

4-1-2006

Review of *From Input to Output: A Teacher's Guide to Second Language Acquisition* by B. VanPatten

Todd A. Hernandez

Marquette University, todd.hernandez@marquette.edu

is in New York City. Finally, all of the chapters should foster a discussion among students about classmates, teachers, neighbors, and friends who are of Hispanic origin, so as to bring the learning of Spanish language and culture out of the classroom and into the real world.

Although this is the first middle school introductory Spanish language and culture program that this reviewer has examined carefully, *¡Exprésate!* appears to be genuinely solid program. This reviewer thus wholeheartedly encourages prospective adopters of the textbook package to visit www.hrw.com to explore for themselves the rich possibilities of *¡Exprésate!*

Eileen M. Angelini, Ph.D.
Chair of Modern Languages
Canisius College
Buffalo, NY

VanPatten, Bill. ***From Input to Output: A Teacher's Guide to Second Language Acquisition.***

New York: McGraw Hill, 2003.
ISBN 0-07-282561-8. Pp. iv+127.

In *From Input to Output: A Teacher's Guide to Second Language Acquisition*, Bill VanPatten provides the non-specialist with a clear, concise introduction to second language acquisition (SLA) research. The text is intended for teachers, administrators, and students interested in learning about SLA. As VanPatten notes, the text can be used as part of a graduate teaching assistant orientation, as a supplement to a foreign language methods

course, or as the main text in a professional development course for pre-K-12 foreign language teachers.

The text consists of an introduction, five chapters, and an epilogue. It is organized around three fundamental components of SLA and their processes: input, the developing system, and output. The introduction provides the reader with basic information about the scope and background of SLA research. The author describes his approach to SLA as psycholinguistic, stating that his main objective is to explain the processes and internal factors involved in the development of a linguistic system.

VanPatten reviews five statements or "givens" about SLA in his first chapter: (1) SLA involves the creation of an implicit (unconscious) linguistic system; (2) SLA is complex and consists of different processes; (3) SLA is dynamic but slow; (4) most second language learners fall short of native-like competence; and (5) skill acquisition is different from the creation of an implicit system.

In Chapter Two, the author examines the concept of input and how a language learner makes use of it to create a linguistic system. Because input is a critical ingredient for successful SLA, he identifies its two key features:

- it is directed to the learner or is language that the learner hears in the speech around him or her; it is not language the learner produces;
- it is language with a communicative intent; the learner's communicative job is to capture the message or meaning contained in the utterance or sentence, that is, the learner's primary focus is on meaning (26-27).

VanPatten also reviews the nature of input processing. He describes the

concept of input processing as the way in which language learners make sense of the language directed to them and how they obtain “linguistic data” from it. The chapter concludes with an informative discussion of how to facilitate the comprehension of input.

In Chapter 3, VanPatten goes on to describe how a language learner develops an implicit linguistic system consisting of a network of connections between words and grammatical forms. Two key terms are defined: accommodation and restructuring. Accommodation involves the incorporation of form into the linguistic system. Restructuring refers to how syntax and other structures may change when the system obtains certain kinds of data. VanPatten explains that the linguistic system undergoes transformation as it interacts with new, comprehensible input. In Chapter Four, he describes how a language learner develops the ability to produce output. Output is defined as language that a learner produces to express meaning. The author identifies two important sets of procedures that must be developed in order for a learner to be able to produce output: access and production strategies. Access is defined as the activation of lexical items and grammatical forms necessary to express particular meanings (63). Production strategies refer to the procedures a learner uses to create sentences. VanPatten also discusses the role of output in the development of the linguistic system, adopting the position that interaction with other speakers can encourage learners to process the input better.

In the final chapter, VanPatten addresses several questions that classroom instructors often ask. The questions concern topics ranging from the role of drills in classroom instruction

to a discussion on feedback and error correction. This chapter provides the author with the opportunity to highlight the major points of the text.

VanPatten concludes with an epilogue, in which he skillfully charts five implications of SLA research for the acquisition-oriented classroom. He also demonstrates several sample activities to illustrate how an instructor might develop second language curricula that encourage meaning-based communication. The five implications are:

1. the more input, the better (the more meaning-based the class, the better);
2. the more interaction, the better;
3. all learner production should be meaning-based or communicative;
4. focus on form (or grammar instruction) should be meaning-based and tied to input or communication;
5. we should watch out for what we expect of learners.

In *From Input to Output: A Teacher's Guide to Second Language Acquisition*, VanPatten provides a clear overview of SLA. The text certainly can be used as part of a methods course or professional development workshop. The text has several special features as well, such as the “Pause to Consider...” boxes, which invite the reader to reflect on issues related to SLA and classroom instruction. In a methods course, the issues presented in these sections can also be treated as discussion questions or topics for class presentations. Key concepts are printed in boldface, and are also defined in the glossary. The “Read More about It” sections provide the reader with additional readings on chapter topics. In summary, this is a most valuable text for the instructor training future teachers.

Todd Hernández, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Spanish
Marquette University
Milwaukee, WI

Publisher's Response

We are delighted to respond to Professor Hernández's complimentary review of *From Input to Output: A Teacher's Guide to Second Language Acquisition*, a recent title in the McGraw-Hill Second Language Professional Series. As Professor Hernández accurately notes, this book provides a concise and accessible introduction to issues and research from the field of second language acquisition, and is particularly ideal for the non-specialist or uninitiated reader.

In his review, Professor Hernández has provided a useful overview of the chapters and content of *From Input to Output*, touching upon many of the objectives and features that characterize this text. These include how the author approaches second language acquisition and defines certain terms, and also the inclusion of special features such as "Pause to Consider..." boxes that promote reflection and prompt discussion. In addition, in his summary, Professor Hernández comments on the chapter that addresses numerous "frequently asked questions" as well as the Epilogue that offers pedagogical implications. These two sections of the book are especially informative to language instructors.

We would like to thank Professor Hernández for taking the time to provide such a thoughtful review of *From Input to Output: A Teacher's Guide to Second Language Acquisition* and for sharing it with the readership of *The NECTFL Review*. McGraw-Hill World Languages is delighted to publish the Second Language Professional Series,

and we are proud to include this title in that Series.

William R. Glass, Ph.D.
McGraw-Hill

Morris, Matthew W., Carol Herron, and Colette-Rebecca Estin. *Identité, Modernité, Texte.*

New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004. ISBN 0-300-09804-9. Pp. xviii + 401.

Identité, Modernité, Texte is a new intermediate-level textbook designed for college and university students interested in literature. It is cleverly centered on the question of identity: How do we define identity, and how can humanistic values be retained in the modern world? It presents a large selection of challenging modern texts framed by a biography of each author included and a look at the cultural context of the text chosen. In addition, there are numerous grammar exercises and language activities, specifically designed to teach language through literature.

In order to achieve the ambitious goal of using literature to teach language, the book is structured around five types of literary texts: *L'autobiographie* (two chapters), *la poésie* (one chapter), *le récit imaginaire* (four chapters), *le théâtre* (four chapters), and *l'essai* (three chapters). At the end of the text, students also will find a short presentation of a song by Charles Trenet. The *Annexes* include additional information on the most difficult grammar points, a short French-to-English *Lexique*, and chronological information about authors and texts studied. The textbook