

UNDERSTANDING SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION BY LOURDES ORTEGA

Discussion Questions for Chapter 4: The linguistic environment

1. Considering both Ortega's discussion of types of conversational modifications, your own experience/observations as an L2 learner, and your participation in the activities in Thursday's class, what kinds of interaction moves, interlocutor type, and contextual conditions have been the most effective for making input comprehensible, and what kinds have been the least effective?
2. As noted in class and by Ortega, the five factors of the linguistic environment that assist in L2 learning are: (a) acculturated attitudes, (b) comprehensible input, (c) interaction and negotiation of meaning, (d) pushed or comprehensible output, and (e) noticing. Ortega states that "these five ingredients were likely present in a case like Julie (see Chapter 2, section 2.2), the first of several exceptionally successful learners discovered since the mid-1990s" (p. 79). Revisit that article and discuss the ways in which these factors are evident or not evident in her language learning situation, and how positive attitudes alone were not sufficient for L2 language learning. You may compare Julie's situation to that of Alberto and Wes, if applicable.
3. Consider the five components of Krashen's Monitor Model, as discussed in class. As teachers and language learners, what makes these components appealing or logical? As researchers and linguists, what makes these hypotheses unappealing and illogical?
4. Ortega notes that while researchers have concluded that negative feedback is preferable to ignoring learner errors, "much less agreement has been reached as to when, how and why negative feedback works, when it does" (p. 80). Considering what you've read in the text and your own experiences teaching or learning language, what are the key factors that make negative feedback useful?