) and 'reactive' or feedback. Reactive can therefore be 'explicit' (overt error correction) or 'implicit' (e.g. communication breakdown and recast).

Thus, when learners are involved in 'interaction' (between native speaker [NS] and non-native

speaker [NNS] or NNS and NNS) they receive either positive or negative feedback. Learners are likely to receive feedback either directly (i.e. explicitly) or indirectly (implicitly) during their conversation in the target language (Iwashita 2003: 2). It is argued that implicit feedback is more effective than explicit, because it can be used the technique of 'negotiation strategies'.

Negotiation can take various forms, for example: 'repetition, confirmation checks, and clarification requests' all of these can appear after 'communication breakdown'. In other words, these forms occur when the listener needs to clarify what the speaker said (e.g. 'sorry?' or 'what do you mean'). In the L2 classroom, many second language learners can be exposed to negative evidence when practising grammar.

According to Swain (1985, 1995) in her Output Hypothesis emphasizes in the importance of output opportunities in L2 development and argues that "comprehensible input" is necessary but insufficient for learners' L2 development. Regarding to many studies on French Immersion (Harley, 1989; Swain, 1985, 2006), were stated that L2 learners were far from native-like performance whereas they received a great deal of comprehensible input. Swain (1985) attributes considerable importance to negative evidence, in effect considering the shortages in L2 learners' performance on its absence in the immersion classrooms. Also, Schmidt (1990, 1995, and 2001) in his Noticing Hypothesis mentions that noticing is requisite for learning and learners must consciously pay attention to input in order to learn the target language, and learning can take a place.

Thus L2 learners can have some knowledge or information about what structures are ungrammatical in their target language (i.e. the language being learned). Researchers (e.g. Izumi and Lakshmanan 1998) have questioned whether or not negative and positive evidence is actually required and usable in second language acquisition. This evidence is discussed below.

2.3. The role of negative evidence in the second language (L2) classroom environment

Negative evidence plays an important role in second language acquisition for L2 learners to acquire the target language. It also helps learners arrive at appropriate properties of English better than positive input alone (White 1991:133). Negative evidence is often necessary for L2 learners to acquire structures that differ from those of their first language. Many researchers into first language and second language (e.g. Pinker 1989, and Long 1996 respectively) agree that negative evidence plays a role in language acquisition. But it has to meet certain criteria: it must exist; be useful; and be used by learners for acquisition to occur. Much research has focused on these conditions or criteria.

Some studies conducted in the classroom can show the role of negative evidence. For example, White (1991) investigates the 'verb placement' in second language acquisition in English and French. Some verbs can be focused in different

positions such as: 'negative placement, question formation and adverb placement' (Izumi and Lakshmanan 1998:63). White (1991:134) believes that negative evidence in L2 plays a greater role than in first language acquisition.

In White's study L2 learners had difficulty learning to learn 'adverb placement' in English and as a result they produced ungrammatical sentences. In English, adverbs do not come between verb and direct object (SVAO). French, on the other hand, allows adverbs to occur between verb and object. Thus, White (1991:34) proposes that explicit instruction (i.e. negative evidence) is needed.

For example, a French learner of English needs to be aware that in English; it is not grammatical to say: * she drinks always coffee, whereas in French is grammatical. In this situation French learners of English have to learn the new SAVO pattern and ignore the SVAO sequence when learning adverb placement in English. In White's study, one group of participation in the experiment received explicit instruction (i.e. negative evidence) about adverb placement of English.

Another group did not receive evidence about adverb placement but were taught English 'question-formation.' The study found that the group that had been taught adverb placement in the target language came to know that verb movement is not allowed in English. On the other hand, the experimental group that was not instructed in 'English adverb placement' failed to know that SVAO is ungrammatical in English (White 1991:139).

The key point here is that the negative evidence used in this study is effective in helping 'learners to arrive at certain adverb placement properties of the L2, and that exposure only to positive input would be insufficient to allow them to deduce the impossibility of SVAO order'(White 1991:158). In other words, negative evidence is usable in second language acquisition and L2 learners tend to use it to realize ungrammatical sentences in the target language.

Another classroom study by Spada and Lightbown (1993) investigated form-focused instruction and corrective feedback. It is argued that form-focused instruction may have a considerable effect on SLA classes, and is provided through comprehensible input. For example, there is empirical evidence to show that in French immersion programs, 'form-focused instruction influenced interlanguage development of students with several years of experience with communication language use' (Spada and Lightbown 1993:207).

Learnability in this case may require negative evidence because learners may not be able to discover the rules of the target language interlanguage without assistance. Spada and Lightbown's (1993:207) study investigated only a classroom in a quasi-experimental context. Learners here received an experimental treatment to help them to control the English WH-interrogative structure. Learners in this group provided a programme of 'form-focused and explicit instruction'.

The teacher's role sometimes provides indirect correction of learners who produced incorrect 'WH-question' in their interaction inside the classroom (Mitchell and Myles 1999:293). Thus Spada and Lightbown (1993:218) argue that providing explicit negative evidence about the target language is important and useful for L2 acquisition. It can also be effective because providing correction can be regular, incidental and contextualised, and feedback should be always available in the L2 classroom.

2.4. Empirical evidence in everyday foreign talk discourse (FTD) negative evidence.

Research in the late 1970s tended to focus on studied negative evidence in the classroom. These studies tend to emphasise the interaction between native speakers (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNSs). However, communication between NS and NNS is significantly different and can be seen when they are involved in two-way tasks. These require 'the speaker to exchange information held uniquely by them at the outset' (Long 1996:418).

Some scholars (e.g. Jiang and Yi 2014, Oliver 1995, Mitchell and Myles 1999, Zhiri, 2017) claim that little research has been done into implicit negative feedback and it is rare in the out-of-the classroom context. In other words, implicit negative evidence can be provided in real world situations and not only in classrooms.

Oliver (1995) investigated interactions between native speaker child (NS) and non-native speaker child (NNS) in normal conversation. The study found that over 60 percent of the whole interaction involved negative feedback. This implies that NS children provide indirect feedback to NNS children when they are involved in a negotiation task. It is more common for the NSs to provide correction to NNS errors. Most errors tend to be ignored because they focus on meaning (i.e. communication) rather than rules or structures.

This example shows the way in which native speakers respond with negotiation when the non-native speaker's meaning is not clear and this may happen by poor words choice:

NNS: *It go just one line*

Yer

NS: *Just along the line?*

Also in the following example refers to an error was recast as the meaning was transparent

NNS: *And the...the boy is holding*

The girl hand and...

NS: *Yer*

The boy is holding the girl's hand

(Oliver

1995:473).

In addition to the above, it can be seen negative evidence is actually available in L2 learners which occurred in their interaction. It is therefore usable; L2 learners responded to the correction from NSs as a result L2 learners showed improvement in their utterances.

Negative evidence can be provided through formal instruction and corrective feedback in classroom. Nevertheless, Long and Robinson (1998) argue that form-focus instruction and correction can help learners to improve and use specific

grammatical elements. Thus, this evidence can be more effective when teachers provide direct correction when learners produce errors. This is because if there is no correction, they do not notice the errors. When negative evidence about L2 focus on form and meaning, it will be always available to L2 learners crossways a range of functionalities with a high degree of explicitness.

Furthermore, it is also suggested that NNSs are likely to imitate the correct sentences from correction or negative evidence they received from NSs, compared when they received positive evidence.

However, some theorists (e.g. Schwartz 1993, Tarone 1979) have argued that negative evidence does not provide exposure to the linguistic data and without it; the development of language will not take place in L2 learners.

It is also claimed that language cannot be acquired when structures are explicitly explained because L2 learners are more likely to ignore.

Hence, negative evidence can be available in second language but it is not usable by L2 learners. In other words, L2 learners know ungrammatical sentences in the target language but they do not gain any benefit in their utterances.

Extension of negative evidence

It is argued that negative evidence can be extended or sufficient for a 'short term' (e.g. Swan 2006, Spada and Lightbown 1993, White 1991, Long 1996) which means instruction did not have 'lasting effects on their internalized competence.' There is empirical study by White (1991) that in the 'follow-up' test that is done after one year later. For example, L2 learners who had received the adverb instruction which different between English and French had disappeared. Their performance of adverb placement was similar to L2 learners who did not received adverb instruction. Also, when learners are not exposed to the target language for long period, they are more likely to forget what they thought explicitly about ungrammatical sentences in target language.

2. Positive Evidence

Positive evidence or primary linguistic data (PLD) which is 'the process of communicating they offer models of what is grammatical and acceptable (not necessarily the same) in the L2' (Long 1996:413). Positive evidence can be found in utterances and 'texts available in put' to learners during their conversation with each other or when they acquire the language. It is argued that 'authentic and modified' input provide much of 'positive, linguistics evidence' which L2 learners are needed. PLD also are important 'for growth of the system of linguistics knowledge' (Schwartz 1993:148).

In positive evidence, learners make hypotheses of how target language is occurred. There is argument that learners can acquire target language when they are in the right of development stage; because when L2 learners learn any language, they learn it through many stages. Positive evidence is often avoided teaching

grammar explicitly and let learners to discover rules by themselves. Positive evidence is available in L2 classroom where it is not provided any instruction on the L2 (Cook, 1991; Schwartz, 1993).

There is a study done by Trahey and White (1993) in L2 classroom; they researched whether preemption or positives evidence sufficient and effected in second language acquisition.

The study investigated the placement of adverbs in English. The subject who involved in this study were exposed to input (which concluding a flood of materials with English adverbs) for an hour a day for two weeks. After test sessions, the results have shown that exposures to input flood; learners accepted both SAV and SVAO order, but was not significantly affective (Trahey and White 1993:200). Thus, the study indicated that positive evidence alone is insufficient for children and adult second language acquisition to cause 'preemption' of the L1 setting.

Hence, L2 learners do need negative evidence that is providing and explaining grammar rules of second language.

Some researchers (e.g. Ellis 1991, 2000, Jiang and Yi 2014, Long 1996, Schwartz 1993, Spada and Lightbown 1993, White 1991, Zhiri 2017) argue that providing positive evidence or PLD alone cannot help L2 learners to acquire target language because it just gives the things that are accepted in target language and L2 learners are more likely to make incorrect generalizations that based on their first language. This information is not enough; L2 learners therefore need to know what second language disallows.

Thus, positive evidence can be available in SLA but it is insufficient input because L2 learners are unable to discover L2 forms that are difficult or ambiguous and they also may not notice their errors when they are involved in interaction when negotiation is meaningful. Furthermore, some structures cannot gain through 'positive evidence.'

For example, 'Randy gave Mary a present' (it contains of noun phrase (NP) + NP).

This structure is complex for children and adult of second language to learn it through exposure to target language (Ellis 1994:433). Hence, if L2 learners want to learn to this way, they need to receive negative evidence.

3. Conclusion

As can be seen, the role of negative and positive evidence in second language acquisition is discussed. Much research has studied both of negative and positive evidence and whether or not it is available and usable in second language acquisition, particularly in the classroom. It was found that positive evidence indicated exposure to the target language and some research agreed that positive evidence could have a great effect on L2 learners.

However, others consider it to be insufficient for L2 learning to acquire, and they suggested a different role for negative evidence. Negative evidence is useful and effective in L2. It can therefore help L2 learners to understand instructions of the target language. In my

experience in teaching English as second language, when learners are provided with explanations regarding what is ungrammatical in the target language, they tended to use negative evidence. Moreover, they performed better when compared to situations where they did not have grammatical instruction.

As it can be seen, this paper attempted to review and discuss the literature, in order to provide a comprehensive account of negative and positive evidence in second language classroom. For the next paper, a study will investigate the effects of negative and positive evidence in the acquisition of the structure of English passive by Libyan EFL learners.

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