CEMELA Module on:

Second Language Acquisition Theory:
Brief Summaries of Reiss, Cummins, MacSwan, Baker

Adapted from:
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Basic theories of L2 acquisition

- The differences between social and academic language (sometimes known as BICS & CALP)
  - **BICS**: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills
  - **CALPS**: Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency

Theorists:
- Jim Cummins, 1981, 1994
- Virginia Collier, 1987, 1995
- Ana Chamot & Michael O’Malley, 1986
What is social language?

- Language that develops [relatively easily] from social activities (play, TV/movies/radio, informal or conversational exchanges). Other examples:
  - retelling events
  - talking about experiences
  - describing activities
  - giving personal opinions
Social language is context-embedded, that is, comprehension is aided by context clues, like facial expressions, body language, modeling or demonstrations, visual clues and cues, etc.

Because it is embedded in social interaction, social language is thought to be cognitively undemanding.
What is academic language?

- The kind of abstract, higher-level academic discourse that might be found in more formal settings, like a classroom for example.

- Forms of academic language include
  - Comparing and contrasting
  - Listing, defining, classifying
  - Predicting, explaining, analyzing, justifying
  - Inferring, deducing
  - Integrating, evaluating
  - Arguing, persuading, defending
Typically, academic language is context-reduced, meaning that there are fewer clues or supports to help students comprehend content information.

Because of the lack of environment clues, academic language is thought to be more cognitively demanding than social language.
Examples of social and academic language

- **Social language**
  - What did you like about this book?
  - Is there an easier way to do this?
  - What do you think will happen?
  - What do you mean?

- **Academic language**
  - Compare and contrast the main characters in the book.
  - Can you propose and support an alternative technique to facilitate this procedure?
  - Can you formulate a hypothesis that predicts the most probable outcome?
  - What is your reasoning here?
Visual representations of social and academic language

- The “iceberg” model

This figure illustrates the intersection between a student's primary language and secondary language.

Cummins’ 4 Quadrants

Cognitively Undemanding (BICS)

- Beginning ESL
- Total Physical Response (TPR)
- Following Directions
- Face-to-Face Conservation
- Getting Absence Excuse
- Buying Popcorn
- Oral Presentations
- Content Classes (Art, Music)

Cognitively Demanding (CALP)

- Telephone Conversations
- Refrigerator Notes
- Written Directions
- Instructions (No Diagrams or Pictures)

Context

Embedded

- Demonstrations
- Experiments
- Multi-media assisted-lessons
- Basic Math Computations
- Plane Geometry
- Projects & Activities
- Health Instruction
- Social Studies (sheltered)
- Science Experiments

Reduced

- Standardized Tests
- Reading & Writing
- Math Concepts & Applications
- Explanations of Abstract Concepts
- Lectures with few or no illustrations
- Social Science Tests
- Mainstream English Tests
- Most Content Areas

Source: jillrobbins.com/gwu/cummins_quad.jpg
Other theories from Cummins

**Common Underlying Proficiency**
Skills/abilities in different language inhabit the same part of the brain, reinforcing each other at the base while differing at the surface.
*Cummins proposed the CUP theory as a reaction to the SUP idea.*

**Separate Underlying Proficiency**
L1 & L2 function and develop independently in the brain, and knowledge and skills acquired in one language are not transferable to the other. L1 confuses kid while they’re learning L2 *(DISCREDITED)*
Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis

- Related to the theory of Common Underlying Proficiency because it has to do with language transfer.
- That is, literacy skills developed in L1 will transfer to L2.
- This hypothesis predicts that a child who has mastered the basics of reading and thinking in L1 will perform well on entering a second-language environment (like a classroom).
Threshold Hypothesis (Controversial)

- Cummins argues that for the positive effects of bilingualism to be realized and for “cognitive deficits” to be avoided, that children must reach a threshold level of proficiency in their L1 -- i.e., a certain degree of academic language or CALP-- before academic achievement can occur in the second language.
- Cummins argues that children cannot achieve this threshold in subtractive or English-only programs.
Bicultural Ambivalence

- When an English language learner manifests shame of the first culture but hostility toward the second
  - for example, a student who is embarrassed to speak Spanish with her parents or extended family members (who may not speak English), but resists learning English or performing well academically in English.
- Often takes the form of inappropriate classroom behaviors like self-silencing, acting out or speaking back, surliness, a general unhappiness, malaise, or alienation.
Semilingualism

- A bogus theory that some children lack competence in any language.
- Discredited and repudiated by linguists and L2 acquisition theorists, including Cummins (although he advanced the idea in his early work)
- Rooted in deficit theory.
Comprehensible Input*

- The idea that humans acquire language in only one way - by understanding messages or by receiving comprehensible input (Krashen 1985).
- The $i + 1$ formula symbolizes how comprehensible input works: messages in the language must make sense, ideally, just beyond the competence of the learner, who must strain a bit cognitively to understand.
  
  - $i =$ input; also, where the learner is
  - $l =$ a symbolic place you want to bring your students, so that you’re constantly pushing them forward

*Input (what the learner hears and processes)
An Interesting Comparison…

**Zone of Proximal Development**

- The [symbolic] distance between a learner’s actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.

Affective filter – an emotional-mental block or barrier that interferes with or prevents input from reaching the cognitive and language centers of the brain.

- This symbolic “wall” may be caused by learner anxiety, stress, lack of self-confidence or motivation, physical discomfort, hunger, etc.
Interaction of comprehensible input and the affective filter

From Chomsky: The LAD reflects the idea that there is a kind of “device” in the brain specifically dedicated to language acquisition.
Acquisition-Learning Distinction
Krashen argues that adults have two distinctive ways of developing competence in second languages: (1) acquisition, by using language for real communication; and (2) learning, or conscious "knowing about" language (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acquisition</th>
<th>Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>implicit, subconscious</td>
<td>explicit, conscious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>informal situations</td>
<td>formal situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uses grammatical 'feel'</td>
<td>uses grammatical rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>depends on attitude</td>
<td>depends on aptitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stable order of acquisition</td>
<td>simple to complex order of learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Silent Period

- A variable period of time when the learner is listening to and processing the second language (aurally and cognitively), may not yet verbalize it.
- How long? It depends on the child, but typically anywhere from 3 to 6 months, sometimes less, sometimes more time.
The Monitor

- The monitor is a kind of internal grammatical “editing” function that regulates or alters the way that a person uses the second language verbally.
- This phenomenon is related in some cases to how confident or inhibited a learner feels (e.g., he/she doesn’t care about making grammatical errors and just wants to communicate or cares so much about making mistakes that he/she is afraid to speak).
Criticisms of some of these theories

- Whenever interesting and important theories are proposed, people have a chance to think about them, observe them in practice, refine or re-conceptualize them, or even to criticize or rebut them.
- This is a good thing!
Critique of a theory doesn’t necessarily reduce its value for us as teachers. Conversations about how theory helps us help our students; they also improve our understanding of our own teaching practices.
Criticism of social-academic language proficiencies

- The distinction between these proficiencies ignores the effect of social practices and power relations (in linguistic minority and majority communities, for instance) (Edelsky et al., 1983; Wiley, 1996).
- How do we know that academic language proficiency isn’t simply “test-wiseness.” (Edelsky et al., 1983)
- If we claim that academic proficiency is only developed in school settings, are we saying that schooling in and of itself improves our language? (MacSwan & Rolstad, 2004)
Similarly, does that mean that the kinds of language exchanges occurring in one’s home are not abstract, higher level, or complex? Is this a deficit perspective? (MacSwan & Rolstad, 2004)

Does the social-academic language distinction actually promote a deficit view of children’s first language (whether intentional or not)? (Edelsky, 1990; Edelsky et al., 1983; Martin-Jones & Romaine, 1986)
Criticism of comprehensible input, the monitor, acquisition–learning (all part of the Input Hypothesis)

- I + 1 is a nice concept, but it sounds a lot like Vygotsky’s *Zone of Proximal Development*. What’s the difference?
- The Input Hypothesis is too complicated, trying to make one theory from many ideas: a combination of “a linguistic theory (through its natural order hypothesis), social psychological theory (through its affective filter hypothesis), psychological learning theory (through its acquisition-learning hypothesis), discourse analysis and sociolinguistic theory (through both the comprehensible input hypothesis and the monitor hypothesis)” (Lightbown, 1984, p. 246).
Sounds logical, but it can’t be proven (Ellis, 1990; McLaughlin, 1987).

Krashen implies that true acquisition of a language means reading, reading, speaking it. But what does acquisition really mean? How does Krashen define it? (Mason, 2002)
The distinction between acquisition and learning is oversimplified. If you learn something about a language really, really well, have you acquired it, or have you learned it? (McLaughlin, 1987)

Krashen “seems to be wrong when he suggests that learned language - the rules of grammar - are only of much use when writing - people do seem to need the rules in order to speak in well-formed sentences.” (Mason, 2002)
Criticism of the silent period

- How does the silent period differ from what might be called a pre-production period?
- Are kids really being “silent” in their silent period? (Their brains are certainly not silent, but working actively.)
- How do we balance the need to respect a child’s silent period with the need to encourage her to use the language verbally in our classrooms?
Why do we need to know this stuff?

- **Theory matters**
  - It has implications for how we teach, and how we organize our classrooms.
  - Theory helps us plan curriculum and pedagogy.
  - Theory helps us understand how children learn (and learn languages in particular).
  - Theory is interesting! It can even be fun to digest, argue about, deconstruct, praise or criticize it in ways that help us understand it.
Enhancing the Development of Students’ Language(s)

Guadalupe Valdés, George Bunch, Catherine Snow, and Carol Lee, with Lucy Matos

• Like speakers of all other languages, speakers of English use many different registers and styles of English in their everyday lives. These styles and registers make up their speech repertoire, and speakers draw from these repertoires to carry out different types of communicative activities. In the classroom, this means that all students will use language differently according to the context in which they are using it. Teachers who understand the nature of register variation can focus on expanding students’ repertoire to include the styles of various academic conventions, such as a written paper or oral presentation, without expecting students to abandon styles appropriate for other contexts, such as collaborating with a colleague, seeking advice from a teacher, or socializing with a friend. p.160)
Effective language learning takes place in well-organized classrooms where there are opportunities for interaction with the teacher and peers and adequate practice in the target language. Interactive instruction allows students to use elaborated language around relevant topics, building English skills while at the same time developing content knowledge. (p.50)

(Echevarria & Graves, 2007)